

# The jewels and life in the country essay



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This theme is prevalent in Maupassant's stories which make us question if money is evil. Two stories related to this topic are 'The Jewels' and 'Life in the Country'.

The aim of these stories is to challenge our beliefs. We morally question our own judgements - this is what makes the writing so interesting and perhaps more realistic than other authors. Life in the Country is about two farming families in the Normandy countryside; the Tuvaches and the Vallins, who live in neighbouring cottages. These families have four children each, but they merge so closely that 'the two mothers were none too sure which of the heaving brood were theirs and which were not.

'One day an upper class couple; Monsieur and Madame d'Hubieres, stop at the cottage so Madame d'Hubieres can kiss the 'pretty' children. She takes a great liking to the youngest Tuvache boy, Charlot and soon becomes a daily visitor bringing 'treats' and talking to his parents. Soon Madame d'Hubieres, who is childless and spoilt, asks to buy the boy. She is refused by the Tuvaches, so turns to the Vallin family, whose son Jean is Charlot's age. The Vallins accept the offer; Madame Tuvache is outraged and condemns the Vallins, telling everybody of their 'wrong-doing'. Jean Vallin returns aged 21, much to the bother of Charlot who leaves home screaming abuse at his devastated parents.

We question in this story whether money is the root of all evil because from selling their son the Vallins remain unchanged in modesty yet live a more comfortable life; 'the Vallins potted along quite comfortably on their pension', while the Tuvaches become bitter and accusing; 'Madame

Tuvache said the most awful things about them'. We also question whether selling your child is right. Money is evil in many aspects of this story, the most apparent being that a child is sold, ' a hundred francs a month, well, it don't compensate us nowhere near for not having our boy around. We'd need a hundred and twenty'.

What makes this worse is that the father of the child bargained with the d'Hubieres over the price of their son, this, to me, shows great disregard for selling, the most part of, their sons childhood. However the fact that money made Madame d'Hubiere spoilt enough to ask to buy the boy is also evil, because of her upbringing M. d'Hubiere shows little regard for other peoples feelings; ' the little girl who always got her way'. The effect of not receiving money made Madame Tuvache relatively evil also. She allowed her jealousy, shown by the extract, ' watched him go, saying nothing, grim-faced', to compel her to say spiteful things which drove the two families apart, ' each day coarse jeers were bellowed on one doorstep so that they were heard in the house next door. ' M.

Tuvache is also effected by the money because she feels morally superior to the Vallins now because she did not sell her son, this pride, and arrogant outlook; ' came to believe she was better than anyone', allowed her to spoil her son, because ' she had refused to sell her little Charlot' so he came to believe ' he was a cut above his friends because he had not been sold'. It was this spoiling that led Charlot, as a grown man, to throw everything his parents had done for him in their faces as he stormed out in a huff when Jean arrived home ' That's what I could have been like now! ' ' I'll never forgive

you. Never. ' Money is shown here not to be evil because the Tuvaches weren't tempted by the money, ' It'd be sinful and wicked.

' However personally I believe that this act of good was over-ridden by the evil that came after it. Jean managed to live his life being unaffected by the money in that he ' walked into the Vallins hovel if it were his own'. So he had not gained the arrogance that you might expect from his upbringing. He was also well educated, and returned to his family ' a young gentleman. We also have to consider the social circumstances of the decisions taken in this story, namely the selling of a child.

While we have condemned this action if you look at the intentions of the parents, for their son to have a good education, and opportunities in life that they could not offer him, then the selling of a child could perhaps be a good thing. It was obviously not an easy decision to make either, as the parents looked ' grave and thoughtful' despite the large amount of money they'd been offered. ' The Jewels' is a story of Monsieur Lantin, who meets and falls in love with a girl who has recently moved to Paris, she is ' the perfect example of the virtuous woman to whom every sensible young man dreams of entrusting his life. The couple enjoy six years of marriage; she adores him and ' he was incredibly happy with her.

' She soon begins to visit the Theatre on a regular basis and acquires a passion for wearing jewellery which makes Monsieur Lantin uneasy. Madame Lantin becomes more and more obsessed by her jewels, after a night out at the theatre Madame Lantin ' died of pneumonia. ' Monsieur Lantin is heart-broken, and ' very nearly followed her to the grave. ' He soon struggles to

make ends meet and decides to 'dispose of his wife's trash' (how he referred to Madame Lantin's supposedly 'imitation jewellery'). He takes 'the large necklace which she had seemed to like the best' to a jeweller where it is valued at a very high price.

He is astonished; he takes the necklace to another shop, where it is valued at an even higher price. More surprising still, the jeweller claims that the necklace was bought at his shop. The jeweller reveals that the necklace was bought for Madame Lantin and sent to the house. Monsieur Lantin is 'completely dumbfounded,' and finally the truth about his wife's jewels and, more importantly, how she came to own them dawns on him.

He faints. He came to his senses in a chemist's shop,' 'he took a cab home' and 'wept bitterly until nightfall' acquires his fortune. He sells the rest of the jewellery and begins to live in luxury; he resigns from his job and develops expensive tastes such as the theatre and prostitutes. Six months later he remarries, but his wife made him very unhappy. Maupassant challenges our beliefs in this story, and makes us question our morals; he places us in moral dilemmas.

The most prevalent theme is whether or not money is the root of all evil. The first reason that money strikes me as being the root of all evil, is that M. Lantin, chooses to marry her husband based on his wealth rather than whether she loves him or not, 'struck up acquaintance with a few middle class families in the district in the hope of marrying her off.' However, Monsieur Lantin was obviously not rich enough, as to make ends meet, M. Lantin became a prostitute, 'deep and secret pleasure,' this is not only evil

because she was selling her body, but also because she had to deceive her husband, ' a horrible doubt crossed his mind' (he was doubting whether she was actually as virtuous as she had led him to believe).

The money she received from her prostitution may have served well while she was alive, but after her death it makes him very ashamed, ' shame held him back' (from going into the jewellers to claim the money from selling his wife's necklace. He was also affected badly by the money, because it made him boastful, as the more money he gets the more he exaggerates and lies, he mentions three different figures in the last few paragraphs of the story, two hundred, three hundred and four hundred thousand francs. It is shown that money can also be used for good, it allowed him to do things that he couldn't have done without it, such as, get over his wife, ' he felt light enough to play leap-frog with the statue of the Emperor perched up there in the sky' (even if this was just for a little while until he remarried and his new wife made him ' very unhappy') and it allowed him his freedom, as he quit his job, ' I've come to resign my post'. The money made her happy too, because it allowed her to buy jewels, which she loved, ' aren't they beautiful.

' The evil of the money is lessened, I believe, because Madame Lantin used it to run the house well, ' ran his household so skilfully', and treated her husband, ' managed to supply fine wines and rare delicacies. ' These stories propose that whether or not money is evil depends on the social circumstances that the characters are in. Maupassant's own circumstances influenced his writing very much; which is reflected in both stories. It is most apparent in the location of each story; both being set in France; akin to

Maupassant. He used his observations of Normandy during his life to write his stories.

This is evident in the separation of classes, his description of Normandy as 'double-sided'; that there were very rich places with beautiful houses and countryside completely contrasting with the poverty on steep hillsides or narrow valleys. Where the people lived in slums that 'gave off the stench of sweaty underwear and stale food.' Maupassant had known life as both poor and rich; his father inherited a private income, so the family lived very comfortably until the family fortune was lost due to the war, but in his mid-thirties he became very wealthy. Because Maupassant had had such an experience he could write of people from both sides of the classes, this is evident in both 'Life in the Country' - as he writes about both the poor farming families and the d'Hubieres, and 'The Jewels' - as he writes about the poor girl who came to Paris to marry a wealthy man. In each story there is also a change in status, or a change in the wealth belonging to somebody, this may also be a reflection of his life. Maupassant may also have been influenced to write about the d'Hubieres being childless as he was childless.

In the story, 'Life in the Country', we learn that Monsieur d'Hubiere was unable to bear his wife a child, which is clear from his reaction to Madame d'Hubieres enthusiasms of the children; 'took more or less as a personal reproach.' Maupassant was said to be a womaniser in his time and yet has no recorded children, so perhaps this was a problem that he too faced.

Another similarity between the story 'Life in the country' and Maupassant's own life was that Jean moved away from home at a young age to be

educated much like Maupassant who attended boarding school from a young age. I do not believe that money is the root of all evil.

I don't believe it because all is a very inclusive word, and your reaction to such a thing like money, much depends on your strength of character and circumstances. I think the quote from the bible, ' the love of money is the root of all evil' is much more accurate, but further still would be that to care for money is evil. Because Madame Tuvache didn't get money to love, but she still went slightly evil, because she cared for money. But then again, if you didn't care for money, you'd probably be in the gutter. The subject is generally somewhat inconclusive, I think that money does not matter, what matters is your reaction and your intensions.