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### Theme of Love and Marriage in "an Hour"

#### Introduction

The story "an hour" is a witty story that explores relationships, love, and conflicts within the institution of marriage. With the issue of freedom dominating the events that unfold in this story suggests that the setting is in the 19th century when freedom of women was limited in most marriages. The story revolves around a female protagonist who learns of her husband's death through her sister. According to the narrator, the husband's death occurred in a railroad accident. It is through her reaction to the message of her husband's death that the reader learns of how "love and marriage" are portrayed in this story that is full of twists. Throughout the story, the narrator portrays the Theme of love by use of symbolism. The following are some of the instances that the Them of Love and Marriage has been depicted:

When the news of her husband's death was broken to her, the protagonist's (Louise Mallard) initial reaction of shock and grief was genuine and authentic. She was shocked at the loss of her husband and did not have the power to utter a word or face her sister who was the bearer of the news. According to the story, "Mrs. Mallard heard the story with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance" (Chopin 1). She then proceeds to her room to sob and grief over her dead husband. Every reaction from the time Brentley received the news shows that indeed the protagonist loved her husband (Brentley Mallard). In the room where she went to grief, Mrs. Mallard stared at the space and thought of her husband's face that looked at her with

a lot of love. She thought of his "Face that had never looked save with love upon her." The statement shows that every time her husband looked at her, it was always with love. The death of the husband was therefore a bitter-sweet moment for the woman. She was happy to be out of the "bondage" of marriage and, at the same time, missed her loving husband. The narrator brings another detail that shows Mrs. Mallard was enduring rather than enjoying her marriage.

According to the story, "it was only yesterday that she had thought with a shudder that life might belong". These words bring the revelation that her married life was going to be extended because things might never change. She was already in it, and there was no way out and had to submit to her husband and take care of her home.

However, the narrator brings the conflict on the institution of marriage, and love is under focus in this story. The joy that the protagonist felt after processing the news of her husband's death critiques marriage. According to Louise, marriage "is centered on that blind persistence with which men and women believe that they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature". The statement alone shows that the protagonist is not comfortable in her marriage. That is why the death of her husband is described as an "illumination". Her desire for freedom is evident in the moments of reflection in her room. Louise depicts that love and marriage as institutions that restrict freedom of those involved, and thereby the benefits do not equal costs. To further symbolize a lack of freedom as seen by the protagonist, the narrator uses a window in her room to symbolize the freedom that marriage has denied her all this time. The open window in which she gazed the world from her room, was a symbol of a desire to break from the chains of marriage and enjoy the things of the world that marriage has denied her for years (Sustana).

When we are informed of the death of Louise's husband, the narrator says that from that moment, "there will be no power to bend her will." This depicts marriage as a prison where one

party asserts his will on the other, making it feel like a cage. This is a negative depiction of marriage as an institution. This depiction also shows that the setting of the story is in the nineteenth century, where women in marriage were mostly desired for freedom in the male-dominant marriages of that period. The narrator goes ahead to inform the audience of the love between Louise Mallard and her husband. We are told that "Mrs Mallard had loved her husband sometimes. Often she had not". This is an obvious statement that the Louise lived got married to someone she did not fully love, or rather, she was not sure of her love for Brentley. The portrayal that marriage is given in this story also puts men on the spot by depicting them as dominating and as creatures who force their will upon women (Allen).

The narrator tells us that "She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms". It is evident that after receiving the shocking news, the protagonist grieved for a while because she was not hit as much as other women by the death of her husband. It may be because she did not profoundly and genuinely love her husband as other women do, and that is why the bad news did not hit her that much. The conflict in marriage and love are intertwined in this story, with one seemingly affecting the other. Furthermore, Mrs. Mallard feels relieved because, according to the narrator, she feels like in the coming years, there will be no one to live for and that she will not live for herself. This is another statement painting as an institution where women have to live to serve their men without looking out for themselves. It further shows that in the days of the setting of the story (1894), women had little to contribute to their marriages.

When Mrs. Brentley went to weep in her room, the narrator describes to the reader how she sat in the comfortable armchair with her head bent back. The posture shows she was relaxed

with the comfortable armchair shows her newfound identity. This shows that during the period of the setting, once women entered marriage, they lost their identity and freedom. This may be the reason Mrs. Mallard felt grief and joy simultaneously (Deneau). The way the protagonist sat freely in the chair and the description that the narrator gives of her sitting position is a symbol of escape from an oppressive marriage and a new found identity ushered in by the death of her husband. Every description given by the narrator during her "grieving" moment in her room is full of joy for the protagonist as she further describes the rain outside. "The delicious smell of the rain was in the air," showing the showering in of newfound freedom and self-love (Chopin). It may have been impossible to love the husband fully without feeling deprived since it was a male-dominated marriage, and she had no freedom to communicate her thoughts freely.

In conclusion, Kate Chopin has utilized symbolism to bring out the themes of marriage and love are portrayed in the story and how the two are intertwined in a story of a woman whose new identity is showered in by her husband's death. The lack of freedom and identity for women in marriage in this story is supported by the period of the story's setting (1884). Through a plethora of instances shown to the reader by the narrator in the story, the protagonist (Mrs. Mallard) displays a mixed feelings of love and discovery of new freedom when she learns of her husband's death. She grieves that the husband is no more and misses his company and the way she looked at her with love, but at the same time, she feels relieved from the marriage that was seemingly oppressive and denied her identity. In this story that has a twist at the end when the earlier assumption of the death of Mr. Mallard's turns out a false alarm.

Works Cited

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