

CRITICAL AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORY "THE STORY OF AN HOUR" BY KATE CHOPIN: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN VICTORIAN ERA

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Abstract: *This article delves into Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," examining its portrayal of 19th-century gender norms, particularly the restricted role of women as devoted housewives. The protagonist, Louise Mallard, challenges societal expectations when she unexpectedly welcomes her husband's death as a liberation from marital constraints. Drawing parallels with Charlotte Perkins' "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrative underscores the oppressive impact of traditional gender roles on women's mental health. Chopin employs literary devices such as foreshadowing, simile, personification, metaphor, and alliteration to craft a nuanced exploration of marriage, domesticity, and individual freedom. Set against the backdrop of Victorian social standards, the story subtly critiques the confines of matrimony, urging readers to reflect on self-determination. The analysis emphasizes the story's relevance in contemporary literature as a classic feminist work.*

Keywords: *Kate Chopin, The Story of an Hour, Victorian Era, gender norms, feminism, marriage, individual freedom, literary devices, Charlotte Perkins, The Yellow Wallpaper, societal expectations, mental health, 19th-century literature, women's suffrage, literary analysis, feminist critique, gender roles, self-determination, societal constraints, contemporary relevance.*

Kate Chopin, American feminist writer, mostly emphasized on women's independence and sexual freedom in her prose. Her work, including the short "Story of an hour" (our focal point) was considered as rejection of gender norms in the eyes of 19th century's moral norms, while being referred as a classic example of feminist in today's contemporary literature. As Chopin's works hold strong sense of wit and style, the story needs to be carefully analyzed with close attention in order to gain better understanding of women's role as a housewife in Victorian Era.

In her story, Kate illustrates the 19th century, a period during which wives and women were viewed as a property to fulfill domestic roles with full dedication of their lives to the service of the husbands. The story centers around a woman, with heart disease, expected to bear the sad message about her husband's possible death in a road disaster.

The story can be found very appealing, since it clearly reflects the household image of Victorian Age from the perspective of a housewife. The story opens with the problem of informing an ill-hearted woman about the death of her husband. The message which was normally accepted as a horrifying news or/and an unacceptable truth, gets received as a celebration of freedom by the protagonist, Louise Mallard. Her

happiness comes after the death of her partner, since she ultimately suffers under “the well-meaning” of him. This pain can also be found in Charlotte Perkins’ “Yellow Wallpaper”, where an unnamed narrator goes mad as a result of her husband’s insistence on using the rest cure to treat her depression. The visions of trapped woman in the design of the wallpaper makes her insane while increasing her awareness of the oppression inherent in her own marriage.

“The Story of an Hour”, published in 1894, subtly addresses issues associated with Victorian social standards and the women’s suffrage movement, encouraging readers to reflect upon the confines of marriage and the issue of self-determination.

The early spring is selected as a setting to represents the new stage of Louise’s life with dedication to herself, but not her husband. The author shapes the characteristics of protagonist gradually and professionally as the story follows. The unnatural and rather calm reaction of Louise to the announcement of the incident can be the clear representation of her permanent thoughts about the possible death of her husband. Her not shocked neither mentally affected condition towards the message surprised her companions. The other item that has crucial role in character development can be the chair, settled next to the window. It shows thoughtful behavior of alienated main character, who is, because of her heart condition, found emotionally unavailable, kept away from the public and instantly cared by her family. Therefore, she prefers not sharing “the sorrow of her late husband”, but sitting alone in her bedroom drinking the elixir of life through the window, embracing the feeling of freedom in mind and soul. As can be noticed, the main themes of “The Story of an Hour” are marriage, domesticity, relationships between men and women, and individual freedom. Among these themes the morbid notion is that true personal freedom for women at times might only be found in death, as Louise’s soul leaves her body as she sees her husband entering through the door. Later her cause of death is referred as heart attack of the joy - of the freedom of soul, but not of body.

Kate Chopin used many literary devices in her short story, including foreshadowing, simile, personification, metaphor and alliteration. Chopin used an example of foreshadowing in the short story right in the first line. “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death.” Those lines hinted towards her heart attack at the very end of the story. When the narrator said “She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance.” They compared Louise Mallard with other women of Victorian Era, who have trouble trying to accept the statement about the death of the spouse. As Mrs. Mallard understood it quickly (Simile). The line “The delicious breath of rain was in the air.” is giving the rain a human feature, since rain can’t breathe (Personification). A metaphor in this story is in the line “When the storm of grief had spent itself, she went away to her room alone.” The narrator is comparing Louise Mallard’s time of grief to a storm. Implying that it was as intense as a storm. There wasn’t much alliteration in this

story, but a part of a sentence can be used, “a distant song which someone was singing”. The letter that being used for the alliteration is “s”: song, someone, singing.

The story claims the urge of freedom for a woman from her devoted life to the husband and family. The story should be closely analyzed by the humanity as it strongly emphasizes on the idea that the liberation of each individual shouldn't be invaded by the “extreme care” of those around them. The story helps the readers to form concepts about the consequences of silencing women and invasion of their individuality within the family and society. Aftermath, the selfless woman without the personal voice have no meaning, but priorities in her life. In a world that thrives on individuality and personal growth, it is crucial to learn lessons from such powerful stories and recognize the importance of validating each human being and every woman with the freedom to define their own path and voice their own truth.