

Jessica Ortiz

Professor Lux

ENG-102.RO College Writing II

June 15, 2020

A death of Joy and Grief: An Analysis of “*The Story of An Hour.*”

The feelings associated with freedom are too many to unravel. Any of us places its sense into the notion of being free from unwanted attachments. Now and again, we understand that we can do everything and provide everything to be liberated from a person or thing that overwhelms us and impacts our life. No greater example exists than the institution of a disconnected marriage or family household. People often remain married to demonstrate order in their life. That image consumes an individual and, in some instances, imposes fear of the unknown, leaving one or both individuals to accept a dysfunctional situation over uncertainty. In *The Story of An Hour*, after years of submissiveness, the possibility of being freed from her marriage results in the realization that she will never be free, which causes her death.

In Kate Chopin's *The Story of An Hour*, Mrs. Mallard learns of her husband's death at the hands of her sister Josephine and her husband's friend Richards. Mrs. Mallard is a troubled wife to Brentley Mallard, her husband, who is almost enslaved and embattled by the strained relationship they have had. For one, Chopin reveals that Mrs. Mallard loved her husband, albeit not as often as she despised him, as depicted by the lines “and yet she loved him - sometimes. Often she had not” (Chopin 49). Her divided attention is all too clear to see by the way she reacts upon hearing of her husband's death “She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment” (Chopin 48). It is unclear whether Mrs. Mallard is truly grieving her husband's death or rejoicing about

her freedom. However, any assertions of grief are quickly dispensed by the “monstrous joy that held her” after realizing that she could be free henceforth (Chopin 48). Later on, when Brently Mallard returns, alive and unscathed, Mrs. Mallard passes on. The doctors claimed that she had “died of heart disease- of joy that kills” (Chopin 50). However, readers are left to wonder, what was Mrs. Mallards’ probable cause of death? Could a person truly die from something that they enjoy?

In light of the stories’ development, Mrs. Mallards’ death could have resulted from heart disease, the joy of freedom, or the seemingly hapless realization of her husband’s return. Additionally, Mrs. Mallard’s death can either be related to physical conditions or emotional factors. Earlier on, Chopin reveals that “Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble” (Chopin 48). However, it is arguable whether heart trouble was due to physical or emotional conditions. Upon her husband’s death, Mrs. Mallard seems to enjoy a feeling of self-assertion, a feeling of freedom, and the “very elixir of life” as she contemplated of her future days that “she would live for herself” (Chopin 49). It is doubtful whether her heart disease was one of the physical and not emotional circumstances.

Therefore, Mrs. Mallard’s death stems from the emotional ambivalence that overwhelmed her, a contemplation of the short-lived freedom she had very much yearned for, and the repressed woman she would once again be upon her husband’s return. Mrs. Mallard still has an emotional connection to her oppressive marriage. Her perspective is so unstable that she died from shock when she realized that her husband was indeed alive. Mrs. Mallard’s reaction has “. . . more than fear, force, and sex; it is also about anticipation, pleasure, and ultimately enlightenment” (Deneau 2). Mrs. Mallard had lived and endured a marriage filled with challenges. Her love for her husband leads to her emotional attachment and, thus, emotional pain when her husband was

around. Now that her husband died, she had every reason to rejoice and look forward to a fulfilling, free life.

The statement “the realization that her life is now utterly changed, and the understanding that this change is quite possibly for the better- sweep over her, . . . spiritual outlook” (Cunningham 5) can imply a life of imagined freedom. However, such factors contribute significantly to Mrs. Mallard’s emotional attachment to her marriage, ultimately contributing to her death. Mrs. Mallard’s reaction, or rather, mixed emotions, demonstrates that she had her imaginations of Life, marriage, love, and freedom. Her imagination is not expressive in her marriage since, like many married women her age, it was not possible for the existence of individuality separate from the responsibilities to one’s marriage.

As such, Mrs. Mallard considered herself entrapped, and in the presence of her sister and Richard, her husband's friend takes great effort to portray that she is loved and loves. As Chopin narrates, “ when the storm of grief had spent itself, she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.” (Chopin 48). In light of this assertion, it is evident that Mrs. Mallard is physically lonely. However, this displayed behavior may imply that she would not allow her life to be interrupted again. (Hicks 4). The irony presented in the early stages of Chopin’s story is that Mrs. Mallard has mixed emotions; she is both sad and happy.

The emotional conflict Mrs. Mallard is subjected to triggers her imagination of what life would be without her oppressive husband. To some extent, her ill-advised and emotionally constructed life experiences after her husband’s death eventually led to her death since the return of her husband quashes them. The following excerpt explains the emotional state that Miss Mallard struggles to endure. I’ll be at fruitlessly “there was something coming to her, and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; . . . She was beginning to recognize

this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was driving to beat it back” (Chopin 49). As much as Mrs. Mallard is waiting to realize what was possessing her, the passage reflects that Mrs. Mallard is experiencing emotional and physical strain from her husband’s death. Further, Mrs. Mallard (Louise) does not die after realizing that her husband had passed on, rather she died after his return. It is, therefore, doubtful whether Mrs. Mallard dies of heart disease as the doctor claims. Instead, critics suggest that “Lousie collapses only after what we would call the adrenaline rush of her shock” (Cunningham 5) that had placed further strain on her already weak heart upon her husband’s arrival. As it seems, Mrs. Mallard had not completely gotten over her emotional excitement by the time her husband was returning, making her regret life with her husband again, and conflicting the prospective freedom she fantasizes over.

Mark Cunningham, a critic, takes the position that Mrs. Mallard dies of emotional disappointment upon her husbands’ return. However, his argument may derive from a different emotional perspective. According to Cunningham, it was not the disappointment that killed Mrs. Mallard. Mrs. Mallard barely saw her husband, and thus her husband’s return cannot be attributed to her death. Still, Cunningham’s assertion does not hastily dispense as there is evidence that Mrs. Mallard indeed loves her husband, “And yet she loved him”- sometimes. Often she had not” (Chopin 49). Besides, Mrs. Mallard displayed sadness at initially hearing the news of her husbands’ death (Chopin 48).

The doctor’s statement also justifies the joy that Mrs. Mallard was drowned in upon her husband’s arrival “of joy that kills” (Chopin 50). However minimal, it is apparent that Mrs. Mallard loved her husband, and it could be that she was overly and monstrously excited upon learning of his arrival. “The resulting emotional strain” upon learning of life without her oppressive husband overwhelmed her, and she finally succumbed to it. “There as a feverish

triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like goodness of victory.” (Chopin 50). Mrs. Mallard had drowned in her emotional whirlwind that had caused her death. She was both happy and saddened at the news of her husband’s death, and the emotional ambivalence primarily caused her death. Either way, Mrs. Mallard’s death is mostly due to her emotional strain and not her physical conditions.

Mrs. Mallards’ death is unexpected and set up in somewhat difficult circumstances. Chopin hints that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble, and at first glance, some accept that the cause of her death was related to a weak and unhealthy heart. This assertion is later emphasized in the doctor’s comments later on, “She had died of heart disease.” However, it is in the same comments that the second and more likely probable cause of Mrs. Mallard’s emotional attachment to her marriage expresses the love she has for her husband, and the fact that she weeps and grieves over the announcement of her husband’s death. Her illusions and prospective imaginations of a “free” life are, however, short-lived upon the return of her husband, sending her into an emotional turmoil. As it seems, her emotional excitement was only at its peak by the time her husband returned; and she could not help imagining life with her oppressive husband again. Alternatively, the joy she had constructed upon the realization that she could enjoy self-autonomy might have overwhelmed her. Whether or not she learned of her husbands’ return, Mrs. Mallards’ death was due to the emotional ambivalence and conflict that eclipsed her existence.

In reflecting, Kate Chopin’s *The Story of an Hour* teaches us the importance of effective and ineffective communication. Most importantly, the effects on how it is that people respond to an unexpected tragedy. In particular, to news regarding whether somebody lives or kicks the bucket. History has always taught humanity that the importance of a message is not how it is delivered,

but rather how you tell an individual the contents of the message—supporting the notion that any correspondence or news delivered can impact someone deeply and potentially lead to their death. For instance, the unexpected news that a spouse isn't dead after all proves to be more impactful than anything else. Lastly, an individual should take caution on how they express their thoughts or share information. The brain and tongue should always be aligned and should disseminate any opinions with readiness and delicacy.

Works Cited

Cunningham, Mark "The Autonomous Female Self and the Death of Louise Mallard in Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour"." *English Language Notes*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2004, pp. 48-55.

<https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/ps/retrieve.do?t>

Deneau, Daniel P. "Chopin's The Story of an Hour:" Short Story Criticism, edited by Jelena Krstovic, vol 11 Gale, 2008. Gale Literature Resource Center, [https://go-gale-](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/ps/retrieve.do?)

[com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/ps/retrieve.do?](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/ps/retrieve.do?) Accessed 3 June 2020 Originally published in

Explicator, vol, 61, no. 4, summer 2003, pp 210-213.

Gardner, Janet E., et al. "The Story of An Hour." *Literature: A Portable Anthology*, 4th ed.,
Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016, pp. 48-50.

Hicks, Jennifer. "An Overview of the Story of an Hour." *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2002,
Gale Literature Resource Center, 2002,

[https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/apps/doc/H1420007762/LitRC?
u=nysl_se_nyac&sid=LitRC&xid=61a1026](https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nyack.edu/apps/doc/H1420007762/LitRC?u=nysl_se_nyac&sid=LitRC&xid=61a1026)