

A feminist approach to kate chopin's a story of an hour

Literature



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The short story, “ A Story of an Hour”, by Kate Chopin is one work of literature that has called much attention. However, not all of the attention that the story had received is on the positive note. Chopin’s story has received much criticisms and controversies. One reason why Chopin’s “ A Story of an Hour” had become a much talked about piece is because it had discussed about gender issues.

Chopin’s “ A Story of an Hour” is undoubtedly a feminist text due to the following reasons: the story highlights gender differences, the story portrays women as a marginalized group, the story implies resistance to the patriarchal rule, and the story reiterates gender inequality in political and social aspects. Chopin had just reiterated to us things that are observable about gender differences. Chopin had presented us the basic structure of the society according to the aspect of gender differences. The conflict in the story was generated from the fact that the husband has to be away from home to work.

In contrast to that, Mrs. Mallard has to be stuck at home performing stereotyped roles, one of which is to stay at home and worry to death for a working husband. Chopin’s reiteration of women stereotyped to be stuck in the domestic world strongly asks: why are men permitted to work and women are not? These type of gender roles resonates as antifeminist because it implies inequality among gender—as if particular gender is more capable than the other. It seems that Chopin’s strategy as a feminist is to generate questions in the minds of her readers.

Interestingly, “ A Story of an Hour” ends with the doctors stating that Mrs. Mallard had died because of the “...joy that kills. ” A feminist approach to Chopin’s ending would reveal that there is more to it than a seemingly innocent statement. Feminists would be offended by the doctors’ diagnosis on Mrs. Mallard’s cause of death. It is suggested in the narrative that the Mallard couple may had some past conflicts regarding their marriage. This is hinted by the line “...and yet she had loved him—sometimes, more often than not” (Chopin).

It is very likely that the author wanted to present to the readers an oppressive marriage. Mrs. Mallard had expressed a sense of freedom through the line “ Free! Body and Soul free! ” Their marriage may have been free from marital violence. Mrs. Mallard was simply saying that she, as a woman, is now free from the oppressive stereotypical roles of being a wife. And so, the phrase “ of joy that kills” is actually referring to Mrs. Mallard’s hampered freedom from gender inequality. Moreover, “ A Story of an Hour” is a masterpiece of a great woman writer, Kate Chopin.

It is just understandable that her work would raise some people’s eyebrows. This particular story was published during a time were women were starting to realize that they were being treated unequally in the male-dominated society. Even until this day, the liberation of women from stereotypical roles would still raise some disputes. Chopin had used an interesting symbolism for woman’s freedom from stereotypical roles. During the middle of the story, Mrs. Mallard had run upstairs and had locked herself inside a room.

It would be immediately interpreted that she wanted some kind of much needed solitude to mull over what had transpired. However, it could also be interpreted that the locked room was a symbolism for marriage. It would be helpful to note that many details about the Mallards' marriage would be revealed to the readers during this part of the narrative. In effect, the symbolism of the locked room paves way for a parallel symbolism. When Mrs. Mallard had unlocked herself from the room, it is a symbolism that she is ready to face a new world, to move on.

It also means that she is now free from the walls set by the stereotypes against women. Chopin had even described Mrs. Mallard as a "goddess of Victory" when she felt she was already free from the chains of gender inequality. In the culminating parts of the story, Mrs. Mallard died of shock because she was already convinced that she was free, then she saw her husband still alive, which just means she has to go back under being oppressed as a woman. Chopin's "A Story of an Hour" is certainly a feminist text.

The protagonist of the story is a woman, which means the readers, regardless of gender, has to empathize with the heroine. Chopin had shown the readers the typical situation of wives. As dictated by the society, men and women should have different roles. The problem is that men seem to always have the upper hand. Women would just be typically stuck in stereotyped roles such as Mrs. Mallard's. Moreover, "A Story of an Hour" is written according to the vantage point of a woman. In many respects, this

particular story had become a representative for feminism's advocacies such as gender equality.