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Course

Date

Identity as a Personal Choice

Choices made by a person are always motivated by the external factors like social environment, personal relations, and cultural beliefs. In this respect, people often strive for the values established and dictated by the dominant society. This especially concerns the concepts of wealth and poverty where money dictate the choice of identity for people. Four stories for consideration – *The Story of an Hour*, *The Necklace*, *Paul's Case*, and *The Rocking-Horse Winner* – reveal how social status and other external factors affect people's personal choice of identity, thus depriving them of their inner beliefs and moral values.

The Story of an Hour is the narration about feminine identity and the necessary roles taken by people in life. Mrs. Mallard, the main character and fake widow, goes through all the rituals of grieving over her husband. They are depicted in detail: "She swept at one, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone..." (Chopin 1). She is not burdened with love for her husband since this marriage is dictated by obligation and enforcement. Her internal desires of being free and happy, then, are only dreams and undisclosed desire. Still, her personal choice to be a free and independent woman does not allow her to accept her husband's revival that ruins her dreams about freedom. In the story, Mrs. Mallard personal choice turns out to be fatal for her.

In the next story called *The Necklace*, the author describes a life of a beautiful woman, Mathilde. She believes that she is born “for every delicacy and luxury” (De Maupassant 35). By contemplating the contrast between her miserable existence deprived of happy marriage and material wealth, she is mortified by the deplorable atmosphere believing that this is not the life she deserves. She rejects the reality she lives in, thus longing to luxury, especially when she is invited to the solemn evening. By expressing her hatred for poverty, Mathilde cries out, “...there’s nothing humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women” (De Maupassant 37). The main character believes that nobleness and femininity originate from the respectable social and material status.

The realization of difference between the world of poor and wealthy contributes to the development of personal choice of the protagonist of *Paul’s Case*. Like Mathilde, Paul refuses to live in his world due to the lack of perspectives, which his poor reality can offer. Being fascinated by the splendor of independent life, Paul is confident that dull and poor life is not his destiny (Cather 9). Paul’s reluctance to accept the reality leads him to death being a symbol of release from poverty.

Lack of love and respect can also trigger a person to shift his/her views toward another identity dimension as it happened in the story *The Rocking-Horse Winner*. Paul, the protagonist of the story, tries to compensate his mother’s indifference to him by money and respectable status in society (Lawrence 15). His aspiration for being loved triggers him to commit himself to dangerous and hasty deeds leading to a tragic end.

It should be admitted that the above stories are bright examples of how aspiration for identity influences personal choice and personality development. However, all the stories have turned out to be tragic as, in the quest for identity, the

main characters failed to recognize and accept the reality. This imposes the idea that their personal choices were dictated by the dominant societies of their time.

Works Cited

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