

The story of an hour and a sorrowful woman

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



“ A Sorrowful Woman” & “ The Story of an Hour” The sadness and unhappiness displayed by both of the married women in “ A Sorrowful Woman” and “ The Story of an Hour” shows that marriage does not always bring the typical ending of most fairy tales. Thus being living happily ever after. It is evident that both of these women feel trapped in their marriages as many people feel today. Growing up with eight sisters I have also seen this feeling of entrapment in the world as well. In both of these stories the women display such a lack of love towards their spouses and in fact in “ The Story of an Hour” it seems as though Mrs.

Mallard never really loved her spouse and is the happiest for the hour that she thinks her husband is dead. The woman in “ A Sorrowful Woman” is never satisfied with her marriage and life and feels trapped as well. The bizarre thing is that both of these women end up dead and do not find a way to get help or to get out of the marriages. The authors of these two stories Kate Chopin and Gail Goodwin both tie the unhappiness of these women to the way in which society impacts ones marriage.

First of all, through the settings of their stories, both of the authors suggested that social expectations be the real causes of their protagonists' deaths. In “ A Sorrowful Woman,” the nameless protagonist has what seems to be such a desirable life. She has a “ durable, receptive, gentle” husband and a “ tender golden three” son (189) “ He was attuned to her; he understood such things” (189). This statement leads one to believe that her husband always understood her. It also seems that he is willing to sacrifice his time for her and theirfamily.

Mrs. Mallard in "The Story of an Hour" is in a similar environment. Knowing that she has heart trouble, "great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death" (18). By setting up such nice environments where the two protagonists live, the authors keep readers away from the thought that their protagonists' deaths are the result of bad treatment. It is the force of social expectations placed upon the women that locked them in the jail of marriage and that eventually lead them to death.

It becomes evident while reading both of these stories that both of the female protagonists in the two stories live very unsatisfactory lives. Mrs. Mallard in "The Story of an Hour" seems to feel trapped in her own marriage. "She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even certain strength" (19) tells us that her marriage has taken everything away from the young woman emotionally. "It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long" (19), shows that she never felt freedom in her life and felt very unhappy in this marriage because life seemed to be so long because of it.

Therefore, "She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same" (18) when she was told about her husband's death. She just accepted it and went to her room because she realized that her husband's death gave her freedom and now "spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days [that] would be her own." (19) In the other story "A Sorrowful Woman", the once again nameless protagonist, is imprisoned in her own mind. This is different from "The story of an hour." In "A Sorrowful Woman" the sight of her family makes her so disgusted and uneasy.

She feels that to love and take care of her family is a burden. “ She stood naked except for her bra, which hung by one strap down the side of her body; she had not the impetus to shrug it off” (189) indicates how tired and unmotivated she feels about her life. Both of these women in these two stories struggle to live happily and are constantly living in agony. Many readers, including myself, might wonder why they don't free themselves by offering divorce to the husbands.

Chopin and Godwin use a lot of irony to allow readers to know that it isn't simple for their protagonists to break the social expectations that keep them in the boundary of marriage. Divorce is never an option for them. Divorce might have never been defined in their society, and it was most definitely not as common then as it is now. These poor women have no way to escape from their intense unhappiness. Not only did these women not have a way to get out of their crisis, but they were also prohibited from being themselves and from doing what they want.

In “ A Sorrowful Woman,” the main character is exhausted from being “ a wife and mother one too many times” (189). When her son says, “ She's tired of doing all our things again” (193), this tells us what her life was like. She was constantly feeling the stress of trying to be a housewife against her will, although she did have the ability to write and wasn't given much of a chance to write. Only once in her life does she have a chance to write “ mad and fanciful stories nobody could ever make up again, and a table full of love sonnets...”(192-193); that is before her death.

This woman is in a tough predicament. While the person herself tells her to do whatever she wants to, the person that is affected by social expectations inside her tells her to do other things. She completely loses control of herself. Even though she was unable to do things she wants, she still had to pretend as if she was the luckiest woman (189). In "The Story of an Hour," on the other hand, Mrs. Mallard's overwhelming joy when she received the news of her husband's death indicated for how long and how much she wanted to be "Free, free, free!" (19). Only alone in her room could Mrs. Mallard express her happiness. In front of people, she has to repress her feelings and pretend to be sad. The conflict inside and outside the woman tells us so much about what the society expected her to do. It also seems that Chopin was trying to show the conflict between Mrs. Mallard's marriage and society by intensely describing her world inside and outside of her room. Chopin and Godwin have successfully directed readers to the only reasonable resolution of their stories, the deaths of their main characters.

Death is the only way our two protagonists are able to escape from their agony and from the pressure of social expectations placed upon them. These two women's societies don't allow them to die comfortably even when they have chosen death as their fate. In "A Sorrowful Woman," even though our nameless protagonist despises being a mother and wife she still does what society would expect of her, as a housewife, right before her death. She made "five loaves of warm bread, a roast stuffed turkey, a glazed ham, three pies of different fillings, ..." (192).

In "The Story of an Hour," Mrs. Mallard was said to have died of "joy that kills" (20) even though it seems as though she died because she was finally able to see freedom in her day's ahead and could not fathom to live under her husband's will again. Even until her death, her society still pushed her in the position of a pretender, of a person she never wants to be. Without a way out of these unhappy situations, both of the protagonists chose death for freedom. It is only through death that they are both able to escape from their unhappy lives.

These stories provoke so much thought. Should society be more understanding of people? Maybe if our society could be more accepting and understanding there would be less tragedy like there has been in Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Godwin's "A Sorrowful Woman." Works Cited
Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *Thinking and Writing About Literature*. Michael Mayer. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 18-20.
Goodwin, Gail. "A Sorrowful Woman." *Thinking and Writing About Literature*. Michael Mayer. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. 189-193.