

A comparison of the story of an hour



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Kate Chopin's "The Story of An Hour" depicts the life of Mrs. Mallard, who has just received the news of her husband's death in a train accident.

Instead of being aggrieved, however, Mrs. Mallard is relieved because her husband's death frees her from his domination. However, it turns out later that the information about Mr. Mallard's death was not true. She is shocked to see him alive, which causes her to experience a heart attack and die.

James Thurber's "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" is about an old man who is constantly carried away by fantasies. He experiences a series of daydream episodes, in which he plays the role of the U. S. navy's fighter pilot, a surgeon performing an operation, an assassin in court, a Royal Air Force Pilot on a bombing mission, and finally as a condemned man before a firing squad. He experiences these fantasies while on a shopping trip with his wife to Waterbury, Connecticut.

The two stories portray characters whose actions are influenced by unreal events and imagination. Accordingly, hallucination is a common motif in both stories. Mrs. Mallard falsely believes that her husband is death, and, therefore, she is free of his influence over her. This is illustrated by her inward rejoicing when she receives news that her husband had died in an accident. She celebrated her widowhood by wishing that she could live longer to enjoy her freedom. Chopin states:

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long (Chopin 424).

Mrs. Mallard's happiness in the midst of grieving shows that she is alienated from society. Consequently, she does not join others in mourning her husband. Instead, she finds solace in his death. Similarly, Mr. Mitty's ability to enjoy his fantasies suggests that he was escaping a life that he did not enjoy. For instance, she orders him to "Remember to bring those overshoes while I'm having my hair done" (Thurber 120). His wife orders him around like a child while the traffic cop and parking attendant yells at him. In this regard, the two stories portray characters seeking to escape the reality of their lives. Mrs. Mallard finds consolation in the knowledge that her husband will no longer be there to oppress her. On his part, Mr. Mitty finds comfort in pretending to be someone else, usually playing the role of admirable characters such as a doctor, a pilot and a soldier. Therefore, both texts explore the theme of fantasy as a means of escaping from the harsh realities of life.

Another point of connection between the two stories is the short-lived nature of the characters happiness. Mrs. Mallard's happiness is cut short when her husband walks in through the door, very alive, very real. She is brutally awakened to the reality that she'll continue to live under his domination. As a result of her resentment of this prospect, she collapses and dies of what the doctors call "the joy that kill" (Chopin 425). Likewise, Mr. Mitty's fantasies are repeatedly interrupted by his wife and the policeman. As a result, both characters fail to get a permanent escape from their situations.

Nevertheless, the two texts differ in how they treat the characters' fate. Mrs. Mallard is destroyed by her inability to face reality while, Mr. Mitty survives by shifting from one fantasy to another. However, the ending of the story

where he faces a firing squad suggests that he too will not survive. This possibility suggests that alienation is a destructive infection of the mind and soul that robs individuals of the will to live.