

Kate chopin: a woman ahead of her time essay sample



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Abandoned by friends due to her supposed 'immoral' works, Kate Chopin was a mind ahead of her time. Stuck in the strict 1800s, her expressions of loathing marriage and sexual freedom in the lives of women were less than ideal to their modern culture (Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" 2241-2243). Her writings often consisted of marriage being below dreams of music and art, and even love not being able to hold a marriage together (Davis 62). The reality of these ideas compromised Chopin's short stories and novels; the feeling of repression of women and the crushing restraint of marriage (Anderson et al. 80)

Born as Katherine O'Flaherty in St. Louis, Missouri, she was daughter to an Irish father and French mother who often encouraged her education in music and reading. Her grandmother also taught her the French language as a child. These different ideas exposed to her are what would set up her individual mindset later in life. Despite her themes of writing, she was married to a man named Oscar Chopin when she was nineteen. She later had six children and did not start writing until after her husband's death.

Her writings had made her disliked by society, who considered it immoral to most people (Anderson et al. 480). However, Chopin saw society in return as degrading to women, who were unable to work and live for themselves because of the "male-dominated" world they lived in (Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" 2242). With Chopin's last years, her writings became more "somber" and were not well received. Chopin became depressed and her failing health was hard for her to deal with. On August 20th, 1904, Chopin died of a stroke, possibly due to a hereditary form of circulatory trouble (Wolff 225).

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Chopin's theme is unique in the sense that they were written during a time of women's inferiority, especially since most of her main characters attitudes towards marriage is as much against society's morals as they themselves are. These characters would often choose things like music and art over getting married, and in one case, found it even more important than love. Chopin does not tend to speak out against divorce either, in her work, and makes the first known woman character who was an alcoholic (Davis 61-63).

Her writings were said to disrupt the " Sacred Institutions" of marriage and American womanhood by disregarding moral codes without repenting it (Beers et al. 430). Many said she should devote herself, and her characters, to her " holy office" of a mother and wife (Beers et al. 430). She was often condemned as " sordid and vulgar" (Beers et al. 430). Her reputation of avoidance to these statements coincided with the rise of feminist criticism. However, despite this negative aspect, Chopin often gave accurate portrayals of French Creole culture, and was a literary pioneer who inspired the modern American woman (Beers et al. 30).

In Chopin's short story " Desiree's Baby", Desiree is an adopted child, her origins unknown. She was taken in by a very rich family and grew up to marry another rich man, Armand. Together, they bear a child, but as the child grows, rumors grow with it. The child's skin is darker and appears to have African American blood in him. Armand immediately blames Desiree, for her blood-line is unknown. Then, in shame, he throws Desiree out, along with the baby, and burns all evidence of themselves being married and having a child together.

While he burns these records, he happens upon a letter from his ‘mother’ to his father. With the end of the letter, and the story, it reads: I thank the God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery (Chopin, “Desiree’s Baby” 573). This theme of repression of women is shown by the mere and unsettling fact that Armand could just throw Desiree out, baby and all.

He could simply erase her existence with him with one bonfire, because he is “the more powerful” (Chopin, “Desiree’s Baby” 574). Even when she was not at fault, no real help came to her, because it would be shameful for Desiree to return to even her mother’s home, despite the fact she was invited back. Desiree found herself disgraceful, thinking she was “cursed with the brand of slavery” herself, and along with her child (Chopin, “Desiree’s Baby” 573). With the story *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier is a married woman who never really conformed to the socially acceptable format for women during her time.

She taught herself down to swim while at a vacation house that most of the story takes place at, though she becomes scared swimming into the sea and goes back to shore. With these days, she meets a man, Robert, who is not her husband, and skips a church mass with him to spend an “idyllic day together” (Chopin, “*The Awakening*” 52). However, as flirty as Robert seems to be, he cannot find himself wrapped up in an affair with a married woman and leaves to Mexico. Edna returns to their home with her husband, but she continues to explore her freedom.

She breaks many social codes, and at one crucial moment, takes off her wedding band and throws it on the ground, stomping on it. From this moment on, she shows a great distaste to marriage and even makes a comment after refusing to attend her sister's wedding, in which she says: " A wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on Earth" (Chopin, " The Awakening" 52). Soon, Edna's husband notices these changes in behavior. He calls a doctor who simply dismisses her changes as only being moody, and that she will be normal again soon.

Not so worried about her anymore, Edna's husband leaves for a trip to New York. However, he never comes back, and she does not see him again. Edna would soon return to the vacation home by the ocean, she finds Robert again. Robert confesses his love for Edna, but before they can share their love, Edna is called away. When she returns, Robert is gone, leaving a note for her. It reads: " I love you. Good-by? because I love you" (Chopin, " The Awakening" 52). That night, Edna does not sleep, and the next morning she strips completely and swims into the sea where she drowns.

When Edna swims into the sea the first time, she becomes scared, a sign that she is not completely able to detach from society and her safe life. However, at the end she finally strips herself, her last restraint, and dives into the sea. As she does, she sees a bird sinking into the water. This signifies Edna's inability to " fly away" in the tides of the world, unable to become free (Chopin, " The Awakening" 53). However, Edna does not kill herself because Robert has left her, but has used death as an ironic sort of freedom.

Edna cannot be happy with the superficial mother-role that society wishes her to play, but she feels she does not have the talent to take freedom through art. Beyond her time, *The Awakening* never did gain its recognition until the 1960s. It “ implies the impossibility of a woman gaining freedom in the society of 1899” (Chopin, “ *The Awakening*” 52). In “ *Story of an Hour*”, Louise Mallard has a heart condition that constantly worries her sister. One day, Louise learns that her husband has died in an accident. She cries, and runs up to her room.

Her worried sister stands outside the door, and tries to persuade her out of the room. As she sits in her room, after calming herself down, her thoughts turn to how she is now free from listening to her husband. He was a kind man who did love her, but she still felt constricted by the thought of marriage. However, it turns out that her husband is not dead. When Louise finds this out, her weak heart gives out at the shock, and the realization of the loss of her freedom. She has a heart attack, and passes away.

As the story ends, the doctor explains that her heart gave out because of her joy at seeing her husband alive again. *Story of an Hour*” is one of Chopin’s strongest examples of repression of women and marriage. Though her husband loves her, she still feels repression by her marriage. With the return of her husband, not actually dead, her hope of freedom crumbles. It seemed to be “ the destruction of her dreams” (Chopin, “ *Story of an Hour*” 2241). However, in an ironic manner, just as it was in *The Awakening*, death is now her only course of action to freedom from the bonds of marriage.

However, in this instance, the death is accidental, and not a suicide as it was in *The Awakening*.

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Instead, she dies of a heart attack by the mere feeling of losing the freedom she had so easily come to enjoy in the few moments she realized what it felt like. Most writers use winter or autumn months and rainy days to symbolize death, however, Chopin lets Louise find out of her husband's supposed death in the springtime. This symbolizes the free and happy feeling the death brings to Louise. However, she walks down from her room, a cruel foreshadowing of losing her freedom, finding out her husband is still alive (Chopin, "Story of an Hour" 2242).

Though she was abandoned by friends, called immoral and "vulgar", Chopin remains a literary figure that coincided with an eventual revolution (Beers et al. 430). She was a voice of women, who did not feel like they were fit for life as a mother or a wife, but instead art and music, where their love was held in words and notes. Though, even stuck in the repressing 1800s, she wrote words that rebelled against society and paved a way for the future. Kate Chopin was truly a mind ahead of her time.