

Story fuel her writings
and her disgust for



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Story of an Hour” Story of an Hour” When I read Kate Chopin’s, “ Story of an Hour” I am reminded of a Edgar Allan Poe horror poems. The narrator has a “ divine transformation” yet it kills her. This puzzles me, so I will search for the true meaning of this strange story (marriage, as I believe). To accomplish this task and to truly understand this short story, I will first learn about Kate Chopin’s life and experiences.

Later, I will investigate her use of symbolism in “ Story of an Hour” and their’ dual purposes (to the story and to Kate Chopin’s life/how it relates to her) mainly dealing with marriage. After researching the life of Kate Chopin, her works do not seem so strange, in comparison with her life and grief. Seemingly death and isolation fuel her writings and her disgust for contemporary society. Though she was born in 1850 into an upper-middle class family, they were Irish¹. Being an Irish immigrant was the worst Ethnicity during the middle and late nineteenth century in America.

This period was full of hatred towards the Irish always being depicted as thieves and scoundrels. This hate escalated to the “ Molly McGuire” murders and the hanging of over one dozen innocent Irish immigrants. Furthermore, death plagued Kate Chopin throughout her whole life. At the tender age of five, her father, Thomas O’Flaherty died in a rail accident². Seven years later, her great grandmother, Victoire Verdon Charleville dies, who she had been living with for six years. The same year, Kate’s half-brother, George O’Flaherty, dies of typhoid fever³. During the next seven years, she graduated from the Academy of the Sacred Heart and visited New Orleans, which she loves. She marries, Oscar Chopin, they have six children, but in 1882, Oscar dies of malaria⁴.

One year later, Kate's mother dies. After, moving back to her native St. Louis she begins to write and attempts to have several works published with no success. So begins her struggle with society and herself, which consumes her until death in 1904. In 1894, Kate Chopin created my subject of focus, "Story of an Hour." After several re-reads it becomes more apparent that Chopin uses symbolism to substitute long description and explanations. This allows Chopin to effectively complete the story in just twenty-two short paragraphs.

This symbolism often reflects similarity to Charlotte Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Similar to Gilman, it is obvious that Chopin is adamantly opposed to the institution of marriage. Therefore, the main purpose of, "Story of an Hour" is to show how marriage is a form of slavery. She believes, society holds married women captive.

She expresses this by the sudden conviction and the caprice by Mrs. Mallard after the "death" of her husband. Thus Mrs. Mallard's "heart condition" represents the lack of freedom and her desire to be released from the bondage. Though she does not realize it, subconsciously she knows that society has imposed marriage as the only "good" and "righteous" position for women.

Furthermore, societies, controlled by men, give the perception that only through marriage can a woman truly be happy. So her heart starts to collapse because she has given into marriage and thus she has lost her freedom and "free will..."

..." After she learns of her husband's " death" she no longer is confined. As she ponders this idea, she releases all the stress and emotions that had been building up during the years of marriage. It is overwhelming, yet as she describes it, " her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body. 5" She mumbles " free, free, free5" uncontrollably as the feeling of freedom takes over her body.

This new " freedom" of Mrs. Mallard, likely is the same Kate Chopin felt after the death of her husband. Her experience with marriage seemingly is very similar to Mrs. Mallard's, as the role of " wife" was fine for Chopin until her husband passed away. After several years, Chopin finally started to express her feelings through writing and wishes other women should learn of the " evils" of marriage. Thus I can conclude, at some point Chopin had a similar experience to Mrs.

Mallard's and thus she modeled this story partly after her life and marriage. To add to the impact Chopin titles this work, " Story of an Hour," signifying the whole story takes place over a single hour. As the story progresses the irony and it's purpose increases. We get a mixed message from Chopin, in that once Mrs. Mallard has this intervention she can not sustain her life.

Thus we are left with the ambiguous question, what causes Mrs. Mallard's death? To be honest, I am not quite sure myself. However, Chopin hints that " freedom" of mind and body is more valuable than life itself. Therefore, she implies that after this intervention by Mrs.

Mallard, that going back to the confines of marriage would be killing the life and heart of Louise, thus death is the only solution and of course the " heart
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condition" foreshadowing an impending death. Chopin utilizes a unique writing style to express her satirical plot. Through symbolism and first person perspective we see her "new thinking" and the apparent reason for death. Yet at the same time, the characters in the story have no clue to her "invention" or plans for the future. Rather they conclude, as the last sentence states, "when the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease.

"I believe this has to purposes by Chopin, first, suggests that other women at the time had similar feelings, but just as Mrs. Mallard could not express them to anyone, and second, the total disregard for women and their feelings, as they did not think about her, rather it was her husband, the man, that Louise died for. In conclusion, I enjoyed Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour" and found her unique writing style beautiful. It is very deceptive, only shedding its secrets through vague symbolism and implications. But through researching Chopin's life story and through analyzing this story I was able to interpret the meaning and purpose of this fine story.

Though I have to admit reading Orwell or Hemingway is a bit easier to read and understand, but that just takes the fun out of it! Footnotes 1-4.

Information compiled using Kate Chopin: A Re-Awakening- Chronology, <http://www.pbs.org/katechopin/chronology.html>.

5. Cunningham. Culture and Values, Volume II.

Pages 378 and 379. Harcourt/Brace College Publishers. Orlando, FL. 1998.

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