

# The life of kate chopin essay sample

War



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

More often than not, great pieces of literature are usually reflections of the authors' life and the era they lived in. The literary pieces serve as mirrors to the struggles and triumphs that their respective authors have gone through. After all, the best material that an author can write about is that of his or her own experience. This proved to be true in the case of Kate Chopin, an American writer which changed the face of literature with the depiction of women in her works. Two of her short stories, *The Story of An Hour* and *Desiree's Baby*, are reflections of her life and the time in which she lived. This research paper aims to illustrate how the aforementioned short stories reflect the life of Kate Chopin.

Catherine O' Flaherty, also known as Kate, was born on July 12, 1850 in the city of St. Louis in Missouri (Ker, n. d.). At the tender age of five, she attended The Sacred Heart Academy (Wyatt, 1995). Unfortunately, her father Thomas died two months later on a train accident. After this tragedy, Kate experienced what was about to be the most influential occurrence that would shape her writing: living in a house full of widowed women (Ker, n. d.; Wyatt, 1995). In a period when the central authority of the home was the father, Kate grew up in the influence of strong empowered women, like her great-grandmother, grandmother and mother, whose lives lacked the dominance of men.

Victoria Verdon Charleville, her great-grandmother, was in charge of Kate's education; the former was responsible for teaching the latter all she knew about music, the French language, even gossip about the women of St. Louis in the past (Wyatt, 1995). Kate indeed belonged to a line of women who deviated from the norm: her great great-grandmother was the first ever in <https://assignbuster.com/the-life-of-kate-chopin-essay-sample/>

St. Louis to be legally separated from her spouse (Wyatt, 1995). In Mississippi, she also managed her own business while raising five children (Wyatt, 1995).

Kate resumed her studies in the Sacred Heart Academy, an institution run by intelligent nuns (Wyatt, 1995). Again, she was immersed in the influence of women. Kate excelled in her studies, received various honors and even became a member of the Children of Mary Society. During this time, women were expected to be confined in a domestic role: being a wife and mother were the only roles women were supposed to fulfill (Ker, n. d.).

Moreover, women were supposed to submit to the men in their lives, as the men are considered to be authority. This role that society imposes on women proved difficult for Kate to accept. This is because she was raised in a house and was educated in school by women figures who were in authority. The central figures in her life were women. Hence, the difference between how she was raised and how society expected her to be proved to be instrumental in her writing. This fact is reflected in her stories, wherein her strong heroines were suppressed by their marriages (Ker, n. d.).

*The Story of An Hour* is about Louise Mallard, a wife who received the news that her husband Brently was killed in a “railroad disaster” (Chopin, 1894). In the beginning, Louise reacted as any wife should: she cried in grief of such loss. She even stayed in her room in a desire to be alone. However, the grief was soon replaced by happiness. The realization of her husband’s demise made her extremely happy, as she knew she was free from his control. His death was her means to freedom. Later in the story, it turns out

that the news of her husband's death was false. Brently was alive, as he was nowhere near the accident. The story ended with the death of Louise, as caused by "the joy that kills" (Chopin, 1894).

This short story's first reference to the life of the author is the "railroad disaster" that allegedly killed Brently Mallard (Chopin, 1894). It was earlier mentioned that Kate's father Thomas was killed in a train accident. The other reference was the repression of Louise during her marriage to Brently.

Kate's strong female-dominated background emerged with the freedom Louise felt upon learning of her husband's supposed death. In the story, it was written that upon Brently's death, "there would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have the right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature" (Chopin, 1894). This sentence asserts Kate's belief against the male domination of women, a true testament to her women-dominated upbringing.

The Civil War was another influential factor in Kate's life. She grew up in a time when the war between the Union and the Confederacy was taking place (Gallagher, 2007). In fact, the war was instrumental in separating her from a friend she met at the Sacred Heart Academy (Wyatt, 1995). The name of the friend was Kitty Garesche; her family supported slavery and was sympathetic to the cause of the South. The Confederacy was consisted of the Southern states (Gallagher, 2007). On the other hand, St. Louis was supporters of the North, which were loyal to the Union (Wyatt, 1995). Hence, Kitty and her family were prompted to leave St. Louis. When the war was finally over,

Kitty went back to St. Louis and their friendship resumed until Kitty became a nun (Wyatt, 1995).

Kate married twenty-five year old Oscar Chopin in June 1870 (Ker, n. d.; Wyatt, 1995). Chopin belonged to a rich family who was involved in the cotton-growing industry (Wyatt, 1995). He had the same background as Kate, as he was also Catholic and of French descent. His family was based in Louisiana, so after their marriage, the couple moved to New Orleans (Ker, n. d.).

Kate became the ideal wife, as she fulfilled all the duties that came with such role. She had seven children, of whom two were girls and five were boys (Ker, n. d.; Wyatt, 1995). Their marriage was a happy one; Oscar loved Kate, and acknowledged her wit and independence. He even gave her the kind of freedom that was not granted to other wives (Wyatt, 1995). Unlike their marriage, Oscar's cotton business failed; this forced the family to move to Cloutierville (Ker, n. d.). In 1882, Oscar passed away due to swamp fever, and Kate had to take over the family business (Wyatt, 1995).

*Desiree's Baby* is a short story about Desiree Valmonde, a beautiful woman of "obscure origin" (Chopin, 1998). Desiree was found by Madame Valmonde, and without a daughter to call her own, the Madame adopted her. She grew up to be a remarkable woman, and caught the eye of Armand Aubigny. They were married, and soon after, Desiree gave birth to their first child.

What initially began as a happy marriage eventually turned sour after the baby was born. This is because the child Desiree gave birth to was not

<https://assignbuster.com/the-life-of-kate-chopin-essay-sample/>

white. Madame Valmonde asked Desiree to come home to her, and Armand did not want anything to do with Desiree. That is why Desiree soon left, bringing her baby with her. At the end of the story, it turned out that the one with the African American blood was Armand, not Desiree (Chopin, 1998).

Again, this story is a reflection of Kate's life and times. First, there is the apparent French reference, as suggested by the names L' Abri, Madame and Monsieur Valmonde, as well as Armand Aubigny. Both Kate and Oscar Chopin had French backgrounds. Second, the character of Armand was portrayed as one which came from a wealthy family in Louisiana. L' Abri, the residence of Armand and Desiree, was described as that which is filled with " negroes," those which harvested cotton (Chopin, 1998). Armand's character seems to be a reflection of Oscar Chopin: both of which came from wealthy families in Louisiana.

They also are in the cotton-growing business. Third, the story has a reference to the Civil War era in which Kate grew up in. The war was waged because of slavery, and the slaves were African Americans (Gallagher, 2007). The main crop of the South was cotton, and slaves were needed to support this agricultural endeavor. In the story, it was described that the " negroes were picking cotton" (Chopin, 1998). L'Abri was therefore a cotton plantation, the same area in which Kate lived when she was married to Oscar.

The story also mirrors the condition and status of African American slaves during the war. Before the war even began, slaves were already considered

as mere property of the plantation owners (Perry, 1989). They were only seen as objects, not as human beings.

That is why upon recognizing that his child was not white, Armand stopped responding to his wife; this is due to the “unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name” (Chopin, 1998). It would be a shame for a man of Armand’s stature to have a child who belonged to the race of the slaves. It turned out that Armand’s mother has African American blood, which means he has too (Chopin, 1998). In addition, Armand allowed her wife to leave for that which is not her fault. This is yet another reference to the subordination of women, in which women are at the mercy of their husbands.

Like other authors whose personal experiences are embedded in their literary works, Kate Chopin also has her life, and the era in which she lived reflected in her short stories. *The Story of an Hour* and *Desiree’s Baby* clearly mirror their author’s life and times.

## References

Chopin, K. (1998). *Desiree’s Baby*. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from <http://www.classicauthors.net/chopin/desiree>

Chopin, K. (1894). *The Story of An Hour*. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/>

Gallagher, G.. (2007). American civil war. *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia*. Retrieved May 2, 2008, from [http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761567354\\_18/Civil\\_War.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761567354_18/Civil_War.html)  
<https://assignbuster.com/the-life-of-kate-chopin-essay-sample/>

Ker, C. (n. d.). Ahead of her time. *Empire: Zine* . Retrieved May 2, 2008, from <http://www.empirezine.com/spotlight/chopin/chopin1.htm>

Perry, M. (1989). *A History of the World* . Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin.

Wyatt, N. (1995). *Biography of Kate Chopin* . Retrieved May 2, 2008, from <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng384/katebio.htm>