

Theme of gaining
freedom as a woman
in the
chrysanthemums and
the story of an hou...

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The Concept of Freedom is an Ongoing Endeavor in Today's Society

In America, freedom is boundless however, in the 19th-century freedom was nonexistent for most women. There are many similarities between the characters in John Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums" and Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." The main character and protagonist in "The Chrysanthemums" is Elisa, while that of "The Story of an Hour" is Mrs. Mallard. In both stories, the authors describe women who are longing for a sense of freedom. The similarities between the main characters in "The Chrysanthemums" and "The Story of an Hour," are the characters and their yearning for equality. Elisa and Mrs. Mallard are both dynamic characters. A dynamic character is a character that undergoes a series of changes throughout the narrative, primarily due to the conflicts a character faces on their journey.

Throughout both stories, the characters go through a series of sudden changes. Mrs. Mallard finds that her husband has passed away, and at the end of the narrative she discovers he was alive after all. She happens to die from heart troubles of the sudden news. During the time she finds out about her husband's passing, she feels a sense of liberation. At first, when she was given the news she wept in unexpected moments. "She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her." Afterward, Mrs. Mallard had an overwhelming feeling take over her. She now realizes she is independent again. The reader easily experiences the happiness she feels, with the

repetition of the word, free. " She said it over and over her breath: ' free, free, free!" At the very end of the narrative, she is shocked by the sight of her husband being alive. Mrs. Mallard's shock at the sight of her husband ends in her death of a heart attack. Mrs. Mallard goes through a series of unexpected changes, which shapes her character as dynamic. Mrs. Mallard's character is therefore developed throughout the narrative in a short amount of time and her character reveals many values that made her the way she was. She is a woman with a desire for freedom that was deprived by a man in marriage. She is very emotional because her freedom was denied for the second time. Her freedom was taken by her husband who was mistaken to have died, yet when she sees him she collapses and dies. The contrast is when the writer says that, " She had died of heart disease...of the joy that kills" . In " The Chrysanthemums" Elisa is battling with a similar sense of freedom that Mrs. Mallard faced. Elisa is craving for liberation in her life. She lives on a farm with her husband and spends her days tending the flowers, specifically chrysanthemums. Elisa is displayed as a strong woman, strong enough to break the back of a calf. A tinker comes along, while Elisa ' s husband is at work. He asks Elisa if she needs any repairs. She agrees to give the tinker some work, and he sharpens her gardening scissors. Elisa also gives the tinker some of her chrysanthemums. Elisa was concentrating on the man, presumably in a sexual way.

" Kneeling there, her hand went out toward his legs in the greasy black trousers. Her hesitant fingers almost touched the cloth. Then her hand dropped to the ground." The feelings she grasps are passionate, sexual

feelings. As she has to stop herself from touching the man's pants. At the end of the narrative, we find that Elisa isn't as strong as we thought. She sees that the tinker threw the chrysanthemum sprouts on the side of the road and she starts to cry. Elisa goes through another change and snaps back to the reality of her present life. "The Story of an Hour" and "The Chrysanthemums" were both written in the early 19th century. During this time period, women struggled for equality, and for most women liberation was a continuous fight. In 'The Chrysanthemums, the struggle for equality is portrayed through Steinbeck's character Elisa. According to Stanley Renner, 'The Chrysanthemums' shows 'a strong, capable woman kept from personal, social, and sexual fulfillment by the prevailing conception of a woman's role in a world dominated by men'. The frustration is evident when her husband lacks to show appreciation of the beautiful garden she is tending. "Some of those yellow chrysanthemums you had this year were ten inches across. I wish you'd work out in the orchard and raise some apples that big." Instead of showing appreciation toward her garden, her husband wants Elisa to work in the orchard, something that will benefit his farm. Elisa's husband saw her as a housewife and a gardener. He shows little appreciation towards the chrysanthemums. If the chrysanthemums were to die, so would Elisa. The closer one looks at the story, the reader can see how Elisa is being imprisoned by men. John Steinbeck provides the reader with the message of Elisa being imprisoned, by mentioning Elisa's fence in the story. "Elisa started at the sound of her husband's voice. He had come near quietly, and had leaned over the wire fence that protected her flower garden from cattle and dogs and chickens." That "wire fence" kept her trapped from the

freedom she is yearning for in her life. The wire fence is a symbol for herself. The fence isolates her from the real world, and as long as she stays inside the fence she will be safe.

According to Mark Cunningham, 'The Story of an Hour' portrays the position of women in the nineteenth-century American society, as the attempt to break from the life-denying limitations of a patriarchal society." Mrs. Mallard is similar to the character Elisa, in the narrative "The Chrysanthemums," because they both desired freedom. When Mrs. Mallard is told the news of her husband's death, she is at first emotional. "She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself, she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her." Mrs. Mallard thought that life would be long. She now "saw a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened an spread her arms out to them in welcome." Instead of hearing the news of her husband's death (as many women would have heard the same), with a feeling of denial, an overwhelming sense of freedom took over her. Mrs. Mallard has an epiphany, a sudden realization that she is free. Chopin captures a marriage that is dominated by man. Mr. Mallard clearly doesn't treat his wife with great matters. This is showed because Mrs. Mallard is at peace, even if her husband is dead. Women during this time had little to no independence in their households. Women were expected to accommodate their husbands with many household chores. The story implies the way that society was during the 19th century and the resistance of women's rights.

The story shows the resistance by Mrs. Mallard's death of the sight of her husband. Another instance is when Mrs. Mallard's sister is worried she is making herself sick, during her time of grieving. However, Mrs. Mallard is revealing her freedom. Both her husband and sister intervene in her life, essentially demonstrating that her freedom is impossible to hold. Through Mrs. Mallard's thoughts, the reader can see a clear view of the aspects of the patriarchal society. Mrs. Mallard didn't realize how confined she was until she was no longer constricted in her marriage.