

# Symbolisms in kate chopin's the storm

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Symbolisms in Kate Chopin's "The Storm" Kate Chopin's "The Storm" is a short story written in 1898 but was not published until 1969. The story explores an excess of turbulent emotions of the protagonists in the backdrop of unexpected storm. Chopin effectively confronts the brewing conflict of the story by her unflinching depiction of the story through symbolisms. The symbolisms most evident in "The Storm" includes: the storm itself, Assumption, a small town in which the protagonists first met and whiteness as mentioned many times in the story.

Chopin opens the first part of the story by using the illustration of the threatening storm with Calixta's husband, Bobinot: "Bobinot, who was accustomed to converse on terms of perfect equality with his little son, called the child's attention to certain somber clouds that were rolling with sinister intention from the west, accompanied by a sullen, threatening roar" (123). The storm is one of the obvious themes of the story. It is involved in practically every element of the plot.

The text above describes the impending change of weather that is about to come, foreshadowing the series of events that is about to unravel. Bobinot then, decides to wait at the general store with their son, Bibi until the storm evens out. This waiting out or avoidance from the storm suggests that he also avoids the storm of passion that his wife had expected of him. Bobinot's less passionate nature becomes more evident on how he is described later in the story: "Then he returned to his perch on the keg and sat stolidly holding the can of shrimps while the storm burst" (123).

The text gives an insight on Bobinot's general behavior or nature as an individual describing him as stolid, meaning having or revealing little

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emotion or sensibility or it could also mean not easily aroused or excited. After this, the readers are introduced to Calixta at their home who is at first "unaware of the storm coming" because she is occupied with sewing and doing other mundane chores (124). The story introduces the female protagonist as a dedicated homemaker sewing furiously and gathering her husband's Sunday clothes put out to dry before huge drops of rain wet them. This behavior portrayed by Calixta in beginning story implies that "her sexuality is repressed by the constraints of her marriage and society's view of women, represented in this passage by the housework" (121). Chopin efficiently compares the storm brewing in nature with the storm within Calixta as she encounters Alcee in her home alone: "As she stepped outside, Alcee Laballiere rode in at the gate.

She had not seen him very often since her marriage, and never alone" (124). The text displays Calixta's surprise reaction upon seeing a past lover right through her door. Out of courtesy, she then let Alcee in her house more so, since the rain is starting to get stronger: "He expressed an intention to remain outside, but it was soon apparent that he might as well have been out in the open: the water beat in upon the boards in driving sheets, and he went inside, closing the door after him" (125).

The text describes the growing intensity of the storm. It also foreshadows the growing storm of passion that is building up between Calixta and Alcee. Chopin's description of the intensity of the storm that is starting to build as the story progresses is parallel to the tension raging between Calixta and Alcee: "The playing of the lightning was incessant. A bolt of lightning struck a tall chinaberry tree at the edge of the field" (124). The text describes the

violent temperament of nature. This draws Calixta and Felix physically closer together.

Calista, being scared of the raging storm is comforted by Alcee: " Alcee clasped her shoulders and looked into her face. The contact of her warm, palpitating body when he had unthinkingly drawn her into his arms, had aroused all the old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh" (125). The text explores the passion waging in Calixta's heart suffused with the raging of the storm outside. This also reminds her of the past flirtation they shared a couple of years ago in a place called Assumption. Storms as we know it is useful.

Storms is also known for its destructive effects. And lastly storms usually occurs briefly. The storm of passion that takes over Calixta and Alcee is depicted in the story as something beautiful and significant: " When he touched her breasts they gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy, inviting his lips. Her mouth was a fountain of delight. And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life's mystery" (125). The text explores the beauty of abandon within the rage of their passion Calixta and Alcee discovered.

The symbolism " The Storm" in the story is intended to reflect Calixta's sub-conscious sexual longing as a result of her inadequate conjugal relationship with her husband. Just as the climatic storm takes in the characters in the story by surprise, the emotional storm of sexual fulfillment takes her by surprise. She realizes this arousal only after it passed and after the fact (121). Going back to the fact that they were both married to another people,

the readers are prompted to question the morality aspects of what happened between Calixta and Alcee.

However, such question is dismissed quickly by the story's plot. As quickly as the storm passes by the town where the characters are, so is the passion that took over Calixta and Alcee: "The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems. Calixta, on the gallery, watched Alcee ride away" (125). Although Calixta gives in to Alcee's advance, there is no suggestion by the author that the act was one of love making. The whole affair was not so much one of Calixta's love for Alcee, but one of her love for herself.

Hence, from a technical point of view this is not a story of romance, but one of human nature. Though acclaimed now, this work was published after Chopin's death as she knew it was in direct opposition to societal norms of her times (433). After the spontaneous sexual encounter between Alcee and Calixta, the storm subsides. The sexual act was not to be forgotten and buried out of consciousness. Both of them have to put it in the context of their lives. While the reader would expect feelings of remorse and guilt from the two, they instead feel rejuvenated and relieved.

Chopin captures the state of their minds using the following words: "So the storm passed and everyone was happy" (126). The tone of ending of the story suggests that everything works out for everyone's benefit. Calixta and Alcee's secret is officially safe, dissipating as the storm itself has. Another symbolism that is evident in the story is Assumption or the small town where Calixta and Alcee met up and shared kisses five years ago: "Do you remember-- in Assumption, Calixta?"

Oh, she remembered; for in Assumption he had kissed and kissed her; until his senses would well nigh fail, and to save her he would resort to a desperate flight" (124). The text describes the passion they once shared in Assumption although it does not lead to sex because Alcee would leave Calixta in heights of their passion so as to save her purity. The name Assumption has religious connotations that reminds us of virginity and chastity. In Christianity, it refers to a specific event: the Virgin Mary's ascent to heaven after she dies.

Instead of having sex in a place associated with chastity, the place where Calixta and Alcee consummate their feelings for one another is Calixta's home. However, it is the memory of their time in Assumption: a place that reminds them of chastity, where they could not be together that sparks a more mature interlude between them. Another symbolism that Chopin examines in the story is the repeated mention of "whiteness". While usually white symbolizes purity or chastity, the story twists it around to represent sexual desire and longing: "She was a revelation in that dim, mysterious chamber; as white as the couch she lay upon.

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. The generous abandon of her passion, without guile or trickery, was like white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never been reached" (124). While this whiteness in literature would traditionally refer to a body the male character could not access, this text transforms the meaning of purity into desire and sexuality.

The " flame" of Calixta's " passion" is " white"; her body in all its ecstasy is " like a creamy lily. " In this story, the color white might almost be better understood as red-hot. It means giving in, not holding back.

## **Works Cited**

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