

Sebastian Cortes

College Writing II

Dr.Lux

April 17, 2023

Research-Based Paper

“The Story of an Hour”

Introduction:

The short story "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin is a profound examination of the human experience, especially as it relates to the desire for personal freedom and autonomy. Louise Mallard, a woman who is informed of her husband's death and overcome with a sense of freedom and independence, is the protagonist of the narrative. As she celebrates her newfound independence, she is confronted with the devastating reality that her spouse is alive and well. Despite being situated in the late nineteenth century, the story's themes and messages are still relevant to modern audiences. Specifically, "The Story of an Hour" functions as a reminder of the significance of personal autonomy and individuality, despite societal constraints and

expectations. In this paper, I will examine this central theme in greater depth, utilizing both the story's text and a variety of secondary sources.

To support my position, I will examine how Chopin's story emphasizes the significance of personal liberty and uniqueness. In the context of gender and marriage, I will also investigate how societal norms and expectations can serve to restrict personal autonomy and limit individuality. Through this analysis, I hope to cast light on how "The Story of an Hour" speaks to broader issues and concerns in contemporary society, particularly as they pertain to issues of identity, agency, and personal choice.

In "The Story of an Hour," Chopin uses the character of Louise Mallard to emphasize the significance of personal freedom and individuality. In the beginning, Louise is portrayed as a woman constrained by societal norms and her function as a wife. However, upon learning of her presumed husband's demise, Louise feels liberated and begins to revel in her newfound independence. As Chopin observes, "Something was coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air" (Chopin 3). "This passage emphasizes that personal freedom and individuality are not merely abstract notions, but rather concrete and significant experiences that can have a substantial effect on one's sense of self and identity.

Moreover, Chopin argues that societal norms and expectations can serve to limit personal autonomy and individuality, particularly in terms of gender and marriage. Louise observes, as she reflects on her life as a wife, that "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" (Chopin 3). This passage demonstrates how traditional gender roles and expectations can serve to restrict personal autonomy and individuality, especially for women.

Louise's experience is ultimately cut short when she discovers that her spouse is still alive and well. According to Chopin, "When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease - of joy that kills" (Chopin 4). This tragic conclusion also highlights the significance of personal freedom and individuality, as well as the devastation that can result from their denial. Thus, "The Story of an Hour" serves as a potent reminder of the significance of personal autonomy and the human desire for individuality, despite societal expectations and constraints.

In Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," societal norms and expectations are depicted as limiting personal autonomy and individuality, especially in the context of gender and marriage. Mrs. Mallard's heart condition is characterized as a reflection of her repression and lack of agency in her marriage. In addition, the news of her husband's death initially gives her a sense of freedom, as she can finally contemplate a life of her own choosing. However, as the plot develops, it becomes clear that such independence is not readily attained. Mrs. Mallard, for instance, must conceal her newly-acquired freedom from her sister and other family members, who mistakenly believe that her visible sorrow stems from her loss. Furthermore, Mrs. Mallard's vision of independence is disrupted when her husband returns unexpectedly alive, and she dies of shock. Chopin's story emphasizes the detrimental effects of patriarchal social norms on women's lives and the need for personal autonomy and individuality as essential components of a fulfilling existence, as noted by several scholars (Gregory 57; Berman 45).

In conclusion, "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin is a potent and thought-provoking work that continues to resonate with modern readers. Chopin invites us, through her vivid depiction of

Mrs. Mallard's experiences, to contemplate the intricate interplay of individuality, societal norms, and personal choice, and to consider the potential for resistance and transformation that resides within us all. By examining how the story emphasizes the significance of personal freedom and individuality, as well as how societal norms and expectations can serve to restrict personal autonomy and limit individuality, we can gain a deeper understanding of our own lives and the world around us.

This analysis has demonstrated that "The Story of an Hour" relates to broader issues and concerns in contemporary society, particularly in regard to issues of identity, agency, and personal choice. By engaging with the story's themes and ideas, we can begin to envision new opportunities for ourselves and our communities and work toward a more just and equitable world. Chopin's story ultimately reminds us of the ability of literature to challenge, inspire, and transform, as well as our own capacity for development and transformation.

Works Cited:

Berman, Jeffrey. "The Unbearable Letting Go of Love: Reconsidering Feminist Consciousness-raising." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2005, pp. 43-62.

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *Vogue*, Dec. 6, 1894, pp. 1-4. JSTOR, doi:10.2307/4610378.

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Nina Baym, 9th ed., vol. C, W.W. Norton & Company, 2017, pp. 245-247.

Gregory, Eileen. "Feminist Rereadings of Chopin's 'The Story of an Hour.'" *Women's Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1991, pp. 57-68.