

Professor Hale

SOFIA- Writing About Literature

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### Irony in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"

Many people have believed that marriage validates a woman's life and also defines her. Once this idealized milestone has been reached, she then begins to define herself through marital expectations. These stereotypical expectations include bearing children, maintaining a home, and living up to the preset standards that a woman should. Women have upheld this traditional role for centuries and have been reluctantly accepting while doing so. The problem with this traditional belief is that orienting a life around marriage—without experiencing the joys that exploring individuality brings beforehand—will only result in a woman's unhappiness; Mrs. Mallard, the main character in "The story of an Hour," experiences just this, for she is consumed by a severe depression that also effects the health of her tender heart. Her marriage becomes oppressive and renders disappointment and un-fulfillment in all that it entails, leaving her bereft of both metaphorical and physical life. She was never able to feel satisfied with her marriage because she never experienced life beforehand. In "The Story of an Hour," Kate Chopin uses irony to illustrate that a traditional marriage harms a woman both physically and mentally.

The irony of Mrs. Mallard's response to the news of her husband's death lies in the fact that her reaction did not constitute what a common reaction to death entails: extreme disbelief, prolonged heartache, and violent hysterics. When her sister Josephine breaks the news to Mrs. Mallard gently—to avoid provoking a heart attack—Mrs. Mallard weeps automatically.

However, what sets her apart from this common reaction is the fact that once her fleeting "storm

**Comment [C1]:** Appropriate Title.

**Comment [C2]:** Title that is not just the name of work.

**Comment [C3]:** I provided a summary of the story but it was not too lengthy and did not give too much away.

**Comment [C4]:** After A LOT of revising, this thesis is concise and effective. It has a literary device that the author uses to develop a theme. Although it is a slightly radical assertion to make, it has become a strong thesis.

**Comment [C5]:** Topic sentence includes device.

**Comment [C6]:** Stuck to present tense.

of grief had spent itself,” her grieving process ceases; she moves on to thinking about how Mr. Mallard’s death signifies the re-birth of her new life of freedom. Chopin manipulates her response with irony by emphasizing that Mr. Mallard was a kind husband who did not physically mistreat Mrs. Mallard. The way that Mrs. Mallard responds would be fitting for a woman who had endured years of abuse and a loveless marriage; however, Mr. Mallard’s face had never “looked save with love upon her,” but because of her unhappiness towards her restricting marriage his kindness was irrelevant. His benevolent behavior did not prevent her from feeling stifled by the traditional marriage that was holding her back. She could never make a decision without the burden of a traditional marriage’s expectations weighing her down, nor could she explore her personal dreams; because of this barrier that marriage inflicts, she did not show deep remorse but instead had visions in which she is “running riot” and fantasizing about her dreams. The use of irony in this instance may make Mrs. Mallard seemingly cold-hearted; however, the nature of her marriage and its ability to cause detriment to her personal happiness illustrates the severity that a traditional marriage can have on a woman’s soul. It is what constitutes her reaction of “opening and spreading her arms” to her new dreams. Chopin’s use of irony in Mrs. Mallard’s reaction, accents the long term effects a traditional marriage can have on a woman’s sense of individuality.

Living out dreams and learning how to live as an individual human being before marriage was not an option for Mrs. Mallard. The only time she experiences these feelings is right before her death. Because of this injustice, she did not greet marriage whole-heartedly but with unhappiness and regret. However, during their marriage Mrs. Mallard was unable to experience the liberating joy that living for ones’ self brings which is why she reacted to the news with such unquenchable thirst. Her previous days were only hers partially, and with her new life they

**Comment [C7]:** I supported the idea of irony with appropriate evidence and interpretation.

**Comment [C8]:** I kept it consistent by supporting my ideas with TRADITIONAL marriage and not UNWANTED.

**Comment [C9]:** Once I said the author’s full name, I just used her last name throughout the paper.

would “belong to her absolutely.” The realization of her new life brought her sensations that she had never experienced and she “breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.” Thoughts of her new life bring back something as monumental as her desire to live. It is ironic that such a sudden shift in mindset was just as quickly snatched away by something as permanent and unfair as death. Kate Chopin incorporates Mrs. Mallard’s demise to ironically illustrate the fact that after the one time in her life that she felt the genuine happiness that her confining marriage had stolen, her freedom as a woman was swallowed up by death. The only time in Mrs. Mallard’s life that she truly seems to feel free and determined to live is in the short hour before her heart failure. Chopin creates this ironic truth to illustrate that, before her death, Mrs. Mallard never felt individualized because of the duties that she had to fulfill as a wife. Her sense of individuality became lost in her expectations and also aided in the tragedy of her death.

**Comment [C10]:** I remembered to place my punctuation inside my quotes.

Mrs. Mallard’s life can best be deemed a tragedy because her life has become a mere chore as opposed to an exploration of self. Mrs. Mallard’s unhappiness was the epitome of her woe and ultimate demise. The fact that her part in marriage was a necessary expectation rather than a choice is what makes its actual end a form of short-lived rebirth for Mrs. Mallard. Kate Chopin incorporates irony to put an unexpected spin on marriage to illustrate the detriment that thrives when Mrs. Mallard is robbed of her happiness and individuality. The prolonged depression and suffering that Mrs. Mallard endured in order to uphold her role as a married woman is illustrated throughout the story in ways that make the injustices that women face extremely real. Mrs. Mallard entered her marriage viewing it as a trap rather than an opportunity to grow which, unfortunately, is something she had no control over. As a result of her life being centered on her marital commitment Mrs. Mallard lost sight of the joy that living out dreams can

**Comment [C11]:** Strong interpretation. I included literary device and what it proves.

**Comment [C12]:** For my conclusion I restated my thesis in other words to avoid repetition but keep it cohesive.

provide for a woman. With the shocking return of her husband, Mrs. Mallard not only becomes the victim of a traditional marriage but also a victim of “the joy that kills”.

**Comment [C13]:** Unlike my previous draft, I ended this conclusion with a strong sentence and a quote that can be left to the audience's interpretation.