

12 pt font, Times New Roman, double spaced

No more than 1/4th of the page devoted to title, author, and class.

Years or Days?

When was the last time you lost a loved one? This experience is never pleasant, and yet we can likely remember these deaths just like they happened yesterday. Often, death is an experience of extreme sadness that spirals into permanent change; however, in “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, we follow the character through her raw emotions after hearing of the news of the death of her husband. Within the story, Chopin uses irony, figurative language, and symbolism to give us a deeper understanding of the perplexity involved in losing a loved one.

In “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, the author employs situational irony to mislead the reader. After hearing the news of her husband’s death, Mrs. Mallard begins to feel free once she realizes she no longer has to cater to and serve her husband, “But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely.” This leads us to believe that she is on her way to living the life she has always wanted for herself. Unfortunately, however, life has other plans for her. Upon seeing her husband at the front door, because he had not actually been killed in the accident, she drops dead. Even though we were expecting Mrs. Mallard to assert her independence, it turns out that she was too weak to escape on her own.

Chopin emphasizes the character’s newfound freedom by using common symbols found in literature. The first symbols she includes are in reference to trees and rain, “She could see the

open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life.” Those symbols showcase the new beginning afforded to her after the news of her husband’s death. Before this news, she was trapped in a loveless marriage and had no voice; however, his death freed her much like a bird when set free. Likewise, Chopin writes that “countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves” to give allusion to her new ability to make noise of her own and be heard. In fact, Mrs. Mallard’s name is in reference to a type of duck, one that can fly but often chooses not to, making the reader question which life Mrs. Mallard has really chosen for herself.

Figurative language is also a consistent component of “The Story of an Hour.” She uses an embedded metaphor to describe the feeling she was having as “creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. Obviously, feelings can’t “creep” toward someone and color can’t fill the air. She is using this metaphor to describe how completely overcome with emotion Mrs. Mallard is. She also describes this joy she feels as “monstrous.” This is a descriptive metaphor because she is giving us a visual of exactly how powerful her joy suddenly is. Similarly, she claims that Mrs. Mallard is drinking in the “very elixir of life through that open window.” This is another embedded metaphor as life cannot be imbibed.

Chopin’s usage of these writing techniques gives us some insight into how playful an author can be with even the most serious of subjects. She explores the topic of loyalty and obligation to a partner versus loyalty and obligation to yourself. In 1973, armed robbers charged into a bank in Stockholm, Sweden, and kidnapped four employees. Soon after, several victims maintained loyalty to their captors and refused to testify against them. Which is harder to understand – a woman feeling free at the experience of losing someone who has played such a pivotal role for years or a woman feeling protective of a person she has met for a few days?