
Feminism In The Story Of An Hour By Kate Chopin

“The story of an hour” by Kate Chopin narrates the events taking place in the last moments of Louise Mallard, a housewife who is happy after being falsely informed about the death of her husband. Today, gender equality is one of the most debated issues. For a long time, society has been controlled by men. The desire for women to be free has led to the feminist movement which seeks to end the equality between men and women. Feminism is interested in achieving equality so that a woman can be herself and be free without her conduct and place in society being dictated by conservative social norms. It tries to show women that they can do everything that men can do. Resentment towards men is evident in Kate Chopin’s through the way Mrs. Mallard rejoices after learning that her husband has died. She is happy that she is free from the shackles of marriage. She whispers that both her soul and body are free. Although Mrs. Mallard has a heart problem, she feels that she would be able to do something constructive with her life if she was not chained to marriage. In Kate Chopin’s time, the oppression of women was prevalent, and the social institution of marriage contributed to the oppression. Marriage in “The Story of an Hour” is shown as suppressive of the identity of women, as seen through the marriage of Mrs. Mallard. Marriage’s oppressive nature in this society kills women’s attempts to achieve freedom.

The Mallards are a family of the working class at the time the story is written. Brently Mallard, the husband, works to provide for the family while Mrs. Mallard takes care of the family as she is not working. Looking at the story deeply, it is clear Mrs. Mallard suffers from the oppression that her husband and society have placed on her. Mrs. Mallard is the story’s main character. Like in all male-dominated societies, Mrs. Mallard is only known by the name of her husband. The implication of this is that without her husband, she does not have an identity. Chopin shows that Kate is oppressed from the very beginning. Her husband has a first name from the start of the story, while Mrs. Mallard’s first name is only given late in the story. Marriage is seen as an oppressive force for Mrs. Mallard. Wang writes that the statement of the mental activity of Louise shows she has undergone some degree of suppression and “that is what she deep in her deep mind in the story” (Wang 115). This makes it clear that marriage curtails the freedom of women and makes them feel oppressed.

Women are portrayed as emotional from the story’s first line. The author writes: “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death” (Chopin 199). This line shows that Mrs. Mallard does not have the emotional strength to come to terms with the news of the death of her husband, implying that she may herself die upon finding out. Besides, as she tries to tame her joy after Brently’s death, the author writes that she was powerless (Chopin 200). These instances show the way Mrs. Mallard, the main character, was thought of as being small and weak, both physically and in her marriage. This is the way women have been thought of for a long time. Mrs. Mallard’s heart disease could be a symbol of the oppressive ideas and emotions of her marriage and may be related to the nature of the marriage she seeks to break away from (Tahameed 31). Such a revelation tells the reader how effective an oppressive marriage can be to the women, as the condition of Louise’s marriage is seen as comparable to heart disease, a fatal condition.

During the nineteenth century, the time when Chopin wrote "The story of an hour", men had all the authority in marriages and the women had to submit to the dominance of the men. "The nineteenth century was still a patriarchal century, and women without a strong rebelling voice traditionally conformed to that patriarchal world" (Wang 115). The life of Mrs. Mallard in "The story of an hour" reflects this state of affairs as she lives according to the dictates of her husband. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Mallard is happy that in the coming years, she is going to live a life of her own because there will be no one to dictate her life (Chopin 200). When Brently was still alive, he probably made all the important decisions in the life of Mrs. Mallard, which denied her the opportunity to think about what she wants to do and lead an independent life. Now that he has died, she is free and eager to live the freedom that has resulted from her husband's death. Although she knows she will be upset and weep during her husband's funeral, she knows that after that one moment of bitterness, she will have "a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely (Chopin 200). Mrs. Mallard's happiness does not mean that she had no love for her husband, she was just fascinated by the fact that she is going to be making all the decisions regarding her life by herself.

At the story's end, when Brently Mallard comes back home without the knowledge of the occurrence of an accident, Mrs. Mallard dies upon seeing him. The doctors say that she had died of heart disease and joy. However, it is unlikely that this is the truth in reality. She has lived a life of submissiveness for a long time and thought that she was finally free. She is likely to have died from the frustration of knowing that life was going back to the state of submissiveness instead of the freedom she had anticipated. The freedom that Mrs. Mallard does not even know she seeks comes in the death of Brently, her husband. However, it vanishes when she sees him coming. Her husband not only controls what she does but also causes her death. Chopin uses various literary devices to show the oppression of women in marriage through Louise. She shows the connection between the patriarchal nature of society and marriage. She asserts oppression in marriage when she suggests that any attempts by women to achieve freedom were suppressed. "The Story of an Hour" shows the reality of the time it was written.