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FEMINIST VIEWS OF KATE CHOPIN'S SHORT STORIES

Kate Chopin is now recognized as an important figure in nineteenth century American fiction and as a major figure in feminist literature. In our article we highlighted the feminist views of Kate Chopin's short stories «The Story of an Hour» and «A Respectable Woman». From a caring mother, oppressed house wife and a loving wife and mother, these are all good examples of strong women. That was something that characterized Kate Chopin's stories from the rest. These positive examples gave women strength and helped them realize that they are valuable and equal to men.

Key words: feminism; short stories; woman, marriage, patriarchy's ideology

One might argue that the history of American women's literature in the twentieth century began some time in the 1880s, or even earlier. The American feminist movement got under way in the decades before the Civil War, and the radical feminists in the United States today are the latest manifestations of a long-standing national tradition of political struggle for the rights of women.

Kate Chopin was one of the most individual and adventurous of nineteenth-century American writers. She wrote about some taboo topics in the nineteenth century, such as female sexuality, childbirth and pregnancy. Kate Chopin is considered the first woman writer in America to accept passion as a legitimate subject for serious fiction. Kate Chopin saw and understood all aspects of the female psyche and her particular interest was woman's awakening to her true nature, whether traditional, emancipated or a mixture of the two[4, p. 215]. Of particular interest for this article are a number of these self-assertive female characters in Kate Chopin's fiction.

Her heroines usually live out their strong impulses, while some devote their lives to maternal and wifely duties, many others insist on freedom from tradition and limitations.

The **aim** of this article is to analyze feminist views in Kate Chopin's short stories. Not many writers during the mid-to late 19th century were bold enough to address subjects that Chopin willingly took on. Although E. Fox-Genovese claims «Kate was neither a feminist nor a suffragist, she said so. She was nonetheless a woman who took women extremely

seriously. She never doubted women's ability to be strong»[4, p. 215]. Kate Chopin's sympathies lay with the individual in the context of his and her personal life and society.

Through her stories, Kate Chopin wrote her autobiography and documented her surroundings. She lived in a time when her surrounding included the emergence of feminism. Her ideas and descriptions were not rue word for word, yet there were an element of non-fiction lingering throughout each story.

Among her major works there are two significant short story collections : «Bayou Folk», «A Night in Acadie», and short stories : «At the Cadian Ball», «The Story of an Hour», «The Storm», «A Pair of Silk Stockings», where she depicted a real life of women of that time.

As a woman, Chopin saw the destructive effects of the cult of true womanhood and started writing as a way of expressing her frustration and disappointment with life. This ideology shaped the woman's life from childhood to the grave, and made her life unbearable. A woman who wanted to live freely and express her own thoughts experienced destructive results of this ideology which did not allow her to have her own life. She dared to write of the private needs of women by not only admitting the possibility that women have strong sexual needs of their own, but stating it as pure reality [1, p. 78].

K. Chopin, a master of the short story genre consistently used her fiction to fight for greater freedom and fulfillment for women in their social, sexual and spiritual roles and expressed her expanding thoughts on the female condition in her short stories.

She took an individual step for women's liberation by exploring and representing the complex range of human emotions in several of her short stories many of which were to push out the boundaries of what were considered as acceptable subjects for fiction. Her writing challenged the American literary tradition by her bold expression of woman's longing for sexual and personal freedom in a way that was previously unknown [4, p. 214]. So many of her heroines preoccupied with the desire to escape the confines of a stifling marriage. Chopin admired independent and active women [7]. And, by refusing to make men the central target of her women characters' despair, she focused more directly on the institutions and social frameworks in which they were trapped .

K. Chopin's «The Story of an Hour» is called «one of feminism's sacred texts». It is the most prominent example of a woman who is trying to ascertain her identity. The story is about Louise Mallard's unexpected response to her husband's sudden death in a train accident. Having heard of the sudden death of her husband, Mrs. Mallard finds out that she will get rid of her bounds and live an independent life from then on. She is given that chance, quite by accident, and the story tells of the hour in which this freedom is given to her. Evans sees this story as «a way of letting out the oppressed feelings by relieving disappointments and enslavements». It is distinctive from other stories as it overtly explores the previously subtle themes of female freedom and self-fulfillment within marriage. Evans points out that in this story, «Chopin for the first time openly confronts the problems of marriage and shows that a loveless or oppressive marriage is unethical» [2, p. 53].

In «The story of an hour» we see the protagonist named Louise as a weak person become into a stronger women. She contemplates her newly found independence and is delighted over thought of being free. This surprising reaction reflects the feeling women had in the late 19th century had towards marriage. Through this, Chopin voices that marriage meant men had total control over women. The women were not allowed to have their own identity, thoughts or purpose [6].

In Louise's case, her husband's death frees her from the restraint of marriage. Her once forbidden pleasure of independence will no longer hold her back. For just an hour, Louise experiences and praises her freedom that is no longer chained to her husband's control. As she

looks out the window we realizes how marriage made her into someone who did not have an identity. She has lived a life that has given her limitations, that she was only her husband's wife and nothing more. She believed for a brief moment that she no longer has a man that will «in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature.» This demonstrates that patriarchal ideology that was the norm in the late 19th century [3, p. 21].

In the story «A Respectable Woman», K. Chopin is cleverly exposing a dilemmatic condition and position of Mrs. Baroda as a wife and a woman. After years of marriage, she was attracted to another man who was her husband's best friend. This is not merely a sudden reaction that happens without a trigger. It can be seen that her feeling towards Gouvernail was a reaction to her own marriage. In the story, her family seemed normal and happy; she had a good and wealthy husband. Expectedly, nothing would go wrong with it.

At the end of the story, the reader gets surprised by Mrs. Baroda's statement: «I have overcome everything! You will see. This time I shall be very nice to him». It can be concluded from her statement that in the end, she followed her desire to love Gouvernail and ignored her duty as a wife. Here, K. Chopin tries to deconstruct the idea of a supportive and loyal wife, which is a typical image of a wife in the literature[5, p. 198]. From the story we could find that her husband expected her to be a supportive and loyal wife, who obeyed his orders. The irony is that by obeying her husband's orders, she was also «being allowed» to grow her wrong desire and commit adultery. Through the image of Mrs. Baroda, K. Chopin has shown how women are often enslaved by their marriage, especially by their duty as a wife and they are only considered a vassal and possession to complete her husband's world of tyranny. Mrs. Baroda is an image which symbolizes the women who are trapped in a cage called «marriage» [5, p. 196].

In conclusion, K. Chopin is greatly contributed to the feminist movement. She was one of the first female authors to honestly write about females feelings towards their roles, husbands, children and sexual desires. I believe she had the courage to freely express herself due to her experiences in life. Coming from a family of tough women, it was not much of a surprise for her to express herself freely about women's rights. In her pieces of work she talked about several topics that caused controversy such as a woman committing adultery, having independence from her husband, and having control of their sexual desires. At the time that K. Chopin wrote her stories women did not have many rights, they were held to a high standard. Women were supposed to worship their husband, take care of the children and the house, so this is why her works caused such controversy.

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