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Comp I MWF 800

Literary Analysis

Literary Analysis Of “Story of An Hour”

Feelings and perceptions of others can be a difficult subject to encounter. Ones perception of what another should or may be thinking, could be the complete opposite, of what the actual feeling or thought the individual is having. This is portrayed in an ironic way in Louis Mallard’s ‘*The Story of an Hour’.* Kate Chopin does a great job in catching the readers eye and attention, from the very first sentence. The first sentence in this story - “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death” (Chopin, 1) – is a great example of this.

The main character in the story, Louis Mallard, suffers from a heart condition. She is married to Mr. Mallard, a railroad worker. Her sister Josephine, and her husband’s friend Richard, who had heard about the accident at his newspaper job, were both there to deliver the devastating news to her as gently as they could. Upon discovering that her husband has been killed in an accident, Louis reacts differently than they had thought her to. It is in the next hour, ‘Story of An Hour’, that we as readers discover some plot twisting truths about Mrs. and Mr. Mallard, alongside the fact that Mr. Mallard is not in fact dead.

Breaking the news to her, Josephine and Richard knew they had to do so with care. Richard had rushed from his work – “He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message” (Chopin, 2) – This sentence shows, that Richard considers himself a close and caring friend of Mrs. Mallard. The sentence does however also tell us that, in his wish to be the one to tell her, he did not spend much time validating if or if not Mr. Mallard had indeed been involved in the accident.

Louis went to her room after the devastating news – “When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her” (Kate Chopin) – This sentence sets the scene for the following self-reflective passage of the text. As she is sitting in her armchair facing the open window, Louis reflects what her husband’s death will mean for her and her life going forward. In this passage, Kate Chopin’s words are picked with care, describing what she sees as open, inviting and cheerful. The window can be thought of as a pathway to her new life, which offers her many new opportunities. As a reader, one is left with a sense of confusion. All seems so happy despite Louis just losing her husband, that is however until the sentence – “She said it over and over under her breath: ‘free, free, free!’ The vacant stare and look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright.” (Chopin, 3) – This sentence to me really indicates that Louis is now free from her husband and that she has been wishing to be so for a long time.

In the next part of the story, which is only about a paragraph long, a lot of things are open for interpretation. As Brently walks in “…Richards quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife” (Chopins, 4) – could indicate that Richard had known about the problems the two of them had, and that he feared of what was to follow, being well aware of Louise’s heart condition. “…Josephine’s piercing cry…” (Chopins, 5) – can be interpreted in two ways, she could be happy to see him, happier than her own sister, which could indicate an affair – thus explaining the unhappy marriage. The other possibility is that, Josephine was aware of how her sister felt and that she was genuinely unhappy that her sister would have to suffer again.

The story also uses great symbolism to tell Louise’s story. Examples of this of this are the countless twittering sparrows and the patches of blue skies that were starting to show through the clouds. The twittering birds exemplify that she is now a free bird out of her cage, that is her marriage. “There would be no one to live for her during the coming years; she would live for herself.” (Chopins, 6).   
 The blue patches in the cloudy sky, for me picture the happiness and freedom she is about to receive after having lived a life in grey conditions with no colors or self-thought – “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.” (Chopins, 7)

In conclusion, I think that this story shows some of the problems in our modern society in an ironic way. The story grabs the reader’s attention from the start, and it does not let go till the very end. I find myself sitting amazed about the symbolism as well as the twists and turns used in the story, one was never to predict what was to happen next.   
 I will leave you with my favorite quote from the text, as this to me really exemplifies the whole meaning of this story - “‘Go away. I am not making myself ill.’ No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window” (Chopins, 8)

Work Cited

Chopin, Kate. “The Story of an Hour.” *Writing Today*, by Richard Johnson-Sheehan and Charles Paine, third edition (custom edition for Arkansas State University), Pearson, 2016, pp. 128-129.