Suppressed Freedom

In many of Kate Chopin’s stories, there are similar themes and motifs of the meaning of love and the conflicts that are associated with it. One of the best examples of this is in her short story, “The Story of an Hour.” In “The Story of an Hour,” Chopin emphasizes the conflictions of being of self-fulfilled in a relationship and uses a karmic twist to add irony to theme of the suppression of freedom in a relationship. Chopin does this through her use of symbols that relate to the theme, and through irony within each symbol.

The first symbol that Chopin uses is a “heart trouble” that Louise is dealing with. Even though it is an actual physical problem for her, it is also a symbol that represents her negative feelings toward her marriage and her feeling trapped in it (Toth).The reader finds out that Louise has heart troubles in the very first sentence of the story. Right after we find this out, she is told that her husband was killed (Chopin). Since the readers know nothing else about Louise at this point, they would assume that this news would put her heart at risk. Instead, when Louise goes in room to think about the situation “her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body,” Chopin wrote. This is when the reader realizes that the news of her husband's death had not hurt her heart, but instead uplifted it. This relates the “heart trouble” to the theme of Louise not being fulfilled with her marriage and now she is free from it.

The irony connected with the symbolic “heart troubles” is when Louise walks down the stairs to find her husband, Richard, waiting at the bottom of them. When she sees him, she immediately dies (Chopin). This adds an ironic twist because the other characters assumed that she would be happy to see Richard alive. Instead Louise knows that all of her great feelings of freedom and thoughts of her future were now irrelevant because she would be trapped in her marriage again (Toth). This also adds a factor of karma to Louise's selfish feelings of being happy that her husband had died. This represents a character vs society conflict because society says Louise should have been happy to see Richard, but instead the thought of him being alive killed her. This is also comparable to society saying that Louise should have been in mourning, but instead she was filled with relief that her husband had been killed.

The second most important symbol in the story is the “the open window.” After Louise is told the news about her husband she goes into her room and sinks into “a comfortable, roomy armchair” and looks out the open window. She “gazes” at the outside and appreciates the “new spring life,” “the delicious breath of rain,” and the “twittering sparrows.”(Chopin). All these happy and positive words used to describe the things outside the open window represent her new freedom and all the great things that await her new life (Toth). The bright blue sky provides her a tease of her bright future ahead.

The irony connected to the symbolic open window, is when her sister Josephine won't leave Louise alone and forces her to turn away from the window (Jamil). Little does Louise know, her newly acquired freedom is also going to be turned away from. It is at this moment when she stops gazing out the window, thinking about her bright future, that she walks with Josephine downstairs to see her husband a live and well (Chopin). Just as her beautiful view out the window was obstructed, her beautiful view into her bright future was put to an end, when she realizes she isn't free and she is still trapped in her marriage (Jamil).

Throughout the short story Louise's emotions and morals are rollercoasted and put to the test, coinciding with the theme of the conflicts of being self-fulfilled in a relationship. Her feelings of being trapped and unfulfilled with her marriage are resolved when she thinks her husband is dead. These feelings are then quickly brought back to life when she find out Richard is still alive. Kate chopin uses imagery and diction to add meaning to the symbols, representing the overall theme of the story. She uses specific plot events and conflicts to add to the irony and theme of the story

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