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**THE PRICE OF BOURGEOIS DREAMS: MARXIST ELEMENTS
IN MAUPASSANT'S THE NECKLACE**

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Abstract

*This research article examines the Marxist elements in Guy de Maupassant's short story *The Necklace* through the lens of Marxist literary criticism. The study aims to identify the portrayal of powerful (bourgeoisie) and powerless (proletariat) classes, analyze how economic conditions shape human life and happiness, and explore the ideological control exercised by the ruling class. The research adopts a qualitative, interpretative methodology, which is suitable for the analysis of literary texts in their natural setting. Data is collected from secondary sources including books, journals, magazines, and online sources. The theoretical framework is drawn from Dobie's Marxist analytical model, which posits that general human life is determined by economic conditions, that society is structured by the means of production into bourgeoisie (owners) and proletariat (workers), and that this division creates hierarchies of power and economic slavery. The findings reveal that *The Necklace* presents a capitalist society sharply divided into two classes: the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production and enjoy material luxuries, and the proletariat, represented by Mathilde Loisel, who suffer constant humiliation and misery due to their lack of economic resources. The story further demonstrates that happiness is falsely equated with material possessions, and that the bourgeoisie not only exploits the working class economically but also creates dominant values and standards that the proletariat cannot afford, leading to devastating consequences. The study concludes that *The Necklace* serves as a strong critique of capitalist society, exposing how economic conditions determine human suffering, class struggle, and the ideological manipulation that perpetuates inequality and injustice..*

Keywords: *Marxism, bourgeoisie, proletariat, class struggle, economic determinism, The Necklace, Guy de Maupassant, capitalist society*

Introduction

Literature encompasses the full range of human experience, and all evolutionary aspects of human life serve as the ultimate subject matter of literature and art. In a similar vein, Marx's theoretical perspectives foreground revolutionary movements rooted in the pursuits and struggles of the working classes (Slaughter, 1980). Slaughter (1980) argues that Marxist critics seek to explore and analyze the foundational grounds of Marxism, which rest on understanding the relationship between society and the individual. Indeed, every social formation—particularly capitalist society—is a central object of study for Marxism.

Cuddon (1991) explains that Marxism primarily interprets Marx's philosophical tenets, in which class struggle and socio-economic conditions play a central role, as these tenets advocate the importance of class and ideology. Tyson (2006) maintains that Marxist literary theory builds its framework on the socio-economic conditions of human life, which can only be understood in relation to socio-economic realities. Tyson (2006) further states that all ideological beliefs are embedded in cultural conditions, and for Marxist critics, the chief concern is to understand society in relation to material and historical conditions.

Barry (1995) defines Marxism as aiming to establish a classless society based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Marxism is a materialist philosophy that seeks to explain all work-related actions or events without recourse to a metaphysical or spiritual realm. It offers a tangible, scientific, and logical explanation of the world; consequently, religious explanations of life and behavior are rejected. Marxism proposes a remedy to

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all human miseries founded solely on the force of struggle. Wright and Eagleton (1976) examine that, from a Marxist standpoint, all art has been treated as part of the superstructure of society. They note that for Marx, all literature is ultimately a product of this superstructure and the social milieu in which it is produced.

Upward (1937) states that the Marxist critics primarily aspire to see the destruction of capitalist forces and strive to establish socialism in modern societies. Their writings are concerned with real-life issues such as revolutions, class struggles, unemployment, and economic crises. Panda (2015) acknowledges that, in the past century, the genre of criticism was greatly influenced by Marx's ideological beliefs. He explains that Marxism approaches literary texts by analyzing them in relation to the political creeds, social milieus, and cultural conditions in which these texts were authored. In this way, all literary works are interwoven with their social, historical, and political backgrounds and contexts.

Abrams (1999) defines that Marxist critics approach literary texts from any historical era not as works created according to timeless artistic criteria, but as "products" of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era (p. 149). Castle (2009) also argues that Marxist literary theory is primarily based on the idea that all literature is the product of ideology and social forces, and that all social realities are part of materialism—the main domain of Marx's dialectical materialism.

Marxism in Literature

Literature serves as a medium to translate material reality into feelings, unlike science, which approaches reality differently. Literature always seeks to transform material realities into thoughts and ideas, but it also attaches feelings and emotions to those realities. Marxist critics are interested in exposing and unraveling the hidden mysteries behind literary texts. They do not approach a text merely as a depiction of naturalistic aspects of life; rather, they are keen to identify historical circumstances, truthful representations of life, and the class differences that plunge society into a quagmire of class stratification.

In the same manner, Marxist literature studies inequalities based on power, race, and stereotypical beliefs of racial domination in society. Furthermore, Marxist literature encompasses subject matters related to class stratification and the marginalization of women under the yoke of power. It also examines how nations are subjected, oppressed, and exploited on ideological grounds at the hands of capitalism.

Broadly within the domain of literature, Marxism can be applied to analyze texts from the perspectives of economic, social, and political systems. Moreover, Marxism in literature studies class-based oppression, class division, and class struggle. In addition, as a literary theory, Marxism tries to analyze culture as a product of socio-economic systems, because the representation of culture in a text is based on socio-economic conditions. Thus, literature ultimately approaches cultural norms and beliefs to understand their reality through a Marxist lens.

Furthermore, Marxism in literature always attempts to interpret that behind all written texts there is a driving force of economic power, as well as behind every political and social activity. Consequently, Marxism in literature is treated as a touchstone to analyze texts and to uncover all the working forces that fuel class systems, inequality, injustice, and economic disparities prevailing in society.

In almost all literary works, Marxism deals with the basic issues of the struggle of the underprivileged and downtrodden classes for recognition of their due role in economic and social systems. This constitutes the subject matter within the realm of literature that shows how Marxist critics oppose society and challenge the powerful forces of capitalism. Indeed, Marxism acts as a driving force to foil efforts to subjugate and marginalize people in society. It launches movements

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against forces that trigger class division and solidify economic inequality. Marxist critics aspire to reform and bring about change in the social fabric of society.

Marxist literature mainly deals with the social, economic, and political living styles of people in society. It studies how these three aspects of human life are interconnected, and Marxist critics expose the relationships among human action, events, connections, production, and socio-economic classes.

Every writer of any age has tried to pen down his or her reaction and portray the picture of a suffering society, its culture, and the prevailing incidents of exploitation at the hands of capitalism a system that seeks to maintain its status quo while desiring to strengthen its supremacy of power and economy.

Literature Review

A literature review is a critical overview of existing research on a specific topic. Rather than just a list of summaries, it synthesizes information to show the current state of knowledge, identify gaps, and provide a foundation for new research (Ahmad, Bukhari & Maitlo, 2025; Ahmad, Khokhar & Shaheen, 2026). Its function is to provide the foundation for new research (Soomro et al., 2025; Yousaf, Ahmad & Riaz, 2026). A literature review acts as a critical bridge between existing knowledge and your new research, ensuring your work is relevant and well-grounded (Murtaza et al., 2025; Mehmood et al., 2026). In a nutshell, its importance lies in its ability to justify, contextualize, and strengthen your academic efforts (Cheema et al., 2023; Shaheen et al., 2024; Yousaf et al., 2025).

Azad (2016) elaborates that Marxism is sometimes called Scientific Socialism, an ideological framework proposed by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Their beliefs and ideas provide readers with ample theoretical foundations for the conscious struggle of the working classes, which ultimately reshapes socialism in society—a nobler form and higher social order according to Marx and Engels. According to Woodfin (2014), Marx clearly observed the struggle of people in the materialistic world, where individuals are violated in the names of caste and class difference. The researchers further mention that Marxism is highly determined by social, political, and communal reality. Marxism challenges and seeks to disclose the ways in which our social and economic system is structured so that only the elites benefit, while the rest of the lower classes face problems.

Heyman (2018), in his research study, maintains that Marxist theory mainly highlights basic theoretical concepts, especially those related to human history, societal change, and economic inequality. He further explains that Marx and Engels critically examined the industrial society of the eighteenth century. They not only understood the changing dimensions of capitalist society but also worked actively for change. Moreover, they highly criticized contemporary policies and provided a roadmap to a stable and civilized society.

Boer (2018) advocates that Marxism should not be considered merely a philosophy, but rather a philosophical anthropology. Moreover, it can be understood as an economic, political, social, and historical program or theory. Raymond (1977) asserts that Marx developed two basic concepts base and superstructure in the realm of sociology. The base is directly connected to the productive forces of society, while the superstructure primarily defines all other aspects of society. The researcher further admits that when linking base, superstructure, and ideology, we come to understand that the superstructure signifies the cultural norms that people individually inhabit. In addition, it includes the political, societal, religious, and economic institutions of society. Furthermore, the superstructure grows out of the social circumstances of which the base is comprised. The base and superstructure are closely linked to each other and exist in a constantly evolving state; they never stay still or static. The dialectical process continually keeps them moving and changing.

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Althusser (1971) exposes the role of art as being used primarily for consumer purposes within the capitalist system. The capitalist elite treats art as a commodity. In this sense, art clearly loses its originality and becomes a source of earning money. However, the true purpose of art is not to earn money but to provide pleasure, and to highlight and criticize the injustice, inequality, and brutalities occurring in society. The researcher further admits that when we take a glimpse at history, we can clearly find that it was art and artists who brought revolutions to society, gave human beings consciousness and awareness of the world, and essentially inspired the proletariat to stand against the inequalities, injustices, and brutalities inflicted upon them for many years.

According to Marx and Engels (1848), throughout human history, society has evolved through contradiction and opposition. Contradiction is the essence of development and improvement. In the process of historical development, the early egalitarian society mainly evolved from Neolithic civilization. In other words, the political and economic structure of agricultural society was based on a feudal system. Meanwhile, with the emergence of industrialization, the means of production changed from agricultural to industrial. As a result of that change, the means of production automatically transformed. Apart from this, the social revolutions of the eighteenth century and the emergence of democracy were the result of a paradigm shift from feudalism to capitalism. In this process, capitalism was constructed in its early phases. According to Morais (1948), capitalism operated against the natural system; despite bringing prosperity, it gave profit and benefit to the upper class (the bourgeoisie) and exploited the resources and earnings of the working class (the proletariat).

Helemejko (2012), in his research, mentions that in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx coined two terms: "dialectical materialism" and "historical materialism." In historical materialism, Marx expressed the revolution of society from the agricultural world to capitalism, while in dialectical materialism, he expressed the dynamic change of society in a scientific manner. The researcher further maintains that, in this process, the significant transformation of society from agricultural land leads to capitalism.

Research Questions

1. What are the Marxist elements in "The Necklace"?
2. Who are the powerful people in the society depicted in "The Necklace"?
3. Who are the powerless people depicted in "The Necklace"?

Methodology

Research methodology is the systematic plan or "blueprint" used to conduct a study, ensuring that results are valid, reliable, and address specific research objectives (Ahmad et al., 2021; Rao et al., 2023; Khokhar et al., 2025). While research methods are the specific tools (e.g., surveys, interviews), research methodology provides the logical framework and justification for choosing those tools (Amin et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2025; Khokhar et al., 2025).

1. Nature of Study

The current study is qualitative in nature, which is highly suitable for the analysis of literary texts. In this context, Gay (2009) suggests that "qualitative research data is collected on many variables in a natural setting, and in this study, ideas and things are studied in their natural being and existence."

2. Interpretative Method

In this research study, the interpretative method is used to analyze the text. According to Bryman (2004) and Silverman (2005), this method is very suitable when the interpretation of literary texts is involved.

3. Data Collection

The data for this research study has been collected from secondary sources, including books, journals, magazines, and online sources.

4. Theoretical Framework

This research study involves the analysis of Marxist elements in Guy de Maupassant's short story "The Necklace." In this regard, the method of analysis has been adopted from Dobie's (2011) book *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. This method is based on the belief that general human life is determined by economic conditions; it is economic conditions that shape people's lives. Furthermore, society is structured by the means of production. In a capitalist society, two classes exist. The first is the bourgeoisie, which owns the means of production, and the second is the proletariat, which is the class that does not own what it produces and works for the bourgeoisie. This condition also creates a hierarchy of power: the class that owns the means of production is more powerful than the working class, which does not own material property. The result of this division is economic slavery, as the working class depends on the bourgeoisie for its general survival.

5. Data interpretation and analysis

"The Necklace" involves two classes that are shaped by economic resources. The first class is the proletariat, which does not own the means of production. Mathilde Loisel belongs to this class, as can be understood from the following passage.

"She dressed plainly because she had never been able to afford anything better, but she was as unhappy as if she had once been wealthy.... She suffered endlessly, feeling she was entitled to all the delicacies and luxuries of life. She suffered because of the poorness of her house as she looked at the dirty walls, the worn-out chairs and the ugly curtains. All these things that another woman of her class would not even have noticed tormented her and made her resentful." (Maupassant, n.d).

This passage reveals not only economic lack but also the ideological conditioning that makes poverty painful. Mathilde suffers not because she is starving or homeless, but because she has internalized the values of the wealthy—delicacy, luxury, and beauty—as natural entitlements. Her resentment emerges from the gap between what she has and what she believes she deserves. Crucially, Maupassant notes that "another woman of her class would not even have noticed" these deficiencies. This distinction highlights that class consciousness is not uniform: Mathilde's particular tragedy is her refusal to accept her social position. Unlike her husband, who finds contentment in modest pleasures such as potpie, Mathilde experiences her class as a prison. The dirty walls and ugly curtains become daily humiliations precisely because she measures them against an imagined aristocratic standard. In this sense, her suffering is as much cultural as economic—a product of social comparison and aspirational desire. The story thus critiques not only material inequality but also the psychological damage inflicted when a society encourages the poor to desire what only the rich can possess.

However, there is a constant desire in the heart of Mathilde Loisel to become a member of the bourgeoisie class, which owns the means of production and enjoys the material luxuries of life. This can be understood from the following example.

"She dreamed of silent antechambers hung with Oriental tapestries, lit from above by torches in bronze holders, while two tall footmen in knee-length breeches napped in huge armchairs, sleepy from the stove's oppressive warmth. She dreamed of vast living rooms furnished in rare old silks, elegant furniture loaded with priceless ornaments, and inviting smaller rooms, perfumed, made for afternoon chats with close friends - famous, sought after men, who all women envy and desire." (Maupassant, n.d).

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The other class that this story portrays is the bourgeoisie class. Within this class, there is a group of characters that includes Mme. Georges Ramponneau. This class enjoys large parties and other luxuries as well. There is a large rift between these two classes, and this rift makes the proletariat class feel inferior to the bourgeoisie class. For example, at one point the narrator says, "No; there is nothing more humiliating than looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women" (Maupassant, n.d.). This means that the experience of the working class, shaped by economic conditions, is one of humiliation and embarrassment. This class lives in a state of constant humiliation because it does not have access to the luxuries that the bourgeoisie class possesses. These economic conditions make them feel uneasy and create in them a constant desire to change their class.

This desire to change her class is very much observable in the character of Mathilde Loisel. The narrator tells us about her that "She had no dresses, no jewels, nothing; and these were the only things she loved. She felt she was made for them alone. She wanted so much to charm, to be envied, to be desired and sought after" (Maupassant, n.d.). This embarrassment and sense of being embarrassed is excessively present even in the small events of Mathilde Loisel's life. We learn about her that "She had a rich friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, whom she no longer wanted to visit because she suffered so much when she came home. For whole days afterwards she would weep with sorrow, regret, despair and misery" (Maupassant, n.d.). This shows that her experience of life as a member of the proletariat class is very painful and full of misery. This experience, shaped by economic conditions, has made her life quite unhappy.

Furthermore, from the above passages we come to know that the society depicted in "The Necklace" is divided on the basis of the distribution of wealth. Loisel lacks any material possession or skill that she could sell to make her life better. This is the reason that her life is not very happy. This shows that happiness in this society is related to material possession. Those who possess material goods or control the means of production are happier than those who do not possess material goods or the means of production.

In order to fit into society, one needs to possess the material things that are considered necessary to be good and respectable among other members of society. For example, at a party to which Loisel and her husband are invited, they must wear good clothes and other articles in order to be considered respectable and equal to other members of society. These material things are the determinants of one's standard; they also decide the extent of respect and recognition one will receive.

Furthermore, this story portrays the power structure of society. The bourgeoisie class not only holds the means of production but also controls society in general. It is this class that creates the values and morals that determine what will be considered good and what will be considered bad. Through its value system, this class controls the members of the proletariat class. The working class not only serves the bourgeoisie class but also slavishly follows its values and standard of life. This is seen in the main theme of the story. Following the party values and ethics of the bourgeoisie class, Loisel borrows a necklace from her friend, which she loses at the party. However, she pays a huge price for this loss. She goes to great trouble to pay back for this loss.

"She came to know the drudgery of housework, the odious labors of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, staining her rosy nails on greasy pots and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and the dishcloths, which she hung to dry on a line; she carried the garbage down to the street every morning, and carried up the water, stopping at each landing to catch her breath. And, dressed like a commoner, she went to the fruiterer's, the grocer's, the butcher's, her basket on her arm, bargaining, insulted, and fighting over every miserable *sou*." (Maupassant, n.d.)

This passage powerfully illustrates how bourgeois values function as a trap for the working class. Mathilde's descent into brutal physical labor—staining her nails, hauling water, bargaining over every miserable *sou*—is the direct consequence of her attempt to perform a single night of borrowed

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wealth. The irony is devastating: she ruins her body and her youth for a fake necklace, yet her real punishment is being forced to live the very life of drudgery that her original poverty had spared her. Before the loss, her suffering was psychological—resentment over dirty walls and ugly curtains. Afterward, her suffering becomes material, visceral, and relentless.

The bourgeoisie does not need to directly exploit Mathilde's labor; its values alone are enough to destroy her. By internalizing the belief that appearing wealthy matters more than being secure, she willingly steps into a decade of servitude. Maupassant thus reveals that class oppression operates not only through wages and ownership but also through desire—the relentless socialization of the poor to measure their worth by luxuries they cannot sustain. The fake necklace symbolizes all such values: worthless in themselves, yet capable of extracting real blood and time from those who chase them.

Research Findings

This research study presents the finding that the short story "The Necklace" portrays a society shaped by economic conditions. The society in this story is divided into two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. One group of characters belongs to the bourgeoisie class, which enjoys all the luxuries of life, while the other group of characters, including the main character Madame Loisel, belongs to the proletariat class, which depends on the bourgeoisie class for its survival.

Furthermore, this story portrays a society that links general human happiness to economic conditions. This is the reason that Madame Loisel is not happy: she does not possess the material things that other members of the bourgeoisie class possess. Moreover, the story presents the belief that in capitalist society, happiness becomes the exclusive right of the upper class only, while the lower class lives in constant misery, as can be observed in the case of Madame Loisel.

Additionally, this story tells us that the bourgeoisie class not only controls the means of production but also creates the dominant values that the proletariat class follows. In order to follow the values of the dominant class, the proletariat class pays a huge price, as did Madame Loisel.

Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis and findings, it can be concluded that the short story "The Necklace" presents a strong critique of capitalist society. It tells readers how capitalist society controls the lives of the proletariat class and how the upper class exploits the labor of the working class. Furthermore, the upper class exploits the lower class not only through economic control but also by creating values that the lower class cannot sustain.

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