Masha Martemjanova

42; 403

Text Analysis

The text analysis is dedicated to the novel by Kate Chopin “The Story of an Hour”. Kate Chopin was an American writer, who wrote in the turn of XIX and XX centuries and represented realism. Her most famous stories are "[Desiree's Baby](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desiree%27s_Baby)," a tale of [miscegenation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miscegenation) in [antebellum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antebellum_era) Louisiana, “Awakening” and "[The Storm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Storm_(short_story))". Her major works are gathered in two collections of short stories “Bayou Folk “(1894) and “A Night in Acadie” (1897). Initially her stories appeared in such magazines as “[Atlantic Monthly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Monthly)”, “[Vogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vogue_(magazine))”, “[The Century Magazine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Century_Magazine)”, and “[The Youth's Companion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Youth%27s_Companion)”. The usual setting of most of her stories is Louisiana; many of her works are set in [Natchitoches](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natchitoches,_Louisiana), which is the northern part of Louisiana.

Her prose style has proved to be unconventional and unique, as she was the first author of her time, who reproduced strong feministic approach in her works. Kate Chopin wasn’t a traditional housewife by herself, as well as her characters. She drank and smoked heavily, arguing with others on political and social matters. She wrote about what she actually had experienced and her major themes were dedicated to marriage, love, sex, a search for independence and self-realization. She published her first novel at the age of 40 and had never stopped writing till the end. Her second novel “Awakening” was met with a wave of shock and disapproval. The novel is dedicated to a married woman’s adulterous affair, which novel shocked both the critics and readers, but established Chopin as a skillfully truthful and rebellious author of the age.

Nowadays Chopin is widely recognized as an unconventional author, who addressed feminist issues many years before it was adopted. At that time women were regarded as men’s property, so Chopin was years ahead stating that a woman need her own way of realization.

What’s more, in her fiction the author explored such forbidden themes as sexual relationships, stating that women commonly need simply sex and furthermore, women are desperately looking for independence and self-realization.

Nevertheless, her novels and short stories are still considered to be masterpieces, which give a strong insight into women’s rights, independence, sexuality and express a strong feministic approach.

The novel under analysis deals with a story of Louise Mallard, a young woman, who feels immense freedom only when her husband dies. While he is alive, she must live for him, and only his death makes her life once more life become her own. Louise is a woman of a new generation of women, who are sensual and independent, who can free from their husbands’ will.

The basic **theme** of the story is joy of independence, burden of being married, struggle for independence, women’s rights. The main idea is to show that marriage limits the realization of a young woman, her will and desires. The author’s message is for women to search for their self-realization before it’s too late, for them to realize their need for independence, even if it’ll break the marriage.

The events described happen in a house, but **the setting** isn’t described properly, as we don’t know what the town is. There are descriptions of Louise Mallard’s, the main protagonist’s, room: “There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair.” But the season of the year is stated, it’s early spring: “She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.” What’s more, the nature in some way reflects her emotions: “There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.” Those patches of blue sky are the indicators of hope, the signs of her freedom, which become evident from the protagonist’s meditations.

From the point of view of **presentation** the text is the 3d person narrative, which sounds more objective: “She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair.”; “Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission.” But there are numerous cases of represented speech in the text, which make it more subjective: “What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name.” “What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!”

In terms of the **contextual type**, the text is written mostly as narration with the elements of description (“She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength.”; “She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares.”), dialogue ("Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." "Go away. I am not making myself ill."); the protagonist’s speech ("Free! Body and soul free!"). Narration informs the reader of a sequence of events and is rather dynamic, but the most development of events happen inside the main character: at first Louise Mallard gets to know that her husband dies in “a railroad disaster”, than she astonished and puzzled, until she realizes that she is finally free, but suddenly her husband arrives alive and healthy, but Louise’s heart cannot overcome both the joy of her husband’s death and the sorrow of his return.

From the point of view of **composition** the short story is very interesting, as the events analyzed cover only one hour in the life of the protagonist Louise Mallard. Paragraphs are short and primarily consist of only 2-3 sentences. Traditional introduction and exposition are omitted in the short story, making the reader immerse in the reading of it from the first lines. The author uses special technique to circle the story: at the beginning “a heart trouble” of Mrs. Mallard is mentioned, while in the end her “heart disease” proves to be the reason of her unexpected death. Nevertheless, the first paragraph of the story can be viewed as the exposition, because the protagonist of the story is introduced: “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.” Then comes the development of events, which are dedicated to the inner development of the protagonist, her revelations and affections. The climax of the story is unexpectedly found almost at the very beginning of the story, when Mrs Mallard realizes her freedom and independence from her husband: “There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully…. Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously…. What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being! "Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.” Almost five paragraphs are dedicated to the climax, after which comes the denouement, when Mrs. Mallard realizes her opportunities in the following years: “Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own.” But the end of the story is unexpected and another sharp moment takes place, when Mr. Mallard appears to be alive: “He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.” Then comes another denouement, when the reader learns why Josephine is crying: “When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease--of the joy that kills.” The end of the story is clear cut, leaving much space for further consideration.

**The main character** of the story under analysis is Louise Mallard, whom we meet at the beginning of the novel: “Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.” We get to know that she has serious heart problems, which later prove to be the reason of her unexpected death: “When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease--of the joy that kills.” There cases of direct characterization of her: “She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength.” But besides the fact of poor health and her appearance, the vast description of the protagonist is provided through indirect characterization.

In the story there is no background information and flashbacks about the life of the protagonists, only the events which happen in a 24-hour period take place. When Mr. Mallard learns about her husband’s death she reacts with an obvious grief: “She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.” Then she goes to her room and observes the nature out of her window, patches of blue sky she sees seem to reflect her inner condition: “There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window… But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.” Those patches of blue sky are very symbolic; they symbolize the light of freedom, which now seems to be possible for the main character: “Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will--as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.” She gradually becomes more and more agitated, repetition of the word “free” renders her condition of excitement: “She said it over and over under the breath: "free, free, free!" Her inner condition is heightened by her physical condition: “The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.” It’s evident that she loves of husband, but still the fact of her death releases her and makes her feel free and happy: “She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead.” She is a woman of her age, who obedient and dutiful, who live for their husband, and who nothing more than an addition to their husbands: “There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature.” But no longer she will be such a woman, her soul and her body will free from her husband’s possession, though there were moment of joy in their family life: “And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!” She becomes more and more agitated about her future perspectives, constant repetitions are the indicators of her high spirits: “Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own.” She feels herself victorious, a simile with a goddess of Victory is used to render her emotions: “There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory.” At the sight of her newly alive husband, her heart cannot stand it. When Brently returns, he unwittingly yanks Louise’s independence away from her, putting it once again out of her reach. The forbidden joy disappears as quickly as it came, but the taste of it is enough to kill her. The character of Mrs. Mallard is not static, her character develops within a single hour.

There are other characters in the story, for example, Mrs. Mallard’s sister – Josephine. She cares greatly of her sister: “Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." At the end she is greatly wounded by the death of Mrs. Mallard: “He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry.” What’s more, it is she, who tells about Mr. Mallard death to Mrs.Mallard, she tries to put it as gentle as possible in order not to hurt her sister’s feelings: “It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing.”

Another character is her husband’s friend Richard, who is first to get to know about the accident: “It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He also communicates Mr.Mallard’s death to Mrs. Mallard, but he isn’t so gentle: “had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.”

The author employs primarily bookish **vocabulary** to communicate the ideas to the reader: “veiled hints”; “half concealing”; “a physical exhaustion”; “a suspension of intelligent thought”, “subtle and elusive”. Such vocabulary create extremely poetic atmosphere in the short story. Still cases of colloquial vocabulary are found in the dialogues, the sentences are primarily elliptical: “"Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." "Go away. I am not making myself ill."

In order to portray the characters and describe the setting vividly and convincingly the author of the analyzed story resorts to various **expressive means** and **syntactic devices**. Lexical devices are very diverse in the text. **Epithets** are found heavily in the text and perform various functions: describe the setting (“a comfortable, roomy armchair”; “The delicious breath of rain”); render the change in the moral and physical condition of the protagonist (“veiled hints”; “a paralyzed inability”, “sudden, wild abandonment”, “a monstrous joy”; “clear and exalted perception”; “that bitter moment”; “the strongest impulse of her being!”; “a feverish triumph”); describe Mrs. Mallard directly (“a fair, calm face”; “a dull stare”; “The vacant stare”; “keen and bright” (eyes); describe Mr. Mallard (“the kind, tender hands”; “fixed and gray and dead” (face); render the private will of Louise Mallard (“powerful will”; “blind persistence”; “a private will”).

**Metaphors** perform important functions in the story. The following metaphors show that everyone cares of Mrs. Mallard and doesn’t want to hurt her: “great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death”; “and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message”. Initially Mrs. Mallard is overwhelmed and stunned by the news and her husband’s death: “When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone”; “pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul” (with simile). But then she begins to realize bit by bit that much more pleasant future is unclosing before her eyes: “The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her faintly”; “There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.” Her physical condition reflects her inner thoughts and feelings: “a sob came up into her throat and shook her”; “lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength.” A set of metaphors to describe her inner condition, a significant change in her life: “her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.; little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips”; " The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes”; “Her pulses beat fast”; “the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body” (her physical condition echoes her state of emotions). Now she realizes distinctly that the burden of marriage has gone and that she is free from any pressures: “But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.” The highest moment of triumph of her independence is shown in the metaphor: “No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.”

**Similes** are very bright: “She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance.” – such description of her provides more grounds for viewing Mrs. Mallard as not a generalized image of a woman of her age, but a new one, more independent and more feministic. She is not devastated by the fact of her husband’s death, “except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.” The crime of thought is mentioned, her thoughts of rebel were unknown at that time: “A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.” The final feeling of triumph and of her independent future take possession of her: “she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory.”

Syntactical devices are also numerous in the story and are represented by various means. **Detachment** shows the real attitude of Mrs. Mallard towards her husband: “And yet she had loved him--sometimes.” **Antithesis** is used to render the inner change in the main character: “There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself.”; “A kind intention or a cruel intention”; “And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not.”

Polysyndetic and asyndetic constructions are used to render the main character, the change inside of her. **Asyndeton: “**But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.” **Polysyndeton** (with enumeration, nominative sentences): **“**Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own.”

**Anaphoric structure** is found within the text, it makes the intention of Mrs.Mallard more prominent: “There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature.” **Epiphora:** “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.” (with antithesis)

**Emphatic structures** are common for the text, they give more prominence to the characteristic of the characters: “It was her sister Josephine who told her.”; “It was he who had been in the newspaper office” (her husband’s friend); “It was Brently Mallard who entered”. **Elliptical sentences** are characteristic of Mrs. Mallard speech “Free! Body and soul free!” and are heavily found in the dialogues: "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." "Go away. I am not making myself ill."

**Repetitions** are most striking and vivid in the text. Alone in her room, her heart races, and her whole body feels warm. She spreads her arms open, symbolically welcoming her new life. “Body and soul free!” she repeats to herself, a statement that shows how total her new independence really is for her. Only when Brently walks in does her “heart trouble” reappear, and this trouble is so acute that it kills her. The irony of the ending is that Louise doesn’t die of joy as the doctors claim but actually from the *loss* of joy. **Ring repetition:** “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door.”

To cut the long story short, the short story by Kate Chopin impressed me greatly. It was greatly unconventional for that time and raised such forbidden themes as joy of independence, the burden of marriage and feminism. The end of the story is suggestive and leaves much space for consideration. It's really too bad that Mrs. Mallard realizes that she needs freedom only shortly before she dies. Her excitement and sense of liberation only last a little while. Of course, they're such powerful feelings, that maybe they wouldn't have lasted much longer anyway. It's deeply ironic that Mrs. Mallard's life ends up being violently shortened only moments after her heartfelt prayer that "life might be long".

In conclusion, Kate Chopin is a brilliant author, who uses various stylistic devices, which help to render the characters and the main themes vividly and convincingly. The most vivid ones are repetitions, similes, metaphors, emphatic constructions, epithets and so on. This story is definitely worth reading.