

The storm

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



In Kate Chopin's "The Storm", a married woman breaks free from the patriarchal norm of her time. This story embodies feminism for many reasons—some of which are giving female characters typical "male" characteristics and discussing female sexuality. An affair that would usually be looked at with distaste and as an abomination is nonchalantly recounted in this shocking tale. It is also representative of Chopin's background and symbolizes the turning of a page for women everywhere. This story goes into the female psyche and questions the sanctity of marriage in a very traditional time. Chopin uses foreshadowing and nature scenes to entangle the reader in the story. This metonymy is about a horrible storm and an even worse affair and is presented boldly in a non-judgmental way, never acknowledging the moral aspects of any of the characters' actions but always pushing the envelope of the reader's superego. To understand the mindset of Chopin as she writes her short story "The Storm", the audience needs to know about the history behind the author. Chopin was raised in St. Louis, but early in her life she married and moved to New Orleans. "Kate's family on her mother's side was of French extraction, and Kate grew up speaking both French and English. She was bilingual and bicultural--feeling at home in different communities with quite different values--and the influence of French life and literature on her thinking is noticeable throughout her fiction" (Koloski). As a child, Chopin went to Sacred Heart School and formed bonds with many women there. As a girl, she was mentored by women--by her mother, her grandmother, and her great grandmother, as well as by the Sacred Heart nuns. Because of these strong female bonds, Chopin wrote much of her work based on the nurturing she

received. Even through all the nurturing, Chopin's early life was full of trauma; her father, great-grandmother, and half-brother all passed away in a matter of years. Many of her stories take place in New Orleans and have the Creole traditions as a quiet theme to her provoking works. The city was bustling and provided an amazing backdrop to the new marriage Kate entered into with Oscar Chopin. The city was full of inspiration that fueled her creative side. By twenty-eight, she had 6 children—five boys and one girl—and a husband all while helping to manage a cotton business. The year after her last child was born, the business failed and the young couple and their full family found themselves managing small plantations and a general store to get by. Tragedy struck again when Chopin's husband died of malaria when she was only thirty-two. This left her a widow with six kids and she never remarried, though she was rumored to have an affair with a married farmer. Nevertheless, Chopin then moved with her children back to St. Louis where she found better schools for them and a richer cultural life for herself. Tragedy would strike another time when shortly after their move, in 1885, her mother passed away. Chopin was encouraged by a family friend to write as a way to let out her pent up emotions and therein she found her outlet. Chopin is quoted in a review saying, " I once heard a devotee of impressionism admit, in looking at a picture by Monet, that, while he himself had never seen in nature the peculiar yellows and reds therein depicted, he was convinced that Monet had painted them because he saw them and because they were true. With something of a kindred faith in the sincerity of Mons. Zola's work, I am yet not at all times ready to admit its truth, which is only equivalent to saying that our points of view differ, that truth rests upon

a shifting basis and is apt to be kaleidoscopic" (Koloski). This gives the audience a glimpse into what Chopin's goal in writing was. She felt it extremely important to impress upon others issues that she understood to be true. An issue Chopin took a hard stance on was feminism. While Chopin has been quoted as saying she was neither suffragist nor feminist, she was undoubtedly in favor of the individuals' rights. She believed in strong women and it was reflected in her writings. The Feminist movement created feminist non-fiction and fiction writings and sparked interest in female writers. It also prompted a general reevaluation of women's historical and academic contributions in response to the belief that women's lives and contributions have been underrepresented as areas of scholarly interest. The majority of society was able to stop and take a look at the impact of female front-runners. The story, "The Storm" is a great example of how a strong woman is typically the center of a Chopin story. It is also characteristic to Chopin because of the questioning tone on subjects like marriage. Calixta, our protagonist in the story, is from all accounts, a happily married woman with a child and doting husband. One afternoon, her husband and young son go into town and while they are out a storm approaches. The two are forced to stay inside a shop in town and not return home, leaving Calixta at home alone. This provides a critical point in the story where Calixta's repression-her marriage-is absent and her unconscious desires start to surface. With the storm fast approaching, she is forced outside to collect her laundry before it is soaked in the afternoon storm. The approaching storm symbolizes the building tension of women everywhere while also being a personification of Calixta's growing desires, getting closer and closer to standing up for her

rights. It also symbolizes a building conflict in the story; a type of foreshadowing of what is to come. " It began to grow dark and suddenly realizing the situation she got up hurriedly and went about closing windows and doors" (Chopin). The growing darkness typically symbolizes evil and paired with her sudden " realization", the reader is immersed in a dark foreshadowing of the immoral content of the immediate future. As Calixta is outside, she sees a man out by the fence, an old face she recognizes instantly; Alcée, a man she has not been alone with since getting married, moreover has not seen often since her marriage. He rides up under her porch and asks to stay until the storm passes. This is a symbol of avoidance in the story; he is someone who perhaps in her younger life she used to be able to flirt with and be around while not feeling guilty-but now she is a married woman with responsibilities. He is not anyone special, nor is he exactly an " old flame" from her past. He is just a man she knew in her former life as a single woman, and now he has reappeared just as her husband is out. The regression to her former single state of mind is becoming evident as the story continues. Chopin here is pulling the reader in by making them connect to Calixta through emotional similarities. Alcée comes in and helps her prepare the house for the (already) drenching storm outside. " They were in the dining room-the sitting room-the general utility room. Adjoining was her bedroom, with Bibi's couch along side her own. The door stood open, and the room with its white, monumental bed, its closed shutters, looked dim and mysterious" (Chopin). The allegory of the growing intensity of the storm reflects the growing fervor within Calixta-both building up to a climax, getting ready to explode. The observation of the bed being

dim and mysterious is another passage Chopin uses to hint to the reader what is coming next, personifying the bed as if it has personality traits of its own. At this point the reader does not know if Alcée is the antagonist coming to derail Calixta's dream life or if he is an anti-hero whom the reader will relate to and come to enjoy reading about. The sexual desire (id) between the two old flames is at first culminated in nervous tension. The two make small talk about the storm and the whereabouts of Calixta's loved ones. While looking out into the storm, Calixta exclaims, " If this keeps up, Dieu sait if the levees goin' to stan' it," which is symbolic of the growing force of their passion and the weakening of their resistance before that passion. The Eros or sexual drive between the two is a thick perfume in the air; the anticipation continues to build while the couple dances around the elephant in the room. This is another powerful scene using the id as a plausible encounter between two people clearly attracted to each other. Then a powerful bolt outside in the storm sends Calixta into the arms of Alcée; the inciting event results in the couple's first embrace, kiss, and also ignites the couple's affair. The scene that ensues inside the house is as powerful as the raging storm outside. Chopin continues the use of the storm as a metaphor to parallel the affair throughout the story. As the storm climaxes, so does the couple's encounter. The storm reaches new heights and with it, Calixta's inhibitions are released into the storm. " They did not heed the crashing torrents and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms" (Chopin). Then as the couple delights in each other's arms (after their love-making), the storm outside starts to calm. After some time of reveling in each other's company, finally, Alcée leaves, riding off into the sun which has

now come out to signify the ending of the storm. Calixta's family returns and everyone lives happily ever after, her family, and his, none the wiser. Just like that, the passionate love affair is over and neither party seems to be affected. Suddenly this dynamic story becomes static, and ends flat with no real conclusion. Calixta's attitude is typical of the feminism mindset and likely reflects the mindset of Chopin herself. She discusses female sexuality in a way that other authors and females dared not to. " Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world" (Chopin). Chopin believed, like many feminists, that female sexuality was something to be explored and discussed instead of being hidden behind closed doors. Men were allowed to discuss sexual encounters but women were told not speak about such things and to keep their thoughts on such matter silent. The story is sexually explicit and unashamed of its content, a mindset the author shares with many of her feminist peers. Chopin never gives an apology for her writings, she believes that feminine sexual desires should be known and even explored candidly. Chopin gives the female character a male view of sex so that she seems nonchalant and casual about her affair. Like many feminist writers, Chopin believes women should delight themselves in their bodies and be honest in their celebrations of their physical experiences, which is clearly evident throughout this story. When looking at the story from a feminist perspective, the storm analogy becomes parallel with the actual character of Calixta along instead of her passionate affair. She starts as a calm, quiet person who would not appear to be a threat. She is what all women during this time were supposed to be, subdued

and graceful, knowing nothing of sexual encounters. As the story goes on though, she becomes like a raging storm unable to control her desires. In being boldly candid about sexual relationships, especially those outside the sanctity of marriage, Chopin adopts the traditionally male domain of sexual desire in her thoughts and writings. In this story she affirms the validity of female sexuality and makes an important statement about women's right to know and appreciate their bodies and experience physical pleasure. Chopin also uses symbolic words and phrases to emphasize the reversal of traditional gender roles. "The generous abundance of her passion . . . was like a white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached" (Chopin). The author uses verbs and actions typically associated with male sexuality to describe Calixta. In Chopin's era men were seen as the powerful members of the relationship but in this story, Calixta has just as much power in the affair as Alcée. She is not seen as a helpless victim or nor is she seen as remorseful. She is a willing player in this encounter, and is fully capable of controlling her own future, whereas in the past, most women were subject to their husbands. The author displays the affair as unapologetic and unashamed, even going so far as to question the sanctity of marriage. "Her firm elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world" (Chopin). In saying this, Chopin is inferring that Calixta's sexual relationship with her husband was less than satisfactory and that she was not able to live up to her potential with him. It is implied that her husband was oppressing her sexually (and maybe in other ways) and now that she

knows her "birthright" she is able to finally feel and explore all that she was meant to. It is suggesting that she has been missing out on something that she is entitled to, something that is inherently owed to females, not just males. This is also suggesting that females are able, and should, feel sexual desires and temptations, instead of just being the object of male sexual needs. It brings women to the forefront so that they are no longer objects, they are now leaders and decision-makers. This story also brings into light many moral questions. Because of Chopin's harsh childhood and the trauma surrounding her, she questioned religion at a young age. The way that Chopin writes "The Storm" leads the reader to believe that it is morally fine to cheat on your spouse. Chopin made a staggering point in the story by making the leading characters so unashamed of their actions. The character of Alcée even believes that Calixta is an angelic being in her own right. "" If she was not an immaculate dove in those days, she was still inviolate" (Chopin). He is saying that even though a woman may not be pure in the sight of others, it does not mean she cannot still be a good person. The characters never give way to their superego or their morality principles. They seek to fulfill psychosexual desires and their implausible, guiltless reactions prove that they allow their id to control their every move. Chopin's use of an extremely flawed protagonist was helpful in proving her feminist point of view. In many of her stories she uses the flawed protagonist to relate to the readers because many of us see ourselves as imperfect. The main character is usually dealing with some internal struggle and in some of her works the female lead makes very unpopular decisions. Chopin is striving to make the point that females are able to make life changing decisions just like the men

they are so often inferior to. She uses the allegory of Calixta and Alcée to symbolize how unimportant the institution of marriage is and how important it is for females to live to their fullest potential. In many ways, Chopin uses her literary works as metonymies to impress upon her audience the feminist mindset she sometimes claims as her own. In the beginning of Chopin's career, her works were praised and even published by some very prestigious magazines. She also wrote children's stories for which she was praised. Unfortunately, even with her creative literary way to get her point across, some of her most thought-provoking work was all but shunned and not at all accepted by her peers during her time. It was only after her death that many appreciated the intense detail and symbolism in some of her later stories. This work was looked at with distaste, something that greatly upset Chopin. She knew that she was living in a world that was not open-minded enough to fully understand her point of view. The world that Chopin was growing old in was very afraid of her questioning anything they held as an absolute truth. While vastly ahead of her time, Chopin's works would later be appreciated for their literary genius. Though she would never call herself a feminist, Chopin embodies the feminist mindset in all her writings, especially "The Storm". This story empowers women to pursue their sexual desires and "think like men" when it comes to physical temptations. It gives women the right to feel empowered and happy in living through her fleshly desires and seeking equal rights everywhere. Not only does this story seek to empower women but also to question traditional gender roles and give women a look at what a powerful woman looks like. Chopin challenges women to feel like they are worthy to experience pleasure and to have equal opportunities to

express themselves. Her closing line, " So the storm passed and every one was happy", gives the lasting impression that if women feel free to express themselves and live out their desires, it will make their lives, and everyone's life around them, better.