

The story of an hour by chopin, and a rose for emily by faulkner

Literature



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Comparing Women Short stories written during the 1800s reveal a society in which women were tightly controlled within the house. A close examination of the main characters in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" and Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" illustrates the weight of social constraints on women during this period in time. Both Faulkner's Emily Grierson and Chopin's Louise Mallard are women trapped by social convention. Faulkner paints a picture of Miss Emily Grierson as a woman strictly contained within the boundaries of her father's home and his old Southern ideals. "None of the young men were quite good enough to Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door" (437). Similarly, Chopin's Louise Mallard is only seen within her home, first hearing about her husband's death in the living room and then retiring alone to her room. Because of the description of her weak heart and other considerations, it is presumed that Louise is elderly, but Chopin describes her as "young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength" (Chopin). She has become so resigned to the social cage of her home and marriage that the effects were present on her face and in her health. These attributes were very prominent among women as "many [women] accepted the promise of domestic happiness and the circumscribed authority that supposedly inhered in piety, purity and submissiveness" (Roberts, 2002: 150) but found only a kind of half-life within the shaded halls of their homes. In both stories, the women gain a chance to experience a sense of what real life is. After her father's

death, Miss Emily starts dating Homer Barron whose position as a Northerner is significant. The North was characterized by growth, progress, energy and new ideas such as women's suffrage (Woodward, 2000). When Miss Emily is seen in public following her father's funeral, " her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows – sort of tragic and serene" (438) and she defies the old order of her class. Similarly, as Louise recognizes her new freedom, Chopin shows her finally coming to life. " The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body" (Chopin). The reason for these changes is explained by the way she continues to whisper the word ' free'. Hewitt (2002) suggests women " were not passively awaiting their liberator, but were instead cultivating the seeds of destruction that the cult of true womanhood itself had sown." When this brief sense of freedom is taken from them, both women snap. For Miss Emily, this takes place when her cousins are sent for and Homer Barron leaves town. Realizing that the town was taking on the role of her father and locking her into a set of ideals that she would have to live up to, Miss Emily seals herself off from that society and becomes her own mistress within the confines of her home. Louise also has her freedom cruelly snatched from under her the moment her husband, still alive and well, walks through the door. Having had a chance to consider her freedom, the realization that she will have to return to her nearly lifeless status of earlier is more than she can bear. Louise's physical death thus stands in as a symbol of the spiritual death most women experienced through their social atmosphere. Both

stories offer strong shock value that reveals the dehumanizing effects of social conventions on the lives of women, but Chopin's story is more effective. This is because it is so immediate. The story is very short and Louise's death is so sudden that the reader is left in shock. Emily's story wanders more and there is a sense of the riddle at the end that, while creepy, was more blatantly hinted at throughout the story.

Works Cited

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