

Suppression of women from a woman perspective

It is a fact that throughout history, women have been looked down upon by society. For a long time, they we weren't even allowed to think, to feel, to express themselves. Women were often told what to do, what to wear, and how to act. They were perceived as fragile and were shown little respect. Furthermore, they were treated inferior to men and weren't given the opportunity to advance. Not until more recently has this gap between the sexes been reduced, thanks to crusaders who championed this phenomenon.

Sensitive to the unfair bias that existed authors like Kate Chopin chose to write stories and plays that depicted this issue in hopes of inspiring others to see the injustice that prevailed. Most of her fiction is set in Louisiana and most of her best-known work focuses on the lives of sensitive, intelligent women. Kate Chopin was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1850, a time when death from disease was prevalent and society was highly conservative. After her father was killed in a train wreck when the author was five years old, she resided in her house with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, all of whom were widows and rebellious in their outlook on life. Consequently, it is no wonder that she grew up to be independent herself. And, when her husband of fifteen years, Oscar Chopin, from Louisiana, died from typhoid fever, she took on the responsibility of rearing her young six boys by herself without getting remarried and moved back home to St. Louis (Toth). Her newfound spirit of independent thinking is reflected in her three short stories "The Story of an Hour," "Desiree's Baby," and "The Storm." Her classic style and her eloquent writing still continues to make an impact on the many concerns that still prevail when it comes to women. Furthermore, her graceful, poetic description of women's lives makes her a favorite for many readers around the globe.

"The Storm" for instance is a story of unleashed passion and its instinctual existence. It argues against the "double-standard" that favors males and sexual promiscuity. It wasn't published until many years later, because Chopin herself understood that not editor at the time would public a work as sexually explicit as this one was. The story develops in the late nineteenth century in Louisiana, during the storm of a Hurricane. It all starts with Bobinot and Bibi getting stuck at Friedheimer's store during the storm while running some errands. The wife in the story Calixta, then finds herself alone back home securing the house to avoid the upcoming storm from getting inside the house. Coincidentally Alice, an old boyfriend of the woman passes near the house and asks her to please give him shelter, to which she replied yes. Once inside the house the strong winds, the harsh lightning start bringing fear to Calixta. In addition, the rush of emotions in conjunction with the dark, intimate vibe of the place prompts Calixta and Alice to commemorate the days in which they were together and in love. "Do you remember-

enjoys the moment as if the present is the only thing that matters. Alice, on his part enjoys the desire and passion he hasn't experience in a while. "The generous abundance of her passion, without guile or trickery, was like a white flame which penetrated and found response in depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached" (11:73). After the storm passes, no sense of regret is experienced by Calixta whatsoever. In a time in which women were expected to be loyal and faithful, we see Calixta, a independent woman that doesn't feels regrets towards her actions as long as her happiness is ensured. Once her husband and son come back she continues her daily life of a married woman without even thinking for once on the immorality of her actions. "Bobinet and Bibi began to relax and enjoy themselves, and when the three seated themselves at the table they laughed much and so loud that anyone might have heard them as far away as Laballiere" (11:74). Also, Alice goes back home with not even one ounce of shame in his body. He writes to his wife which happens to be out of town, for her to come back in a month if she wishes. Is there that we learned Alice's wife herself is victim of society and its stigma, for which she is in an unhappy marriage too, she is perhaps craving for a love adventure of her own. "As for Clarisse, she was charmed upon receiving her husband's letter...and the first free breath since her marriage seemed to restore the pleasant liberty of her maiden days. Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was willing to forego for a while" (V:75). With this story Chopin highlighted the sad reality of many married woman at the time, for which sexuality and pleasure were a taboo and of no importance. For Chopin sexuality should be a healthy and beautiful experience to be enjoyed and experienced by every woman inside or outside marriage. Her desire is for us to see that life should be taken as it comes, and that the emphasis should be more on the momentary joy of the amoral cosmic force.

"The story of an Hour" gives a face to generalized issues women were experienced at the time. Many women were would find themselves in an oppressive marriage just for the sake of meeting society standards, for which a woman should be faithful and always there for her husband. Furthermore, it was expected for a woman to disregard, her own feelings, ideals, aspirations and desires in order to fulfill her husband own desires. Because society not only approved of this behavior but also encouraged it, women would find themselves feeling trapped and insignificant in their daily lives. We learned from the story that Mrs. Mallard's husband had just perished in a terrible accident at work. Due to Louise weak health friends and family decided to deliver the news as gently as possible to avoid causing her any pain. "Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her the news of her husband's death" (45). [railroad disaster—Brentley Mallard's name led the list of victims.] However, after being made aware of her husband luck, she proceeds to cry uncontrollably for his lost as expected; however, she realizes later these tears are no longer of sadness, but of joy. "There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully.... She was beginning to realize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will..." (46). Although Louise was alone on her room having all these mixed feelings toward the passing of her husband, she

love turned slowly into hate. In a twisted ironic way, the end of Mr. Mallard's life became the beginning of Mrs. Mallard's. "Free, free, free, free! ... There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself" (46). Now she was able to fulfill her dreams and put herself first. Extreme circumstances gave Louise a taste of this forbidden fruit called freedom, there was no way she would now let go of it, for which life was absolutely hers. She even turns to prayer, asking God to give her many years to come for her to enjoy this new life that was now fast approaching. "Free! Body and soul free! she kept whispering." Her sister Josephine, thinking the motive of her seclusion was due to the heartache of Louise' husband passing tried to make her way in the room. Louise insisted she was fine and assured her sister she was no making herself ill. Little do her sister knew that instead Josephine was vibrating with excitement and preparing for a future full of hope. "Go away. I am not making myself ill." No, she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window" (47). In a turn of events, then it is revealed that Brently Mallard is well and alive. He then unwittingly yanks Louise's independence away from her, and out of her reach. "When the doctors came they said she died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (47). The forbidden joy disappears as quickly as it came, but the taste of it is enough to kill her. With the ending of the story Chopin intends to reveal the oppressiveness present on all marriages, even going as far as suggesting marriage's nature is to rob people of their independence. Furthermore, she suggests that the impact marriage as society has dictated is of negative impact in people's lives.

"Desiree's Baby" shows the suppression of women by society, but also the impact race would have in a person's life. The story takes place in Louisiana before the American Civil War. The main character of the story is Desiree, a woman that was abandoned at a very early age by her parents, but that luckily found grace at the eyes of Madame Valmonde, a woman of good name between the rich people of town. Desiree's beauty and sweetness comes to the attention of Armand Aubigny, a wealthy man and owner of L'Abri. Even though he knows Desiree since were kids, one day when Desiree is standing against the stone pillar, Armand suddenly falls in love with her. Seeing how serious Armand is on marrying Desiree, Monsieur Valmonde suggests to Armand that it would be appropriate to investigate Desiree's origins. But Armand is so blind by the love he has for Desiree that he decides not to pay attention to Desiree's ancestors, and he also don't mind she lacks a family name of her own. Instead he insists he will give her a perfectly good one, his. Once married, a fruit of their love is created and later born "a strong little baby boy. With the birth of Desiree's baby, a shadow of despair and sadness is also born. It is made evident with the passing of the time that the baby's looks are far different from a white person and more similar to the slaves they have at the plantation. It is when people start noticing Desiree's baby complexion that Desiree's "perfect" life starts to fall apart. Her condition of being a woman makes her vulnerable to the situation which results in her getting the blame for the tainted lineage. "My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me I am not white. For God's sake tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy, and live" (66). Suddenly, we see love becoming insignificant to Armand once it is obvious he is in an interracial relationship. Because Society has dictated is an ungodly act and should never happen under any

doing so, she can help but to feel abandoned, judged, and guilty for bringing dishonor and shame to Armand's name. She makes a last effort to gain her husband's attention back. Perhaps waiting for a miracle, she tells him she is going back to her mom's if he wants to. Armand then replies yes with coldness and indifference, which destroys Desiree. She leaves with her baby, never arriving to Madame Valmonde's house. Unable to change Armand's cold heart towards her and her baby, Desiree no longer finds a purpose on continuing leaving, for which he decides to end her life. It is at the end of the story, while Armand is burning all the love letters Desiree once wrote him, that we learn is Armand the one to blame for his baby black features and not Desiree. [In a note found by Armand from Armand's mother to his father] "But above all," she wrote, "I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery" (66). Although he is a product of a professed love between two races, Armand is unable to understand and experience true love like his parents. His desire to be respected and love by the ones around him consumes and destroys his marriage. He tells prisoner to his desire to please society for which in the end, he is unable to appreciate the true love Desiree professes to him, even more, he is unable to experience love whatsoever. Chopin intentions with this story was to bring to light the extreme gap that existed between women and men, in which a woman would be also the one to carry the blame, and the one to sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband. Also, Chopin wanted to bring attention to the fact that interracial relationships do happen and should be understood and dealt with humanely for the sake of love.

With "Story of an hour", Desiree's baby" and "The Storm", Chopin covers several issues woman encountered at the time. A woman ahead of her time, she understood the importance on giving women the opportunity to succeed and to dream. In a simple, yet rich narrative she managed to bring to light the suppression women were subjected to by their husbands, friends and Society. Even more, she was able to put a face to topics such as racism, true love, sexuality, provoking empathy from her readers toward the issues a woman encountered in these areas. Her narrative continues to impact the modern generation and is a successful tool for the women cause. Although today women have gained respect and have more opportunities, there is still a long way to go before the gender difference is eradicated once and for all. Because women are the motor that makes possible for our Society to function, it is important the fight continues. Without forgetting were have we come from, we must proceed to the ultimate goal. It is time we women get the appreciation and respect we deserved.

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## Females in Conflict

For a long time, women hid in the shadow of the men around her. Society taught them since they were little girls that their main goal was to accomplish ultimate beauty as well as to look fragile. Furthermore, there were expected to be contempt with being a good wife and mother, and to please their husbands. As a result, many women found themselves with a disjunctive: To be smart and independent but criticized or to act dumb and do their expected part while being praised and adored. Although women were diminished and minimized, there were still many people that understood otherwise. Sensitive to the unfair bias women were subjected to, Henrik Ibsen, chose to write a play to illustrate the inequality existent between sexes, as well as the conflict present in a woman's life due to her wanting to be different.

Henrik Ibsen was born in 1828, in Victorian Norway. As a child, Ibsen showed little sign of the theatrical genius he would become. At eight years of age, his family was thrown into poverty, for which they went to live to a farm near town. It was there that Ibsen spent his time reading and were the love for writing was born. By the age of fifteen he started writing poetry and painting. He went later in life to Italy and then Germany. It was in Germany, at the end of the nineteenth century, that he wrote his more famous play *A Doll's House*. *A Doll's House* utilizes the format of a playwright to convey evolving characters how different political and social messages. When analyzing *A Doll House's* protagonist, Nora, her interactions with the other characters depicts both indirect and direct social and political commentaries on the treatment of women in the early nineteenth century, especially in its treatment of male dominance over women and the desire of women to be independent thinkers deserving of respect. This is depicted through Nora's treatment by both her husband and father, her dealings with Krogstad, and in her contrast with her friend Christine.

In "*A Doll's House*" Ibsen utilizes realism by portraying a normal family daily activity, resulting in him engaging the audience by reflecting their daily lives. The story takes place during the Holidays. There is the Christmas spirit present in the Helmer's home. Nora, on her wife role, maintains the house and takes care of the kids, as expected, while his husband works to provide for the family at the bank. At first Nora seems a little frivolous. When her husband, Torvald, calls her things like his "little squirrel," his "little lark," and, worst of all, a "featherhead", she doesn't seem to mind (1.5-1.16). In fact, she seems to enjoy and even play into it. She behaves in a childish way to get attention from all the people around her. After all, since little that's the way she was told to projected herself by everyone, starting by her father who will always called her his doll-child. Although she portrays herself as a spendthrift and is not bother by others thinking she doesn't now the value of money, we later learn she is indeed a very rational woman, completely opposite to what she lets others believe. Not only she understands value of money but has been able to successfully save some to pay back a secret debt she got into years before. Using his dead father's name Nora asked the bank for a loan to give Torvald who was very ill, a lifesaving

secret to light. Torvald's wife actions are fueled by a more noble act. In a society that doesn't forgive or forget he is trying to raise his kids and to gain respect back from the community. And is that since he was caught in a forgery scheme years ago, he is to everyone a nasty, terrible human being. Although with his non-stopping actions he is causing Nora terrible stress and pain, at all moments he speaks to her in a very courteous manner. Perhaps, one of the reason he feels compelled to blackmail Nora is due to her being able to understand his thrive; after all Nora should understand him since she committed the exact crime.

By being able to maintain her role of a good wife and mother while being pressured, Nora once again shows her tenacity and courage. She is not a regular woman, she is capable and very intelligent, qualities that only a man should have. Her husband however, treats her like another child in the house and not like a wife. He calls her silly names and is always scolding her for committing childish acts such as eating candles or spending too much money. For Trovald it seems like the more fragile and childish Nora acts, the more exciting he finds their relationship, it gives him the opportunity to be the all-knowing provider. He says things to her such as, "My frightened little singing-bird. [...] I have broad wings to shelter you under. [...] I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws." (3.257). For Trovald his wife is no more than his doll to use, show and move around. At first, we see Nora doesn't seem to mind, perhaps because is the correct way a woman should behave and should be treated according to society. This sickening, frivolous marriage she is in is the only way of love she has ever known. Nevertheless, she chooses to hide her true self in the lies created by both her and her husband as if by doing so her marriage can prevail intact and strong. Nora tries repeatedly to convince Trovald of giving Krostag his old position at the bank in hopes of keeping her secret hidden a little longer. Trovald refuses to do what his wife suggests, as if it would make him less of a man. This shows the little he thinks of Nora as an individual, given that the thought of going by what his wife says angers him deeply. Unable to change her husband's mind, Nora meets with the reality of her situation. Finally, Trovald finds out Nora's secret. Instead of seeing the true love his wife has shown him by going against the law to save his life, he flips out on her and starts telling her all kinds of terrible things. For him his pride and the way people think of him is so important that it stops him from seeing the worth of Nora and how lucky he is to have her by his side. For Nora, her husband's reaction is a low blow to her stomach, an awakening to the realization that the marriage has been no more than a well calculated act put on to please the outside people. She realizes she is no more than an object to her husband, and that there been all this time strangers to each other. Even though in a change of heart Krostag chooses to end the blackmailing, the damage has been done in the Helmer household.

Also, worth mentioning is the contrast existent between the two feminine characters in the play. In one side we see Christine, Nora's friend from childhood. She is a tough, smart, independent woman, capable of thinking that has been through a lot. The necessity she has experienced in life has taught her to find her place in a world ruled by man. Christine knows what sacrifice is, after all she sacrifice herself by marrying an respectable business man in order to provide for her mom and brothers; by doing this selfless act she gave up her love for Krostad , taking away from her the possibility of

scenarios, they are alike in the sense that both are strong minded individuals with a plans and desires of their own. Furthermore, they both have lived in the name of love to people dear to them. By the end of the play however we see how in their search for happiness both women find themselves in the other woman shoes. While Nora decides to leave everything behind, even her kids to be able to find herself, and her husband has taught her. Christine however, chooses with open arms to be a mother and a wife. She seems not bother at all by the fact that by doing so she is losing her independence. Perhaps because unlike Nora's marriage, Christine is able to experience a relationship in which both parts work together and compromise, the way a marriage should be.

With "A Doll's house, Ibsen brings to the spotlight the importance of women from the household to Society. With a realistic writing he delivers a firm statement, that society should allow women to be independent, and that women should free themselves from the restrictions that society places on them. At a time in which women were encouraged to hid behind their husband, Ibsen encouraged them to emancipate themselves and fight for what they believe in, without paying attention to the criticism they perhaps could receive. Although women are seen today very different from the Victorian times, there still so much that needs to be done. A man ahead of his time, he is considered a pioneer in the fight for women rights. Furthermore, with his writing he has serve as an example and still continues to be a paradigm and an inspiration to many writers. Thanks to people like Ibsen that weren't afraid to go against Society, women today are able to experience many benefits and rights. Still there's more it can be done, for which the fight must continue.

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