

Essay 1: Fiction

TOPIC: Edgar Allan Poe coined the term "short story" because he felt that everyday readers simply did not have enough time to read and appreciate longer works of fiction. Since then, the short story has become a staple of literature all over the world, not only because they are compact, complete stories, but because the short story utilizes literary devices to create intelligent, satisfying tales. **With this in mind, pick your favorite short story. What literary device(s) does the author use? Why does the author use this literary device? Make sure to either break one literary device into three parts or pick three different devices. Do not forget to argue why the literary device is important and how it adds to the point/meaning of the story (the overall argument).**

CONTENT: The essay must have an introduction, body, and conclusion. This means that you must advance a **thesis that you will prove** in your body paragraphs. A good essay should explain its ideas thoroughly. **Include at least three devices or parts of a device that you will prove through the use of evidence from the story. You will need to have at least three body paragraphs, and each body paragraph must use at least two quotes.** Use the essay outline to format your essay according to MLA guidelines. Remember to include the WORD COUNT at the end of the essay.

RESEARCH: In your introduction paragraph, **include information from at least two articles** about the author for background and to give further insight into the story. These articles must come from Taft College's databases, **and you must include a copy of each article, with the portion used highlighted, in the final essay packet.**

FORMAT: The rough draft and final draft must be typed and adhere to MLA guidelines.

SOURCES: Your essay should include approved sources from those read and discussed in class, as well as your research. All quotes, summaries, and paraphrases must follow MLA format. You must include a works cited page.

WORD COUNT: 1000 - 1500 words (4 or more pages)

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATES	Points
Rough Draft	Tues. Sept. 20	25
Peer Review	Tues. Sept. 20	25
Research	Included in Final Draft	50
Final Draft	Thurs. Sept. 22	100
	Total Points:	200

REMEMBER: All prewriting and rough drafts **MUST** be attached in your final draft packet or your grade will automatically drop by 10%.

Office Hours and other Resources:

I am available outside of class during office hours, or by appointment at dkerr@taftcollege.edu. Also, you can visit tutors or SIs in the library for help.

Danielle Kerr, 2016

Awesome Student

Professor D. Kerr

English 1600

24 September 2013

“The Story of an Hour:” Freedom, Joy, and Irony

“[F]ree, free, free” (Chopin 332)! From the slaves of the 18th century, to the Japanese held into confinement, to the child who leaves detention, these words are words of the liberated. However, what if I told you that these words were spoken after the death of one’s spouse? It may sound selfish, heartless, and crazy, but that is exactly what happens in the short story “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin. In the story, Louise Mallard is told that her husband died. At first she is sad, but eventually the grief turns into joy after she realizes that she will finally live an independent life. It doesn’t take long though before her excitement is ruined when her husband is found to be alive. This sight of her husband being alive ironically kills Louise by what the doctors say was “of heart disease—of joy that kills” (Chopin 332). If you think this sounds cruel or absurd, you wouldn’t be the only one. According to the article “Kate Chopin”, the 19th century author received loads of criticism in her days because people were “simply not ready for such an honest exploration of female independence, a frank cataloguing of a woman’s desires and her search for fulfillment outside the marriage” (1). Despite the criticism, Chopin has created an amazing work of literature in “The Story of an Hour” by using literary devices such as setting, symbolism, and tone and style to build a beautifully composed short story.

In the story, the setting plays a very important role that may not seem apparent at first. The first thing to notice about the story’s setting is that it takes place in 1894. Chopin portrays this by stating, “[Richard] had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad

disaster was received... He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram” (331). It is important to recognize that this is the only place that is mentioned besides the Mallards’ home in the story. Richard and Mr. Mallard are clearly outside roaming around, while Mrs. Mallard and Josephine are inside a house the whole story. This displays the stereotypical gender roles in the 19th century where a man would leave to do work while a woman would stay home. Therefore, this time period plays a key role in understanding Louise’s feelings. Chopin is known to write stories about female independence. During her time, women were oppressed and deemed insignificant outside of marriage. Knowing this, the reader can then sympathize with Louise’s reaction instead of criticizing her for seeming cruel and selfish. The next thing to notice about the setting is that there is very little description of the surroundings. The story takes place in the Louise’s home, but the outside setting is the only description that is received. Chopin describes the outside as:

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all a quiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves. 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. (332)

This setting description is significant in two ways. First, it is used to change the atmosphere of the story. The imagery builds the reader senses and allows for a transition from a melancholy and solemn mood into one that is rejuvenating and uplifting. This prepares the reader for Louise’s upcoming joyous feelings. Secondly, the description is very vivid and detailed about the outside

while there is little description of the inside of the house. This leaves the question as to why, which leads to the next literary device that Chopin successfully embodies in the story—symbolism.

There are two ways that Chopin uses symbolism in the story. The first symbol is the open window and its scenery. Louise is fixated on the window with the story stating that “she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that window” (Chopin 332). This window is a symbol for Louise’s open escape to freedom. With her husband dead, Louise can become independent now and live a new life that is not bounded by a marriage. The descriptions of the “new spring life” (Chopin 331) and the “patches of blue sky showing” (Chopin 332) that Louise sees outside the window represent a renewal of life that is filled with hope and beauty. This scenery is much different than the description of the inside of the home. The lack of description of the home just symbolizes how empty and irrelevant her home life was. The second symbol is Louise’s heart trouble. The opening line of the story is “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her gently as possible the news of her husband’s death” (Chopin 331). Louise’s heart issue is more than just a physical one. Her heart issues are a symbol for the emotional heart problems that she carries inside. It is obvious that Louise was not completely satisfied in her marriage. The story even states that “she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not” (Chopin 332). The purpose of this symbolism is to emphasize how deep her heart issues go and to tie these heart issues with the ending. The story ends with the doctors saying she died from heart disease. With the symbolism of an emotional heart issue, the heart disease that she suffers from comes from the emotional constraints of marriage. While Chopin uses symbolism as a way to stress Louise’s longing for self-fulfillment, she likewise uses tone and style to build on this.

Chopin uses tone and style to help develop the message and feelings she wants the readers to receive. The tone shifts within the story. At first the tone is one that is solemn knowing that Louise's husband has passed away, but then it changes into an exhilarating tone. This tone shift is made as Louise realizes the newfound freedom that she has achieved upon her husband's death. An example of this transition of tones is when Chopin writes, "The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body" (332). Louise's grief and shame is no longer an issue as she embraces her desire for independence which changes the tone of the story. Chopin also uses style to highlight important moments in the story. There is very little dialogue in the story. Louise speaks only three times. The first time she speaks she says, "free, free, free" and the second time she says, "Free! Body and soul free" (Chopin 332). Chopin's diction and limited dialogue is used to create emphasis in the story. The fact that free is one of the very few words Louise says and the fact that it is repeated several times shows how important freedom is to the character. It is also relevant that Louise only begins to talk after she has realized the new life she can have, whereas before, she did not speak a word. Chopin also uses complex and specific words and sentences to build up the rush and excitement that Louise is feeling. An example of this is "There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory" (Chopin 332). The quote is empowering along with most of the language Chopin uses when describing Louise's feelings. Again, this helps establish the exhilarating tone in the story. Chopin also uses irony in order to dramatize the story. At the beginning of the story, the reader is told that Louise is "afflicted with heart trouble" so "great care was taken to break...gently as possible the news of her husband's death" (Chopin 330). The reader and the characters of the story expect that Louise will undergo heart problems with the

tragic news, but the opposite happens instead. It is when Louise sees Brently come home unexpectedly that Louise's heart cannot take it. The story ends with "But Richards was too late. When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (Chopin 332). Chopin creates suspense by creating a moment of pause before the reader can understand what has happened with Louise at the sight of her husband. The irony in this unexpected twist is used to instill the reader with shock and awe.

In conclusion, Chopin developed a well-constructed story using the elements of setting, symbolism, and tone and style. Chopin uses the 19th century setting to allow the reader to make the connection of the time period's oppression of women with Louise's feelings. Chopin also captures the reader's attention with her imagery as she builds up the setting to create an atmospheric change that is used along with symbolism to reveal the rebirth that Louise is looking forward to. Tone shifts, limited dialogue, diction, and irony all come together to compose a striking and startling story filled with emotion and empowerment. Despite the fact that many of her works were banned or rejected in her days and lead to the end of her writing career, today Chopin is an author that many admire for her short stories that bring awareness to "the social problems of gender and class structures" (Stipe 1-2).

Word Count: 1,633

Works Cited

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"Kate Chopin." *Feminist Writers*. Ed. Pamela Kester-Shelton. 1996: 1. *Literature Resource*

Center. Web. 12 Sept. 2014.

Stipe, Stormy. "The Book That Ruined Kate Chopin's Career." *Biblio* Jan. 1999: 16. *Literature*

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