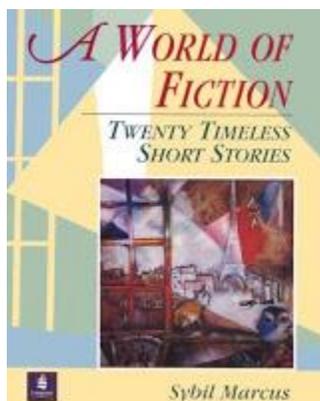


Kate Chopin's The Story of An Hour - A Literary Analysis

Plot



Sybil Marcus' A World of Fiction - Twenty Timeless Short Stories (1995 book edition)

The story starts when Ms. Mallard gets the news of her husband's death by word of her sister Josephine. At first, she feels completely devastated by the news, but then these feelings shift from complete hopelessness to extreme hopefulness within Louise Mallard, only to finish with a heart attack due to a "joy that kills" (Chopin, 1894), a few seconds after her husband arrives home with his suitcase, without knowing there had been a fatal accident in the first place.

Characters

- Louise Mallard: She is the protagonist in the story, and the only dynamic character that appears in the whole plot. After she hears the news of her husband's death, she falls on a state of pure sadness, but then, after a moment of reflection, she realizes that a new, free and independent life has just started for her, and that's when the shift among her emotions begin in the story, therefore becoming a round character.
- Brently Mallard: He is one of the three flat characters that appear on the story. He is Louise's husband and he is presumed to have passed away in the story, as he was involved in a "railroad disaster" and with his name "leading the list of killed" (Chopin, 1894, p. 12).

By simply inferring from the text, the reader may be able to imply that his marriage to Louise was one full with Victorian values: a marriage in which the woman's moral structure had to be "cultivated"¹ to fit in a society full of prejudices and misogyny.

- Josephine Mallard: She's the second flat character that appears in the story, and plays the role of Louise's sister. She is the first person who tells her of her husband's presumed death. At first she tries to calm Louise down after the former tries to cope with the devastating (later graceful) news, but then starts to become

more worried of her sister's sanity, when she gets inside her room and starts screaming "free, free, free!" (p. 13).

In that moment, Josephine becomes hysteric and starts screaming at Louise: "Open the door Louise! (...) You're going to make yourself ill!", a cry for help to which Louise replies with "Go away. I am not making myself ill.", finishing the conversation in that moment.

- **Richards:** He is described as the Brently Mallard's friend in the story and is also the last flat character that appears in the plot. The only actions he performs in the whole plot are: to tell Josephine of Brently Mallard's death, and to be the first person who sees Brently Mallard enter the house after her wife's outbreak.

Setting

The story may take place in a small mansion in England, probably at the time in which Chopin published the manuscript – around the year 1894.

Type of Narrator

The narrator in this story is considered to be "omniscient", since throughout the plot, the reader is able to see the characters' feelings and emotions (without them being conscious of it), which makes it a clear indicator of the presence of this type of narrator.

Figurative Language

There are four recurrent elements used by Chopin in "The Story Of an Hour":

- **Epiphany:** This one is defined by Sybil Marcus as "an unexpected moment of profound enlightenment" (Marcus, 1995, p. 15). This can be seen in the story when Ms. Mallard realizes that, with the passing of her husband she is now able to start a new phase in her life (one of her own), and that is visibly portrayed to the reader when she utters the words "Free! Free! Free!".
- **Personification:** This literary figure is defined by the Roane State Community College (n.d.) as "[the act of] giving non-human objects human characteristics".
- In this way, the reader can see it in the sentence: "The delicious breath of rain was in the air" (Chopin, 1894, p. 12). In this case, the author gives a meteorological event (something that is generally believed as inanimate) the capacity to breathe, therefore humanizing the event.
- **Metaphor:** This figure is defined as "contrasting two seemingly unlike things to enhance the meaning of a situation or theme without using 'like' or 'as'" (Roane State Community College, s.f.). In the story, this can be perceived when the author writes: "It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences, the news of her husband's death." (p. 12). "In broken sentences" tries to exemplify how Josephine attempted to give the news to her sister.

- **Simile:** In this case, it is important to look for comparisons between events happen in the real world and ideas. One example can be seen in this extract: “There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory.” (p. 14)

Imagery

One example of this literary device can be seen when she begins to realize the implications of her husband’s death on her life: “Now her bosom rose and felt tumultuously.” (Chopin, 1894, p. 13). It can also be found in this section when Mrs. Mallard begins to utter a few words after her initial shock: “When she abandoned herself, a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips.” (p. 13), which appeals to our sense of hearing because it tells the reader the way in which she is uttering this word.

Symbolism

There is a strong sense of symbolism found in the way men treated their wives during the Victorian Era. One example of how women felt towards men’s chauvinistic attitude can be seen in this extract: “There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself.” (p. 13). For more on the definition of symbolism, see (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2016).

Connotation

This aspect of the short story is analyzed in the sense of the protagonist attitude towards her husband’s death. Throughout the story, there are certain ‘hints’ that indicate the actual joy that Josephine felt once the news finally sunk in (e.g. when she whispers: “Free! Free! Free!” repeatedly). One example of connotation in this short story is found in this extract: “she knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and death.” Here, we could infer that she will be pleased to see her husband lifeless body in a coffin.

Tone

The general tone in this story is ironic, since the author actually mocks the reality that Victorian women lived throughout the middle and the late 19th century, which was to live a life for their husbands and children; instead of an independent, free lifestyle that the society of today lives, by portraying the “pseudo-freedom” that Ms. Mallard almost experienced, but in the end could not embrace because of the heart attack she suffered, a product of the pure joy and hope that had fluttered in her being.

In a more detailed matter, the tone is also hopeful (that is perceived in the way Ms. Mallard realizes of her husband’s passing), but is represented in a way that the reader does not deviate from the main “mood” the author wants to portray.

About the Author



Kate Chopin (c. 1894)

Kate Chopin was born in St. Louis Missouri in 1851, to a French-Creole parentage on her mother's side and Irish parentage on her father's side. From an early age, she learnt about St. Louis French domination through her great-grandmother's tales and so, she was influenced by the tales of the settling of the first French inhabitants in St. Louis, therefore giving way to various pieces of work inspired by the Acadian colonial epoch in the area.

Although many of Chopin's short stories (she wrote over 100 of them throughout her entire life) dealt with positive aspects of feminism, some of her most notable works, such as "The Awakening" and "At Fault" dealt with serious, taboo topics for its time like adultery and divorce. Thus, the backlash she received after the publication of "The Awakening" was such that it got difficult for her to write during the last five years of her life. The Story of An Hour is considered one of her most significant pieces of work.

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