

LOUISE MALLARD, THE PROTAGONIST OF KATE CHOPIN'S SHORT STORY TITLED *THE STORY OF AN HOUR*, REPRESENTS THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY.

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Abstract: This research paper is based on *The Story of an Hour*, a short story written by Kate Chopin. The present researcher intends to know the mental condition of the protagonist Louise Mallard who otherwise is a heart patient. Her sister and a family friend are cautious enough to break the news of her husband's sudden death. Their concern is that she may not die of the shocking news. When her sister Josephine breaks the news, she weeps in the arms of her sister and goes to her room to be alone. Her loneliness takes her into reverie instead of insanity or heartbreak. The view of the world from her room's open window takes her to ecstasy. She feels free from the shackles of the conventional marriage bond in which love does not have any space.

This researcher paper aims to discuss the position of women in the past as compared to that in contemporary society. Mrs. Mallard represents the women of the Victorian time who were considered as the bread-maker in a family. Her job was to take care of her family and to follow the rules set by family and society. Women are still expected to be docile and submissive to represent femininity. In this story, the writer Kate Chopin has exposed the hidden desire for freedom of a woman who suffers from being subservient in the patriarchal society through her protagonist.

The researcher's endeavor is to reach to an apt conclusion whether the character of Mrs. Mallard represents most of the women of contemporary society or is just restricted to the strange, abnormal thinking of Mrs. Mallard.

In order to reach a conclusion, the researcher did a thorough study of the background of the writer Kate Chopin to understand her psychology to write this story. The researcher tried to understand the women's liberation movement also in order to find out the type of freedom that women want in the present society.

Keywords: Freedom, Women Liberation, women empowerment, patriarchal society, grief, and happiness.

I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper is based on Kate Chopin's short story titled The Story of an Hour. Kate Chopin, née Katherine O'Flaherty, (born Feb. 8, 1851, St. Louis, Mo., U.S.—died Aug. 22, 1904, St. Louis), American novelist and short-story writer is known as an interpreter of New Orleans culture. There was a revival of interest in Chopin in the late 20th century because her concerns about the freedom of women foreshadowed later feminist literary themes. (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2020)

Although Kate Chopin is not the most famous writer of her time, yet she is the typical one. She is considered a feminist author, but she is not a slave of the conventional style of writing. She wrote two published novels and about a hundred short stories. Her short story, *The Story of an Hour*, represents the suppressed emotions of a superficially contented married woman Mrs. Mallard, who has never complained about her life or rights. She has dealt with the personality of Mrs. Mallard with unparalleled vividness. The psychological essentials of the character are grasped through a single open window in the story. The title *The Story of an Hour* itself arises the interest from the beginning and holds it till the end. The character of Louise Mallard appears to be a union of the imagination and experience of the author herself.

II. Methodology:

The character of the protagonist Mrs. Mallard has been analysed from the viewpoint of Feminism/ Feminist theory of literary criticism.

Feminist literary criticism recognizes that literature both reflects and shapes stereotypes and other cultural assumptions. Thus, feminist literary criticism examines how works of literature embody patriarchal attitudes or undercut them, sometimes both happening within the same work. (Napikoski 2020)

In order to reach a conclusion, the researcher did a thorough study of the background of the writer Kate Chopin to understand her psychology to write this story. Also, a detailed study of the women liberation movement was done in order to find out the type of freedom that women want in the present society.

III. Aim:

This research paper aims to study the position of women in the Victorian era as compared to that in contemporary society. Mrs. Mallard represents the women of the nineteenth century who were considered as the bread-maker in a family. Their job was to take care of the family and do household chores. Women are still expected to be passive and submissive to represent femininity. In this story, the writer Kate Chopin has exposed the hidden desire for freedom of a woman who suffers from being subservient in a male-dominating society through her protagonist.

It is the endeavor of the researcher to reach to an apt conclusion whether the character of Mrs. Mallard represents most of the women of contemporary society or is just restricted to the strange, abnormal thinking of Mrs. Mallard.

IV. Discussion:

The protagonist of this story, Mrs. Louise Mallard, shows a sudden swing in her behavior after receiving the news of her husband's sudden demise in a railroad accident. It arises the curiosity in the reader if this weird behavior is a result of the shock after receiving the news of her husband's death, which makes her unstable or there is something more than it meets the eyes. The present researcher intends to understand the mental condition of the protagonist Louise Mallard who otherwise has a heart problem. Her sister and her husband's friend are cautious enough to break the news of Brently Mallard's death in a railroad accident. Their concern is that she may not die of the shocking news. When her sister Josephine breaks the news, she weeps in the arms of her sister and goes to her room to be alone. Her loneliness takes her into reverie instead of insanity or heartbreak. The view of the world from her room's open window carried her to the world of unbridled ecstasy. She feels free from the shackles of the conventional marriage bond in which love doesn't have any space. The author has shown the oppression of women in the bond of marriage.

Much stress had been given to equal rights for women under the Women's liberation movement during 1960s and 1970s. It was the result of the dominating patriarchal society. The women were considered as the bread makers, not the breadwinners.

Our mind floats through unknown nooks and corners, and it is a real wonder for all of us to catch up with this mind-blowing story. It leaves a lot of strange feelings with a reader when one traverses through the trails of the story.

The Story of an Hour by Kate Chopin is a mainstay of Feminist literary study, and the author uses a feminist perspective for an immense desire for freedom. It is an informative story reflecting two points: first, the female search for identity in a male-dominated world; second, the marriage, especially in the late nineteenth century, which may result in loss of freedom for women. The character of Mrs. Mallard in this story is key to Victorian Womanhood. Women of the Victorian time were expected to have all the qualities of a homely lady who should be devoted to the family without any expectations.

The reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901, marked the period known in history as the Victorian era. Victorian woman's role was in the home, as domesticity and motherhood were considered by society to be sufficient for the emotional fulfillment of females. (Feminism during Victorian Era)

The author has given an indirect hint of Mrs. Mallard's unhappy marriage. It seems she is suffering from an internal struggle and a desire for freedom. Her thoughts of being free in her future life are so powerful that she overcomes the shock of the loss.

"...she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window. Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long." (Chopin)

Her yesterday's fear of having long miserable life changes into the desire to have a long, free, and happy life of her own. The death of her husband Brently Mallard represents the end of her serfdom and the open window symbolizes the liberation and a new life ahead. She has been referred to as Mrs. Mallard in the beginning; later in the story, her sister calls her by her maiden name 'Louise'. Mrs. Mallard wants to seek herself and live as 'Louise,' not as Mrs. Mallard. She has a strong desire to get back her own identity.

The famous American philosopher, sociologist, and psychologist G. H. Mead propounded the theory about the mind as the individual importation of the social process.

For G. H. Mead, the self was formed as an interior dialogue between the I-Me, a concept he generated. The Me developed from the social (exterior) world, while the I was the (internal) response of the individual to the exterior society's influence. Mead's theory of the social-genesis of the self, and later the theory of symbolic interactionism, have led to sophisticated analyses of identity in relation to broader social and cultural constructions, such as of nationalities, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, class, particular professions, political affiliations, as well as specific micro-localities and broadly across physical, social, and cultural geographies. (Comaroff & Comaroff 2010)

Mrs. Mallard's role as a wife and homemaker is the result of her interaction with the society and the surrounding environment. The concept of 'Me' is the outward personality of Mrs. Mallard, while the 'I' part is the come out of her solitude sitting in front of her room's open window. It is the sense of being herself which shows a quest of Mrs. Mallard to find Louise. However, that 'I' part of Mrs. Mallard dies with her death when she finds her husband entering the home unharmed. Her death is considered as a shock due to joy seeing her husband alive; this is the 'Me' part of her personality as perceived by others.

V. Conclusion

The researcher reaches to the conclusion that this story is a direct criticism of the suppressed life of middle-class Victorian women. There appears to be a great deal of pathos in the life of Mrs. Mallard. Her personal idiosyncrasies have been accentuated to give an in-depth insight into her mind. Her various moods have been expressed in such a way that it enables the reader to understand the hidden aspect of human nature. The unfortunate circumstances bring her strength and ambition to the surface.

The writer has used a feminist perspective on freedom. Though the story has been written in the late nineteenth century keeping in view the position of contemporary middle-class women in the society, yet most of the women readers of the present time can understand the rumbling thoughts of Mrs. Mallard. Those who experienced similar oppression due to the social structure of their family and society can associate themselves with her and appreciate her feelings.

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