

# Madelyn martinez

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Madelyn Martinez English Comp II 1302-1005 February 28, 2013 “ The Story of an Hour” as a Feminist Text The narrator introduces Louise Mallard as a wife with some type of heart problem. Her sister Josephine and Richards take great care when telling her that her husband has died in a train accident. Despite the sad news she receives, she is unable to contain her feelings of liberation and is elated with thoughts of a long life free of her spouse. Unfortunately for Mrs. Mallard, her husband soon reappears and all of her hopes are brought to a sudden end, literally killing her. Kate Chopin may not have considered herself a feminist writer, but her shorty story has created an expression of the oppression and desire for independence felt by many women in the time period it was written. In the late nineteenth-century, women were taught “ never question her husband’s authority...even if he is an adulterer, a drunkard, or an idiot” (Warren, 10). They did not have the luxury of a will of their own aside from their spouse’s. They, for the most part, were expected to do only activities such as cook, clean and have babies, and “ their legal rights were restricted” (Warren, 9) in the court system. Although Brently “ had never looked save with love upon her” (Chopin, 206), he disregarded Louise’s happiness because the “ lines [of her face] bespoke repression” (Chopin, 206). Mrs. Mallard’s lack of identity throughout the story signifies the way women in this era were treated as fragile and “ powerless” (Chopin, 206) creatures. The narrator observes how she cries like “ a child” (Chopin, 206), and even the other character’s actions in the story revolve around Mrs. Mallard’s preservation. She was known only as a wife, an extension of Brently Mallard. It was not until he was presumed dead that the narrator addresses her directly in the text as “ Louise” (Chopin,

206) because she was, by this point, considered “ free” (Chopin, 206). The lack of children in the story may also indicate a lack of duty for Ms. Mallard. If she had no children to care for, it was then her husband’s duty to insure she was well taken care of. The problem with the belief that women were items to be cared for was that it robbed the woman of her “ individualism” (Warren, 140). That is to say that if a wife was unable to do her duty as a woman and bear children, she was nothing more than a married woman. She lost her label that showed she was something more than just a man’s possession. The irony of trying to save her from any distress is that Mrs. Mallard actually finds herself happy to know her husband has died. She sees a “ long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely... and spread her arms out to them in welcome” (Chopin, 206). In a very short time she develops an “ independence and an emotional resilience” (Taylor, 140) to the shock of her loss, and she carries herself “ unwittingly like a goddess of victory” (Chopin, 206) ready to take on a new life. It is understandable that instead of grieving over the loss of her love, she was consumed with dreams of how she would spend the rest of her life, in anyways she chose because she realized she was finally going to be making her own decisions. Women characters of the Victorian era would not have been as “ fully drawn” (Warren, 3) as in Chopin’s depiction of the story. If one looks into the history of Chopin, they will find she was from a family of “ free thinkers and rebels against legal, sexual and racial conventions” (Taylor, 141). It is not unreasonable for her to have been able to invent such a character as Louise Mallard, a woman with the desire to “ take part in...life” (Taylor, 141) that was not subject to the regulations of her husband’s “ ideal

of a lady" (Warren, 9). In the end, Kate Chopin successfully portrays the secrets a married woman living in the late nineteenth-century may have felt if their circumstances had been similar to Mrs. Mallard's. She allows the reader to understand the oppressive hand of society and the effects marriage often had on a woman of this time period through her use of word choice. She accurately expresses a woman of this era's lack of identity beyond the household. Although Chopin may not have considered herself a feminist, nor intended this story to be read as such, it will forever stand as a look into the life of a married Victorian woman with dreams of something more. Works Cited Chopin, Kate. " The Story of an Hour. " Compact Literature: R. R. W. 8th ed. Ed. Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell. Boston: Wadsworth Cenegage Learning 2013. Pages 205-206. Print. Taylor, Helen. Gender, Race, and Region in the Writing of Grace King, Ruth Mcenery Stuart, and Kate Chopin. Louisiana State University Press, 1989. Print. Warren, Joyce W. The American Narcissus: Individualism and women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction. New Brunswick and London, 1984. Print.