

Critical analysis of the storm by kate chopin essay



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Kate Chopin in her short yet gripping story *The Storm* explores a plethora of turbulent emotions of the protagonists in the backdrop of an unexpected storm. Though dubbed a sequel to her earlier work “*At the Cadian Ball*” (1892) it shares little resemblance to Calixta’s daring. All through, there is an undercurrent of nascent feminism. The tale is more of a reflection of sexually oppressed women of the 19th century under male dominion, woman rediscovering their feminine urge, the right over their bodies and relations they choose to have.

Every literary work is a statement by the author and a statement about the author at the same time. An analysis of the short story cannot be separated from an analysis of the author’s social, temporal and political circumstances. Chopin’s revolutionary tendencies could be attributed to her disillusionment with the American ruling class, in which she was born into (Skaggs). The fact that she lost her father early in life and her mother soon after, played a significant role to play in her development into an introverted, reclusive individual. But as social animals, human beings need to communicate. The only way she found fit was through writing, which allowed her to create, express as well as ruminate her traumatic past (Encyclopedia of World Biography).

One of the turning points in her life were the meeting of a German woman in New Orleans who sort of became an idealistic woman to her as she succeeded in reconciling her celebrity status as an artist with a respectable place in society and a healthy conjugal life. This meeting also cultivated the life-long habit of smoking, which again was looked down upon at the time (again displaying her rebellious nature). When her husband Oscar Chopin’s

cotton factoring business failed in 1879, she moved to Cloutierville. These formative years as a writer finds reflection in many of what Kate Chopin wrote later (Dictionary of Literary Biography, 63).

Chopin starts using the illustration of the storm with Calixta's husband, Bobinot. Bobinot decides to wait at the general store with their son, Bibi till the storm evens out. This waiting out or evasion from the storm suggests that he also avoids the storms of passion that his wife had expected of him. After this, the reader is introduced to Calixta at their home, sewing and performing other mundane chores, "unaware that the storm is coming". This implies that "her sexuality is repressed by the constraints of her marriage and society's view of women, represented in this passage by the housework" (Farca, 121).

The author efficiently collates the Storm brewing in nature with the storm within Calixta as she encounters Alecee in her home alone. The storm raging in nature is suffused with the one waging in the protagonist's heart as she lets loose of her marital bondage and societal propriety. After the storm she experiences bliss as imaged by the sun "turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems" (Farca, 120). Coming as she does from a progressive society the author doesn't have problems alluding to female sexuality and independence of choice.

The metaphor "The Storm" is intended to reflect Calixta's sub-conscious sexual longing as a result of her inadequate conjugal relationship with her husband. Just as the climatic storm takes the characters in the story by surprise, the emotional storm of sexual fulfillment takes her by surprise. She

realizes this arousal only after it has passed and after the fact. The words “ a discomfort that causes her to loosen her collar” talks about the physical discomfort caused by oppressive climatic conditions as well as the psychological discomfort caused by an oppressive marital life. In the words, “ The ferocity of the storm drives them inside the house”, “ ferocity” stands for the intensity of pent up passion and “ drives” refers to their lack of control over the impending events (Farca, 121).

The story is set in for a major part of the story indoors in Bobinot and Calixta’s home in a fictional setting in an isolated region of Louisiana. Calixta, around whom the story revolves, stays homebound while the husband Bobinot and son Bibi are caught up in the storm in the local Freidheimer’s store separated from home by heavy roads and wet fields (Skaggs).

The daytime setting of the story is clearly brought forth when the author refers to the sun being clouded and the woods being wrapped gray. By the end of the story the rain ceases and the sun glistens again “ turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems” (Manning, 134).

The story was written in July 1898 and it reflects the lifestyle of the 19th century. The story introduces the female protagonist as a dedicated homemaker sewing furiously and gathering her husband’s Sunday clothes put out to dry before huge drops of rain wet them. There is no hint of the approaching storm in the first part of the story. Calixta feels warm and mops up the perspiration in the second part having no clue of the impending rains (Manning, 434).

In the Story, the character of Calixta is unable to conform to the society's standards of acceptable conduct, although her lover Alcee perceives her favorably. When Alcee states: " If she was not an immaculate dove in those days, she was still inviolate" (Farca, 124), he is essentially saying that just because a woman is not deemed pure of flesh, it nevertheless does not contest the purity of her heart. The exchanges between Calixta and Alcee will have to be read in the context of her marriage. What the author is trying to imply is that Calixta's chastity was already lost through the marriage. Hence where is the question of her conduct being unchaste? The sparse attention given to Alcee's morality in the narrative is an indication of the norms of the day - when different standards are applied to men and women and the society being a male dominated one (Farca, 123).

Chopin is a lucid writer and direct to the point she makes. She is bold in outlook for her times and oftentimes rebels against the accepted beliefs of her times. Her writing is rebellious and unconventional for a woman author of her time (Dictionary of Literary Biography, 69).

Since she was born to Irish and French-Creole parents and wedded to a Creole her language is interspersed with the local dialect (a highly informal one). The author emphatically states the narrative unabashedly and abstains from moralizing (Dictionary of Literary Biography, 62).

In the passage where Calixta is introduced, she is shown as someone lost in the act of sewing. Here, Chopin employs an interesting choice of words - " no uneasiness for their safety". Some critics point to sewing as a metaphor for

sexual intercourse, although this view is not expressed by the author herself.

Seyersted adds this observation:

“ Perhaps by including other instances in literature in which sewing was used in this matter may have been helpful to readers who are not as familiar with “ popular metaphors”, but this essay was presumably written for an audience already interested in the history and identification of recurrent symbolism and metaphor.”(Seyersted)

The author makes the passionate sequence involving Calixta and Alecee vivid by creatively constructing unusual word orders (all taken from the text of the story) such as

“...her liquid blue eyes”;

“.... her mouth was a fountain of delight.”

“.... her blue eyes still retained their melting quality”

The story comprises some wondrous similes alluding to Calixta’s beautiful body (all quotes from the original story text):

“ as white as the couch she lay upon”,