

## Emotional Torment and Joy of Freedom in Kate Chopin's *Story of an Hour*

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### Abstract

Kate Chopin one of the best-known writers of American literature. Kate represents about social, moral strictures and female individuality in her work. Most of Kate's stories examine the gender role of wife and mother in the conventional society of America. *Story of an Hour*, is her famous short story which deals with feminine selfhood in the marriage life during 1980's. This story talks about Mrs. Luis Mallard, a woman in traditional marriage who had unspeakable desire longs for freedom in her marriage life. So, this research paper aims to analysis this story as how the inner conflict and her emotional torments towards the freedom for herself in the marriage life.

**Keywords:** Moral strictures, conventional society, feminine selfhood, unspeakable desire, and inner conflicts.

Kate Chopin was a great American writer during 19<sup>th</sup> century, and she was a major feminist writer in English literature. She wrote more than hundred short stories and two novels.

Chopin's best-known novel "Awakening" which depicts a woman's need for spiritual and individual freedom in the conventional society of late-nineteenth-century America. Most of Chopin's work represents conditions and search for identity and deeply addressing constraints of marriage, adultery, and divorces. The collections of short stories in "Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadia" explored Chopin as important writer of short stories and she was known as local colorist in the beginning of her career but now is recognized as an important writer in 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature.

This research paper aim to explore Kate Chopin's short story "*The Story of an Hour*". It's one of her best short stories which was published in 1894 and it was well received by audience for its ethical approaches of the characterization of the character Mrs. Mallard. "*The Story of an Hour*" deals with the problems of female identity and selfhood in the standards of 1980s. Mrs. Mallard is protagonist of the story, and she is strongest example of self-assertive woman in Chopin's work. Mrs. Mallard, who is married to Brently Mallard and predicting that she must be happy in her marriage life because nowhere Mrs. Mallard showed that unhappy in her marriage life.

The story explores Mrs. Mallard's feelings and expectation of selfhood thoroughly and apparently, she was suffering from a heart problem, so should be informed any serious news carefully. The opening of the story highlights the same with her husband death news which shows ironic reality of Mrs. Mallard heart trouble and how she must be treated emotionally in the marriage life. Mrs. Mallard character is Chopin's unusual female protagonist in her short stories and, she depicted this character as strange heart problem along with mixed feelings over her husband death news.

Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death. (1-2)

However, Kate Chopin represents emotional dilemma and aggressive feeling over her women characters in her stories, but she has the conventional ending to the audience. *The Story of an Hour* traces the physiological process of the married woman and gives the vision of how woman was limited to the society during the 1980's. Louis Mallard is Kate Chopin's choice for the strongest self-assertive woman in her work. Mrs. Mallard is the woman, who is ahead of the time in the standard of 1980s and her advancement shown during her husband death news arrival which was initially with the grief and speechless but quickly started to feel the freedom and relief within herself.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. (1-2)

There was something coming to her, and she was waiting for it fearfully. At first Mrs. Mallard was freighted of the news as soon she fell asleep; she finds that her own feeling comes upon her to possess her in different mindset.

Facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul. (2-3)

When she abandoned herself, a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it's over and over under her breath: "free, free, free! These lines are intimately connected with her problem of individual identity and longing for her selfhood. When the story begins Mrs. Mallard portrayed as only as a housewife and little concerned about her relationship. Sometimes, she did not realise even she had been happily married or not. Also, Mrs. Mallard overcome shortly after her husband death news, however she grieved so deeply but quickly she started to feel the unknown sense that is connected to kind of relief and freedom for the rest of her life.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees

that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air...There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window. (2-3)

The role of woman in marriage seemed to be unhappy in this story but it never shown visibly in the opening of the story, which makes it clear that this story connected intimately with the thought of identity and selfhood in marriage life. Mrs. Mallard only portrayed as wife rather than concerned about her personal relationship with her husband. Kate tries to show, how the conventional marriages have been practiced during nineteenth century. The convention means here is nothing to concern about women's happiness in her private life. Also, marriages lead women to grant for men and which is considered with no harm in dominating the women in terms of marriage life.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination. (3-4)

Kate Chopin makes it clear in these lines that, either one is acting out of love or not, but women are granted to men in terms of marriages during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Mrs. Mallard Finally accepts the feelings and death news of her husband which made her so ecstatic regarding that she would never limit in her marriage life anymore and to Mr. Mallard. She was completely set free in her life which she never dreamed it before when Mr. Mallard is alive. As she recognized that would be "*free! Body and free soul free*" she kept whispering. At one point, her sister Josephine was kneeling before the locked room with her lips to the keyhole by imploring for the admission of Mrs. Mallard to come out. She had repeatedly pleased her to unlock the room door, indeed Mrs. Mallard initially hesitate to admit her but then both embraced and decided to go down to rejoin with Richard, who brought the death news of her husband.

However, Kate Chopin narrated Mrs. Mallard character to be contrasted with other women that expected to have paralysis and shock or inability over the death news. Therefore Mrs. Mallard is not shocked or had heart problem by the news, but shortly she understands the comprehended events and accepts her husband's death foreshadows and showed her real feelings about the situation. Also, she continues the feeling of epiphany with strong condemnation of nineteenth century societal expectations.

*The Story of an Hour* context makes it clear with the Mrs. Mallard

observations critical of treatment of women during nineteenth century that most of the control would have been practiced by men in the marriage life. Though Kate Chopin writes that both men and women are right to control each other by these lines "*men and women believe they have right to impose a private will upon a fellow*", but the thought was uncertain. Kate strongly desires for female independence in their marriage life, and she concludes the story as Mrs. Mallard descends the stairs and saw main door opens with Mr. Mallard arrival and she quickly learns that he had never been on the train accident. With this event her heart gives out and the doctor's

given the cause ironically "*the joy that kills*".

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