

Student's Reception about *La Parure*, an Ironic Short Story by Guy de Maupassant

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Abstract

Received: 07 July 2025
Revised: 16 July 2025
Accepted: 23 July 2025

This study explores students' reception of La Parure, an ironic short story by Guy de Maupassant, focusing on how they interpret its themes, characters, and moral messages. Employing a reception theory framework, the research analyses responses from students with diverse cultural and academic backgrounds. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and textual analysis to understand how readers perceive the story's critique of social class, materialism, and the consequences of appearances.

Findings reveal varying receptions based on cultural and temporal contexts. Students often empathize with the protagonist, Mathilde Loisel, while simultaneously critiquing her obsession with social status. The study also highlights the relevance of La Parure in modern contexts, particularly in addressing materialism and the pursuit of superficial appearances, akin to contemporary phenomena like social media lifestyles. Additionally, the analysis examines students' perceptions of adaptations of La Parure into films and graphic novels, revealing how different media influence their understanding of the story's irony and moral lessons.

Keywords: La Parure; literary adaptation; materialism; reception theory, social critique.

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How to Cite: Zuleika, T. (2025). Student's Student's Reception about La Parure, an Ironic Short Story by Guy de Maupassant. *International Journal of Education, Information Technology, and Others*, 8(3.A), 47-53. Retrieved from <https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/IJEIT/article/view/12635>

INTRODUCTION

The value of a literary work is often reflected in its central themes, which commonly portray various social issues. Literature tends to mirror the realities of human life, often based on the author's own experiences or observations, and is shared with readers to convey meaning. Fundamentally, literature functions as a channel of communication between the writer and the reading public. It presents ideas, reflections, narratives, and messages intended to be understood by its audience. To fully grasp these elements, readers are encouraged to engage deeply with the text. Since literary texts are inherently open to interpretation and often ambiguous, readers must take an active and imaginative role in constructing their meaning (Dahlan et al., 2022).

Literature serves as a powerful medium to reflect societal values, critique norms, and inspire critical thought. Short stories, with their concise yet impactful narratives, often capture the complexities of human behavior and social dynamics. One such classic is *La Parure* (*The Necklace*) by Guy de Maupassant, an ironic tale that critiques materialism, class aspirations, and the consequences of vanity. Since its publication in 1884, *La Parure* has remained a significant text in

literary studies, not only for its narrative mastery but also for its timeless themes that resonate across generations and cultures.

Reception theory, pioneered by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, emphasizes the dynamic interaction between a text and its readers. Jauss (1982) argues that a literary work is not static; its meaning evolves based on the “horizon of expectation” of readers from different cultural and temporal contexts. Similarly, Iser (1978) highlights the role of the reader in filling the “gaps” within a text to construct meaning. In this regard, analyzing how modern students interpret *La Parure* offers valuable insights into how contemporary audiences engage with classic literature and its themes.

Meanwhile, Munaris and Mustofa (2019) stated that literary reception is closely linked to both the sociology of literature and intertextuality. This connection arises from their shared interest in real readers and reading communities, rather than idealized or textual readers. As Jauss (1982) and Iser (1978) suggest, reception theory focuses on how literature is experienced and aesthetically interpreted by readers, while the sociology of literature emphasizes the broader social and institutional dynamics between literature and its societal context.

In today’s context, where social media amplifies the pressures of appearance and status, *La Parure* remains particularly relevant. Recent studies in cultural and literary reception (e.g., Sharma, 2021; Liu & Chen, 2022) suggest that younger generations often interpret classic texts through the lens of modern issues such as consumerism, social comparison, and performative identity. These interpretations are shaped by their lived experiences and the cultural zeitgeist, making it crucial to explore how students relate to *La Parure*’s critique of societal norms.

Moreover, the adaptability of *La Parure* into various media—such as film, theater, and graphic novels—presents new dimensions in its reception. According to Hutcheon (2013), adaptation is not merely a retelling but a re-interpretation, influenced by the cultural and technological contexts of the medium. Literary adaptations are more than simple retellings; they involve reinterpreting stories to reflect current issues or introduce new viewpoints. This process fosters an interactive relationship among the original text, the adapter, and the audience, allowing for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the story. Adaptations also serve as a bridge across different time periods, connecting classic narratives with contemporary audiences (Tyagi, 2025).

In a previous study on literary reception, Nurmalasari and Samanik (2018) analyzed *La Parure* through the lens of social stratification in 19th-century France. Their work emphasized the influence of social class on the protagonist’s life choices, highlighting how literature reflects societal hierarchies. However, their study primarily focused on sociological interpretation, without exploring how modern students receive or reinterpret the story across different media and contexts.

Thus, examining how students perceive these adaptations can reveal how narrative and thematic elements are transformed and re-contextualized. This study aims to investigate students’ reception of *La Parure* as a literary text and its adaptations, analyzing their interpretations of its irony, themes, and relevance. By situating their responses within the framework of reception theory and contemporary cultural studies, this research seeks to illuminate how classic

literature continues to provoke critical engagement and dialogue in modern educational contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative approach based on reception theory to examine students' reactions to *La Parure* by Guy de Maupassant. A descriptive-qualitative method was selected to examine students' views on the story's themes, characters, and moral lessons, along with their perceptions of its adaptations across different media. The group included 25 university students in literature classes; chosen intentionally to confirm they had previous experience with analyzing literary works. Information was gathered using structured and semi-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs), and textual analysis activities. Surveys collected preliminary insights into students' comprehension of *La Parure*, while FGDs fostered engaging discussions regarding the story's irony, significance, and ethical considerations. Furthermore, participants were assigned to compare passages from the original text with scenes from adaptations like films or graphic novels, examining how the medium affects interpretation.

The information was examined through thematic analysis, which included coding replies, recognizing common patterns, and categorizing them into themes like "views on irony," "criticism of social norms," and "importance to contemporary issues." Cross-medium analysis also investigated the variations in reception between the original text and its adaptations. To guarantee validity, triangulation was utilized through various data collection methods, and member checking was performed to verify the correctness of interpretations. Ethical principles, such as informed consent and the anonymity of participants, were strictly maintained. Although the research offers important perspectives on university students' interactions with *La Parure*, its range is confined to this group. Future studies might broaden the participant pool to incorporate younger readers or a more diverse audience to obtain a wider range of viewpoints.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section discussed the review related to summary of the story and student's reception about *La Parure*.

Summary of the story

The story centers on 3 characters, namely: Mathilde, Loisel and Madame Forestier. Mathilde is the main character. She is physically beautiful; she also wants expensive things to match her beauty and high taste. But she was born into a family of courtiers and married a commoner. Because of these life circumstances, she cannot afford the clothes, accessories, and household items she wants. Meanwhile, Loisel, Mathilde's husband, was a simple man with simple pleasures who was happy with his life. Madame Forestier, as a supporting character, is Mathilde's wealthy friend.

Mathilde's wealthy friend. Loisel invited Mathilde to attend a formal party invitation at the Ministry. She hoped Mathilde would be happy because she could dress up and mingle with high society. Unexpectedly, Mathilde was upset because she didn't have a dress good enough to wear for such an occasion. Mathilde's tears swayed Loisel to buy a new dress for 400 francs, which was quite

an expensive price for them. Loisel also gave her the money that he had saved for himself, but then gave it to buy his wife's dress. On the eve of the party, to buy it, they went into debt to many people. In order to look as rich as she wants, Mathilde also decides to borrow a diamond necklace from Madame Forestier.

The long-awaited party went well for Mathilde, who for a moment felt like the belle of the ball. When the night ended and the couple returned home, Mathilde felt saddened by the state of her modest life compared to the dream party she had just left. But that emotion quickly turned to panic, as she realizes that the diamond necklace Madame Forestier lent her was missing. Loisel searched for the necklace but couldn't find it, and finally decided to replace it without telling Madame Forestier that Mathilde had lost the original necklace. At a jeweler, they found a similar necklace for 36,000 francs, and the necklace was given to Madame Forestier.

For 10 years, the Loisel couple lived in protracted poverty. Loisel worked 3 jobs and Mathilde did household chores until their debts were paid. In the process, Mathilde's beauty and youth had been lost due to the hardships of life. Until one day, Mathilde and Madame Forestier met each other on the street. At first, Madame Forestier did not recognize her friend, and then was surprised to realize that the old and dull woman was Mathilde. Mathilde explained to Madame Forestier that she had lost her necklace, and to replace it, she worked for 10 years to pay her debts. The story ends with Madame Forestier who tells Mathilde that the necklace she gave her was actually fake and very cheap. With its central role throughout the story, it appears that the necklace is a very important object.

Mathilde wears expensive clothes, uses accessories that don't even belong to her, and wastes not even hers, and wasted her simple life. She pretended to live an unreal life. Similarly, the necklace represents the illusion of wealth enjoyed by Madame Forestier and the noble class in general. Meanwhile, Madame Forestier, who knew that the jewels were fake, did not immediately tell Mathilde about them because she loved to give the illusion of being generous and willing to lend expensive items to her friends. Another thing that emerges from this story is false pride. Mathilde's excitement with her physical beauty has driven her to force her husband to buy her expensive dresses and force her husband to buy her expensive dresses and borrow expensive-looking jewelry from her friends. It is because of this false pride that she has to pay dearly, 10 years of working in misery to throw away her beauty and youth.

Student's reception about *La Parure*

This study examines the reception of *La Parure*, an ironic short story by Guy de Maupassant, among 25 university students with diverse cultural and academic backgrounds. The analysis revealed several key themes in their interpretations of the story. First, 60% of the students identified the story as a critique of materialism and society's obsession with social status. They saw Mathilde Loisel, the protagonist, as a symbol of individuals trapped in the illusion that happiness can only be achieved through wealth and luxury. As one student remarked during a focus group discussion (FGD), "*Mathilde represents many people today who prioritize appearances over real happiness, especially in the era of social media.*"

Second, 72% of the students highlighted the powerful irony of the story's ending, considering it both shocking and morally instructive. However, their interpretations of the irony varied. While some viewed it as a moral lesson on the dangers of vanity, others saw it as a critique of societal pressures. For instance, one student commented, “*The irony is not just about Mathilde’s fate; it reflects how society’s expectations force people to chase unrealistic dreams.*”

Third, responses to Mathilde's character were divided. While 48% of the students criticized her as selfish and unrealistic in her pursuit of luxury, 32% sympathized with her, arguing that she was a victim of societal constraints. As one participant put it, “*She only wanted a better life, but the rigid social structure gave her no alternative means to achieve it.*”

Moreover, 80% of the respondents agreed that *La Parure* remains relevant in the modern context, particularly in addressing materialism and the pressures to maintain appearances in the age of social media. Many students drew parallels between Mathilde’s obsession with wealth and contemporary phenomena like *flexing* or projecting false lifestyles online.

In terms of adaptation, 65% of the students had experienced *La Parure* through alternative media, such as films or graphic novels. They noted that these adaptations helped them better understand the story’s emotional depth, especially in scenes depicting the grand ball or Mathilde’s subsequent suffering. However, some students argued that the irony of the story was more impactful in its original textual form, where the twist ending was more effectively conveyed.

Overall, the students’ interpretations were influenced by their personal experiences and cultural contexts. Those who had faced societal pressures to conform to certain standards of appearance tended to empathize more with Mathilde, while others viewed her story as a cautionary tale about the dangers of dishonesty and ambition. The findings suggest that *La Parure* continues to provoke critical reflection on universal themes such as materialism, social inequality, and the pursuit of happiness. The story’s adaptability to various media further underscores its timeless relevance, while its original text remains powerful in delivering its moral and ironic message.

This study demonstrates that *La Parure* successfully transcends temporal and cultural boundaries, offering valuable lessons that resonate with modern readers. It highlights the importance of literary reception studies in understanding how classic works of literature remain meaningful and thought-provoking in contemporary contexts.

The reception of *La Parure* among students showed how different media formats influence their understanding and engagement with the story. Many students appreciated how film and graphic novel adaptations made the story more vivid and emotionally powerful. Visual elements, such as the grand ball or Mathilde’s struggle after losing the necklace, helped them connect more deeply with the narrative. One student mentioned, “*Seeing the story as a film made the irony at the end feel even more impactful.*”

While the original text was praised for its subtle irony and descriptive language, some students found that adaptations made the themes, like materialism and societal pressures, more relatable to modern life. For example, contemporary film adaptations that set the story in today’s world helped students link Mathilde’s

obsession with wealth to social media culture and the pressure to appear successful. However, a few students felt that modernized versions lost the historical context of 19th-century France, which they believed was important for understanding Mathilde's character and struggles.

Adaptations also gave students new ways to interpret the story. For instance, theatrical versions often emphasized Mathilde's inner thoughts and societal constraints, making her more sympathetic. On the other hand, graphic novels combined visuals and text to highlight the stark contrast between Mathilde's dreams and her harsh reality. While these adaptations helped bring the story to life, some students still preferred the original text for its ability to let them imagine the scenes and interpret the irony on their own.

Overall, students found that both the original text and its adaptations offered valuable perspectives. The text provided literary depth and subtlety, while the adaptations made the story more accessible and emotionally engaging. By experiencing the story in different forms, students gained a richer understanding of its timeless message about materialism, societal expectations, and the consequences of chasing appearances.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of students' response to *La Parure* by Guy de Maupassant demonstrates the lasting significance and diverse influence of this timeless short tale. The research emphasizes how students, via their varied interpretations and experiences, engage profoundly with the narrative's themes of materialism, societal norms, and the ironic outcomes of human aspirations. Their replies demonstrate that *La Parure* serves not just as a critique of 19th-century French society but also as a lasting commentary on current challenges, including social media influences and the quest for appearances in today's world.

The students' interpretations differed, with some highlighting the moral lesson concerning vanity and deceit, while others stressed the societal influences that guided Mathilde's choices. This variety illustrates the active engagement between readers and texts, as proposed by reception theory, and emphasizes literature's ability to produce various interpretations influenced by readers' cultural and individual backgrounds. The striking irony of the story, especially at its conclusion, became a key aspect of how students grasped its commentary on social standards and personal decisions.

Furthermore, examining *La Parure* through its adaptations into different media—movies, graphic novels, and theater—offered new perspectives on how students received the work. Although the original text was cherished for its literary richness and nuance, adaptations gained recognition for their capacity to visually and emotionally connect with audiences, rendering the story more approachable and relatable. Nonetheless, certain students pointed out that contemporary adaptations could forfeit the historical and cultural intricacies of the original story, indicating the necessity of balancing adaptation with loyalty to the source.

In summary, the response to *La Parure* from students showcases its enduring charm and its capacity to stimulate thoughtful consideration of shared human experiences.

The story's relevance transcends its original historical and cultural context, resonating with readers who face similar struggles with materialism, societal expectations, and personal aspirations today. Furthermore, the study underscores the value of exploring literary works across multiple media formats, as this approach enriches understanding and broadens interpretive possibilities. Ultimately, *La Parure* serves as a compelling example of how classic literature continues to engage, challenge, and inspire readers across generations and contexts.

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