

Kate chopin's story,
"the story of an hour"
as a social
commentary



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Kate Chopin's short story "The Story of an Hour" both makes use of irony and draws upon the experiences and feelings of a wife in the nineteenth century. After her husband has been pronounced dead in a tragic accident, the main character, Mrs. Mallard, is revealed in psychological detail to the reader. In telling the story, Chopin describes the myriad emotions that her protagonist dwells upon in solitude: some of these emotions are expected, whereas others are not. While the role of a nineteenth century housewife is relevant to understanding the introspection of Mrs. Mallard, it is the irony that ties these elements together to deliver a short but impacting story.

The story begins with a description of Mrs. Mallard and her physical malady. Deliberate emphasis is placed on her frail and delicate nature, as she is described as being "afflicted with a heart trouble." The troubling news that is delivered to her that day is that of the untimely death of her husband in a train accident. Her sister takes deliberate care to reveal the news in "broken sentences" and "veiled hints that revealed in half concealing." When Mrs. Mallard finally accepts and hears the news of her husband's death, "she wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment in her sister's arms."

Understandably distressed and emotionally distraught, Mrs. Mallard retreats at this moment to the solitude of her room and her thoughts.

It is during this introspective period of mourning that the reader can learn more about Mrs. Mallard and her feelings towards her husband. Her emotions are expressed in a brutally honest manner that one might expect from a woman who has just learned of the passing of their spouse. Her husband, Brentley Mallard, is described as a man with a "face that had never looked save with love upon her". From this revelation, it is clear that he was a

tender husband who was devoted to his wife. She feels grief because she knows that “ she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death”. While grieving, Mrs. Mallard's thoughts soon turn to the realization that his death liberates her mind and body from the role and duties of a wife in that time period. She feels that “ there would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself”. Repeatedly, she states that she is “ free, free, free”.

While death freed her husband from the human condition, Mrs. Mallard herself was given an opportunity to live for her own desires. The grief of his death was overshadowed by her newfound sense of purpose and freedom. As Mrs. Mallard is ready to begin living the rest of her life, her newfound sense of reality is shattered. At this moment, her husband arrives home. He was never on board the train where he was pronounced dead and did not know of the accident. The shock of seeing him alive causes upset among all who are present, and Mrs. Mallard dies soon after. The doctors who came to tend to her said that she “ died of heart disease - of the joy that kills”.

Indeed, it is ironic and starkly dramatic that Chopin's main character dies after learning that her husband has not perished in the terrible accident. However, Chopin also uses the story as a platform to express the thoughts and emotions that many, more typical women felt at the time, but were unable to express. Women in Chopin's time period were expected to be content with the roles of wife and mother. It was commonplace for many to live their lives devoted to the needs of husband and family: little regard was given to how they felt and what they wanted in life. Chopin uses the introspection exhibited by Mrs. Mallard to provide readers with a new <https://assignbuster.com/kate-chopins-story-the-story-of-an-hour-as-a-social-commentary/>

understanding of the way women felt about their place in society. This female character is given dimension and the literature she inhabits is given a breath of fresh air.