

Freedom Marriage and Identity in The Story of an Hour

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Kate Chopin shows how one can be trapped in a reality that is neither productive nor satisfying due to exploitation, domination, and thoughtlessness of others, and this is clear in her tale “The [Story of an Hour](#).” After the feminist movement observed in the later 19th century, Chopin’s feelings and thoughts were well realized. The story mainly deals with the restrictions imposed on women in society.

Main Argument:

In her story “The Story of an Hour,” the author asserts the reality that all marital relations, no matter how good and supportive they are, are naturally dominating. The notion of feminism is quite clear in “The Story of an Hour” in a manner that the male part of the society, no matter how kind and understanding they appear, their existence does make a woman feel bound and restricted. She starts relying on every man she comes across in her whole life. When she’s young, she’s dependent on her father and brother, and after marriage, she is bound to her husband. The reason behind this is that the males of our society keep women bound both physically and mentally and make them feel how inferior they are.

Feminism:

The story shows the way women feel bound and not actually free in any man’s existence in her life. The wife realizes a sense of freedom and independence after hearing the news of her husband’s death. She recognizes her liberation, which is an awareness that gives her enthusiasm and excitement. These feelings of excitement were something she really wanted to hide but enjoy. She also did not want herself to feel that way. The resistance and unwanted feelings tell her how undesired this sense of happiness is in reality. She is overwhelmed by the sense of pleasure. She is happy that her life is in her own hands now, and nobody is there to control her or her life. She wants to have this feeling of being free for more days of her life, for which she starts praying as well. She totally understands how these feelings of freedom and joy are unknown to society. When her husband comes back into her life, she isn’t as excited or happy as she was. Instead, she feels terrible as she starts viewing her freedom as being transformed into a constrained and dependent life again.

Negative View Of Marriage:

The negative perception of marriage is clearly shown in “The [Story of An Hour](#).” A woman being happy about her husband’s death is an obvious expression of the negative reality of the marriage. (Chopin, 1894) The language used by the author, Kate Chopin, is used to explain the wife’s feelings and emotions as she vacillates between being emotionless and being intensely happy for her newly discovered freedom. Her words and how she describes her feelings are vibrant and powerful. This language convinces Louise, the wife, that Louise possesses an inner life that is deep and does not have any connection with the external world of her family or friends and that she considers her personal feelings important. The narrator of the story emphasizes the world more in the woman’s mind and less in the outer world.

Apart from the description of the inner life the wife is living, there are many moments in the story that depict irony and tell how happy the wife is about the constraining marriage. The end of the story shows that the wife dies of heart disease and gives the impression that she dies being overjoyed at seeing her husband. (hooks, 2000) But in reality, it was terrible for Louis to see her husband again as she sees that sense of independence and freedom going away from her life again. Heart disease is actually a signifying disease of the marriage. The thoughts and sentiments that were going on inside her were so deeply felt that the reappearance of the husband caused a great shock and hurt to her heart. There’s a moment in the story where the author says, “And yet she loved him—sometimes. Often, she did not.” These lines and direct language indicate that the wife didn’t have any deep and strong feelings associated with her husband. If she had, she wouldn’t have felt joy about his death.

Structure And Style:

The author makes use of such a structure and style that helps in heightening the drama. The structure applied matches perfectly the content of the story. “The Story of an Hour” is a short story comprising many small paragraphs. Just like that, the whole story is about that one hour in the life of the wife, Louise, from the moment she hears about her husband’s death till the moment he reappears. The structure of the story is dense, reflecting upon the intense time Louise spends thinking and rejoicing about her freedom and independence. Just like Louise, the readers also get completely lost and immersed in her sentiments and feelings. A lot of surprises are composed in the structure of the story. First, the unexpected reaction of Louise on hearing the news of the death of her husband, then the husband’s sudden reappearance, and finally Louise’s death.

The author is successful in making every part of the short story significant and interesting by applying a nearly poetic writing style. She makes use of repetitions to highlight the important points. For instance, the word ‘free’ is used repeatedly in order to show how Louise’s soul craves freedom and happiness when she thinks of being free and not tied to anyone now. Repetition of sentences and phrases is also done, such as, “She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only

yesterday that she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.” The similar phrasing of the other half of every sentence tells how Louise’s life transformed drastically. Once, there was a time when she was afraid of having a long life, and now she prays for it. Alliterations and rhymes are also used by the author, such as Josephine “revealed in half concealing” when she tells the news to Louise, and Brently reappears “composedly carrying” his belongings. The short story was made powerful using these structural and stylistic ways.

The Self-Determination:

Chopin clearly explains Louise’s self-determination in one of the significant passages of the tale. Happiness isn’t about getting rid of her husband, rather taking life in her own control was her main joy. The author says, “There would be no one to live for her 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 will upon a fellow creature.”

Louise never indicates anything bad done to her from her husband’s side, rather she implies that the ties of marriage can be disrobing for both parties. There are no accounts of certain offenses her husband may have committed against her.

The Irony Of The Story:

The irony of the story is immediately recognized when the doctors determine the cause of Louise’s death: “died of heart disease — of joy that kills.” It was made obvious that the shock wasn’t due to the happiness of seeing her husband alive, rather it was the sadness that overwhelmed her heart on losing the freedom she was thinking of. While imagining herself being fully in control of her own life, she experienced that joy whose removal caused her to die.

Characters:

Louise Mallard can be seen as a woman who believes in independence, freedom, and control over one’s own life. Her husband is known to be dead in a train accident. After hearing the dreadful news, instead of being sad, she is secretly happy as she feels truly free now. She is possessed with a new desire for life, and it wasn’t that she didn’t love her husband, she merely cherishes her newly discovered freedom. She dies of a heart attack when her husband comes back home alive.

Brently Mallard is Louise’s husband, who was thought to be dead in a train accident. Though Brently was a kind and loving man, as Louise remembers, being married to him arouses the sense of being tied and bound in Louise. He comes back home, not knowing what had happened.

Josephine is Louise’s sister, and she gives her the news of Brently’s death. Richards is Brently’s friend

who gets to know about the train accident and also Brently's death at the office in the newspaper, and he is present when Josephine informs Louise about the death.

Conclusion:

Thus, the story revolves around the concept of freedom in marriage. The notion of feminism is mostly talked about because our societies are mainly male-dominant. Otherwise, marriage can cause restrictions and limitations on men's lives as well. When a wife dies, the merriness of the husband is never seen critically. But feeling happy and free after the death of the husband is considered shameful for a wife.

References

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