**Literary Analysis of *The Story of an Hour***

Kate Chopin’s *The Story of an Hour* is a short story that details women’s experiences in marriages in the 19th Century. The story was initially published in 1894, with a huge focus on the view of society during that time. Chopin highlights how societal norms and expectations were repressive, especially for married women limited to household chores. According to Zea (2005), Chopin is popular for exemplifying unconventional ideas of marriage, including women’s independence and divorce, which attracted numerous criticism of her works during the Victorian period. The author utilizes progressive women at the center of her novels to criticize how society has limited their freedom and expression. *The Story of an Hour* illuminates such progressive thoughts using realistic fiction that details a woman’s point of view and experiences. The author uses Louise Mallard’s reaction to the news of her dead husband, Brently Mallard, to highlight relationships in marriage and women’s independence. Using effective characterization, symbolism, and irony, Chopin efficiently illustrates women’s challenges in marriage and the repressive society that fosters male domination.

**Characterization Analysis**

Chopin employs adequate characterization to give readers a deep insight into the protagonist’s experiences and predicaments in a patriarchal society. Louise exemplifies the feelings of many women in marriages constrained by societal norms and chains, even though most women hide their genuine feelings (Wan, 2009). Louise is a devoted and loving wife to Brently, as is expected of any married woman during the 19th Century. The author describes, “Great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death” (Chopin, 2018, p.1). The description implies that she is not as strong as her husband because women are perceived as weak. Louise receives the news of her husband’s death from her sister, Josephine, because she does not often go outside. She is restricted in her house to take care of the household chores. Chopin writes, “She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same” (Chopin, 2018, p.1). Cunningham (2004) points out that Louise’s restriction in the house portrays her isolation and seclusion from society because of her gender. Louise’s freedom is limited as she only stays home without interacting with other people.

**Symbolism and Irony**

Similarly, Chopin utilizes various symbols that illustrate the protagonist’s feeling of oppression and isolation in a male-dominated society. Louise Mallard yearns to be free even though she does not outwardly express it to anyone, including her husband. Her marriage restricts her as she cannot express herself fully and independently. Louise’s heart condition symbolizes her lack of freedom and her attitude toward marriage. The author emphasizes that Louise has “a heart trouble” that makes her weak and vulnerable, and thus has to be treated with great care.

Similarly, the “open window” from which Louise observes the outside world symbolizes the prospects of impending freedom and independence (Chopin, 2018, p.1). The author writes, “She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life” (Chopin, 2018, p.1). The open window and square symbolize new openings as she anticipates a life without restriction. Spring life represents new beginnings as Louise visualizes a life without her husband (Na’im & Qazi, 2020). As she views the changes outside, she gets connected to her desire to embrace a new life independently without the constraints of being married.

Correspondingly, Chopin utilizes irony to effectively illustrate the protagonist’s short-lived freedom, even though she yearned for it her entire life. Before receiving the news about her husband’s death in an accident, Louise had not thought much about her autonomy as a woman. However, in this moment of sadness, the prospects of a new beginning overwhelm her imagination as she envisions a life without restrictions (Paudel, 2019). Although she does not immediately show her joy, she gradually experiences a growing awareness of the independence and freedom that her new life promises. Although grieving, she slowly recognizes that she will be “Free! Body and soul free!” (Chopin, 2018, p.2). She realizes that not only her body would be free but also her mind as she unclutches herself from the shackles of marriage. However, her joy is short-lived when Brently Mallard opens the door confirming that he was not involved in an accident. Louise collapse and dies as doctors confirm that “she had died of heart disease-of joy that kills” (Chopin, 2018, p. 3). This statement is ironic because she did not die because of the happiness of seeing her allegedly dead husband alive. Instead, her short-lived feeling of joy and freedom as an independent woman leads to her demise.

Overall, Chopin’s *The Story of an Hour* efficiently illustrates the desire for married women in the 19th Century to attain self-independence. Chopin utilizes the character of Louise Mallard with effective symbolism and irony to illustrate the predicaments of women in repressive societies and marriages. Chopin utilizes her experiences and observation of society to critique the marriages that fostered male dominance while limiting women’s freedom. At the center of the story is Louise Mallard, representing women in the 19th Century and how they struggled to have autonomy and freedom in marriages. Nonetheless, Chopin’s message is universal and timeless as it advocates for gender equality.

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