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Unveiling the Feminine Voice in Kate Chopin's Selected Stories

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Abstract

This paper examines the manifestation of the feminine voice in Kate Chopin's three significant short stories: "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Woman," and "A Pair of Silk Stockings." The study seeks to reveal the challenges and issues faced by women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as illustrated in Chopin's works. It further explores how these narratives highlight societal constraints and advocate for women's liberation. Guided by the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Elaine Showalter, which focus on the social construction of gender and the necessity for women to surpass their assigned roles, the analysis underscores the problems of patriarchal dominance, restricted autonomy, and societal expectations imposed on women. The study demonstrates how Chopin critiques the rigid gender norms of her era and calls for women's empowerment. It emphasizes Chopin's profound impact on representing women's experiences and the ongoing relevance of her work in contemporary discussions on gender equality and women's rights.

Key Words: Feminine, Liberation, Voice, Gender norms, Empowerment, Identity, Patriarchy

Kate Chopin, a prominent American author of the late 19th century, is celebrated for her exploration of women's experiences and struggles within a patriarchal society. In her short stories, "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Woman," and "A Pair of Silk Stockings," Chopin provides thoughtful portrayals of the female perspective emphasizing the restrictions and challenges experienced by women during her era. This study aims to analyze these three works through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir's and Elaine Showalter feminist theory, investigating how

Chopin's narratives challenge prevailing gender norms and advocate for women's liberation.

Drawing from Simone de Beauvoir's and Elaine Showalter's understanding of feminism, this study hypothesizes that Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Woman," and "A Pair of Silk Stockings" collectively convey a strong feminine voice that confronts societal expectations and concerns. Through the portrayal of female characters, Chopin skillfully exposes the injustices faced by women and highlights their desire for autonomy and self-fulfillment. By immersing oneself in the analysis of these three stories, expect to reveal how Chopin's voice on femininity not only serve as a critique of the gender inequalities of the time but also offer a catalyst for understanding and advocating for women's rights.

Elaine Showalter, a prominent feminist literary critic, has contributed various texts and theories to the field of literature and gender studies. One of her seminal works is *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, published in 1979. This essay outlines her approach to feminist literary criticism, emphasizing the need to analyze literature through the perspectives of women's experiences, voices, and roles in society. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir, a groundbreaking French feminist philosopher and writer, has made significant contributions to the study of gender and women's liberation. Her seminal work, *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, is the foundation for modern feminist theory. De Beauvoir's perspective emphasizes the social construction of gender and the ways in which women are marginalized and oppressed within patriarchal societies. This study aims to employ de Beauvoir's and Elaine Showalter feminist theory as a theoretical framework to examine the feminine voice in Kate Chopin's short stories, "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Woman," and "A Pair of Silk Stockings."

Showalter's theory focuses on examining literature through the lens of gender roles, societal expectations, and the portrayal of women characters. By applying Showalter's feminist criticism, one can explore how Chopin's narratives challenge traditional gender roles, reveal the constraints women face, and reflect broader feminist themes such as autonomy and identity, ultimately offering a deeper understanding of the female experience and resistance in a patriarchal society. Similarly, de Beauvoir's theory is rooted in the concept of "The Other," which asserts that women have historically been relegated to a subordinate position in society. She argues that patriarchal systems enforce traditional gender roles and perpetuate the notion that women exist solely in relation to men. De Beauvoir's feminist theory, therefore, provides a useful lens through which to analyze Chopin's works as it encourages a critical examination of the societal constraints imposed on women and their struggle for autonomy and self-realization. By exploring the feminine voice in the selected short stories, this thesis aims to reveal how Chopin engages with de Beauvoir's and Showalter's ideas, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the feminist themes within her works and their significance in challenging prevailing gender norms.

Chopin, an American writer of the late 19th century, is known for her bold portrayal of women's lives and their struggles against societal expectations. Chopin's works often explore themes of female agency, liberation, and the constraints of the patriarchal society in which her characters live. In "The Story of an Hour," published in 1894, Chopin delves into the life of Louise Mallard, a woman who experiences a conflicting mix of emotions when she learns of her husband's death. "A Respectable Women" published in 1894 explores the inner thoughts and emotions of a married woman named Mrs. Baroda. "A Pair of Silk Stockings," published in 1897, centers

around a woman named Mrs. Sommers who, after a windfall, indulges in the simple pleasures she had long been denied.

These three stories provide insight into the complexities of women's lives during the late 19th century and highlight the tensions between individual desires and societal expectations. Chopin's narrative voice invites readers to question the limitations placed on women and challenges traditional notions of female roles and relationships. With their exploration of themes such as independence, autonomy, and the pursuit of personal fulfillment, these works have become important contributions to the feminist canon and continue to resonate with readers today.

In "The Story of an Hour," the central character, Louise Mallard, receives the devastating news of her husband's death. Emotionally overwhelmed, Louise retreats to her room where she undergoes a gradual transformation in her feelings. Unexpectedly, she begins to experience a sense of liberation and joy, realizing that her husband's demise signifies newfound freedom for herself. This realization of independence brings about a range of conflicting emotions for Louise, as she navigates the complexities of her thoughts and desires in the wake of her husband's passing. The joy that Louise feels upon realizing the possibilities of a life without her husband is short-lived, as she discovers that he is actually alive. This sudden revelation shocks her to the point that she ultimately succumbs to death. The doctor in the story attributes her demise to heart disease, specifically "of the joy that kills." Through this narrative, the story conveys a message about the repression of women in a male-dominated society during the late 19th century. Women during that time were expected to fulfill traditional roles such as managing the household, cooking, and raising children, with limited opportunities for personal fulfillment or self-expression.

“The Story of an Hour” implies that Mrs. Mallard's husband, like many men of his time, exerted dominance and control over her life.

Similarly, Chopin crafted the story “A Respectable Women” which explores the inner thoughts and emotions of a married woman named Mrs. Baroda as she grapples with her unexpected feelings towards a family friend. The story is set in the late 19th century and revolves around Mrs. Baroda, a woman who considers herself to be a respectable and proper wife. Her husband, Gaston, invites a friend named Gouvernail to stay at their plantation for a few weeks. As Gouvernail settles into the household, Mrs. Baroda finds herself drawn to him in a way that surprises and disturbs her. As the story unfolds, Mrs. Baroda’s internal conflict intensifies. She begins to recognize the stirrings of attraction and desire for Gouvernail, emotions that challenge her self-perception as a respectable and devoted wife. She struggles to reconcile her feelings with her sense of duty and societal expectations. Despite her internal turmoil, Mrs. Baroda maintains a facade of normalcy. She engages in conversations with Gouvernail, often finding herself captivated by his intellect and charm. However, she becomes increasingly aware of the potential consequences of her emotions and desires. She fears that her feelings might compromise her marriage and reputation. In the end, it explores the complexities of desire, societal expectations, and the tension between personal feelings and social norms. Mrs. Baroda’s internal struggle provides insight into the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society, where their own desires and emotions could be at odds with the roles they were expected to fulfill. The story is a reflection of Kate Chopin’s exploration of women’s inner lives and the conflicts they experienced in navigating their individuality within the constraints of societal expectations. “A Respectable Woman” offers a glimpse into

the nuanced emotional landscape of its female protagonist and highlights the complexities of the feminine experience during that era.

Finally, “A Pair of Silk Stockings” centers on the character of Mrs. Sommers. When she unexpectedly finds herself with a spare fifteen dollars, she immediately begins contemplating how she can wisely spend the money, particularly on her children’s needs. While her intentions are sensible and selfless, her subconscious desires have a different agenda. Mrs. Sommers unconsciously finds herself at a department store, where she succumbs to the pleasure of purchasing silk stockings. Following this impromptu shopping spree, hunger strikes, and she decides to have a simple lunch. However, her appetite leads her to indulge in a lavish, multi-course meal, complete with dessert, wine, and coffee. As she relishes in the delicious food, Mrs. Sommers experiences a sense of satisfaction and contentment that she hasn’t felt in a long time. Mrs. Sommers becomes intrigued by a theater flyer and resolves to spend the remaining money on attending a movie. During the film, she shares chocolates with another moviegoer, adding to her enjoyment. Once the movie concludes, Mrs. Sommers boards a train, reluctant to return home and confront the harsh realities of her life. This tale highlights the universal longing for freedom and unrestricted living. It portrays a woman’s yearning for personal growth, independence, self-identity, and fulfillment. By illustrating Mrs. Sommers’ desires and actions, Chopin advocates for the liberation of women from traditional societal roles.

Chopin’s short stories often explore themes of women’s search for their true selves, self-discovery, and freedom. In “The Story of an Hour,” a woman realizes her newfound freedom and releases from her role as a wife when she learns of her husband’s death. Similarly, in “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” the main character

undergoes personal development. Chopin was an influential writer during the era of realism, a time when societal norms placed men in dominant positions. However, Chopin challenged this status quo and advocated for women's rights. Her stories were written in the 19th century, a time when women had limited rights and were expected to conform to the image of a loving wife. Any desires or thoughts differing from this image were considered selfish, and women were expected to prioritize their husbands' happiness. Chopin courageously pushed the boundaries of societal expectations, drawing inspiration from influential women in her life. So, the study of feminine voice is necessary in Chopin's selected stories.

Chopin's stories have gained significant popularity and sparked extensive criticism. In the 19th century, women were oppressed in various ways by patriarchy, including economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. Traditionally, women were expected to be submissive in patriarchal societies. Feminism arose as a response to the injustice faced by women, aiming to raise awareness and advocate for their rights in modern society. Feminism challenges society's mistreatment of women by examining its causes and suggesting solutions, ultimately promoting women's liberation. Prior to the rise of feminist ideals, women were generally unaware of their rightful place in society. Critics have provided various perspectives on Chopin's stories, addressing different issues and analyzing them through various theories and research.

In Lawrence I. Berkove's article "Fatal Self-Assertion in Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," the author examines the theme of self-assertion and its tragic consequences in the story. Berkove argues that Mrs. Mallard's desire for personal freedom and independence ultimately leads to her untimely death. However, Berkove also emphasizes the irony in Mrs. Mallard's exclamation. He notes that while she may

see her newfound freedom as liberating, it ultimately becomes a form of self-destruction. Berkove states that Mrs. Mallard's 'fatal self-assertion' is the driving force behind her demise. Furthermore, Berkove argues that;

Chopin uses symbolism to illustrate Mrs. Mallard's tragic fate. He points to the mention of an open window in the story, which represents Mrs. Mallard's desire to escape. Berkove suggests that the open window is a symbol of the dangers that lie outside of the domestic sphere for women, leading to Mrs. Mallard's untimely demise. (154)

Berkove's analysis highlights the tragic consequences of Mrs. Mallard's self-assertion. He emphasizes the irony in her desire for freedom and suggests that her pursuit of independence ultimately leads to her downfall.

Similarly, Negin Karami and Esmaeil Zohdi in their article "Kate Chopin's The Story of an Hour: A Feminist Interpretation" delves into the empowerment of women and their struggle against strict social and traditional structures. Through the protagonist's journey, Chopin presents her feminist viewpoint and draws from her own experiences to depict the challenges faced by American women in their everyday lives. This article illustrates how women confront societal conventions that limit their freedom. The article also explores the tension between liberation and societal conformity in shaping women's identities. Writers highlights the importance of women taking control of their destinies and pursuing their desires. The story's depth lies in how women can achieve freedom by developing a strong sense of self. Women's desire for change motivates them to create new lives for themselves, breaking free from the oppression they have endured.

This story follows an unusual tale about female identity. It is an important story because in this way women and other members of society will have the

same functions, values, threats and as a result they will receive many forms of oppression. Here is a young woman called Louise Mallard who suffers from heart trouble and is told the news of her husband's death in a railway accident. This danger is visible and notable since the story twists around Louise Mallard preservation and everybody arranges security conditions to save her from any extreme grief. She will experience no more than a momentary change in her life and the woman has depression of being unable to focus on freedom and her circumstance is a murderer to herself. (431)

This idea discusses the issue of female identity and societal oppression and also highlights that the story is unusual because it challenges the traditional roles and values assigned to women in society. By portraying Louise Mallard's reaction to her husband's death, the author explores the complexities of female identity and the restrictions placed on women's emotions and desires. Louise's initial grief seems predictable, but as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that her reaction is more nuanced. Points out that Louise's circumstance is a form of self-oppression. Despite having a chance to embrace her freedom, she falls into a state of depression and feels unable to focus on her own desires. The complex aspects of female identity and challenges prevailing cultural assumptions about women's roles is major focused.

The article "Prostitutes, Respectable Women, and Women from 'Outside': The Carl Grossmann Sexual Murder Case in Postwar Berlin" by Sace Elder examines a specific historical case, the Carl Grossmann sexual murder case, that took place in postwar Berlin. The focus is on the interactions and perceptions of various groups of women within the context of this case.

The social dynamics and perceptions surrounding women who were engaged in sex work, women who were considered respectable and adhered to societal

norms, and women who were seen as coming from 'outside' the established norms or boundaries ... Societal attitudes and legal systems treated women based on their identities and roles. (193)

This delves into how sex workers were perceived in postwar Berlin society. This could involve exploring the stigmatization, marginalization, and social biases that sex workers face. It might also discuss how their occupation was often associated with criminality and moral deviance. The concept of 'respectable' women refers to those who adhered to societal norms and were seen as upholding traditional values. The article could explore how these women were viewed in contrast to sex workers. It might touch on the pressures and expectations placed on them to maintain a certain image and conform to social standards of morality. 'Outside' includes women who did not fit neatly into the binary of sex workers and respectable women. They might have been marginalized due to their identities, such as being from different socio-economic backgrounds, having non-conforming sexual orientations, or being associated with countercultural movements. The article may discuss how these women were treated by society and how they navigated the challenges posed by their non-conformity. The case of the Carl Grossmann sexual murder serves as a contextual backdrop for examining how societal attitudes and legal structures impacted women of different identities and roles. The article might analyze how the legal response to the case reflected prevailing biases and prejudices, and how this influenced the outcomes for different groups of women involved.

Additionally, this article delves into how the case sheds light on the broader cultural, social, and legal changes happening in postwar Berlin and Germany at that time. The postwar period in Berlin marked a time of social upheaval and rebuilding. The article could delve into how changing perceptions of gender and sexuality

intersected with broader cultural shifts during this era. It might explore how societal norms were being redefined and renegotiated in the aftermath of World War II, and how women's roles were being reexamined. This might include discussions about perceptions of gender, sexuality, crime, and justice in the aftermath of World War II.

Moreover, Cristina Giorcelli's article "Sheer Luxury: Kate Chopin's 'A Pair of Silk Stockings'" focuses on its thematic exploration of luxury and its implications. It delves into how the story portrays the concept of luxury, both in terms of material possessions and personal experiences, and how this intersects with the protagonist's life and choices. Giorcelli delves into the story's central theme of luxury, dissecting the symbolic significance of the silk stockings as markers of indulgence and personal empowerment.

The protagonist's deliberate choice to embrace the symbols of luxury manifests autonomy and agency, fundamentally challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations ... consumerism is embedded within the narrative, as the protagonist's engagement with luxury raises questions about the delicate balance between personal desires and societal norms. (84)

The article discusses how the protagonist's actions in spending her money on indulgent items reflect her desires and longings. It might explore how these desires conflict with her societal roles and responsibilities. And also explore how the story critiques consumerism and the allure of material possessions. It might discuss how the protagonist's experience with luxury highlights the tension between personal desires and societal norms. It delves into how the story addresses gender norms and expectations, particularly in the context of late 19th-century society. It might discuss how the protagonist's actions challenge traditional notions of femininity and domesticity. Situating the story within its historical context, the article also examines

the interplay between gender norms and societal constructs prevalent in the late 19th century. By intricately weaving together these themes, the article illuminates how the protagonist's pursuit of luxury is a layered act that not only reflects her desires and aspirations but also constitutes a critique of broader cultural dynamics.

Finally, in Allen Stein's article "Kate Chopin's 'A Pair of Silk Stockings': The Marital Burden and the Lure of Consumerism," the narrative follows Mrs. Sommers, a woman of modest means, who unexpectedly comes into possession of a small sum of money. She decides to indulge herself by spending the money on luxurious items, such as a pair of silk stockings, rather than fulfilling her usual roles and responsibilities within her family. Stein's analysis likely delves into the concept of the 'marital burden' that Mrs. Sommers faces. This could involve discussing how her daily life is characterized by fulfilling the needs and expectations of her family members, often at the expense of her own desires and personal fulfillment. Stein asserts, "the newfound money presents Mrs. Sommers with a rare opportunity to escape these burdens temporarily and experience a taste of personal freedom and self-indulgence. Mrs. Sommers is drawn to the allure of material possessions and experiences, which offer her a brief respite from her domestic obligations" (361). In this sense Stein discusses how this portrayal of consumerism reflects the societal values and pressures of the time, highlighting the tension between personal desires and societal roles. Stein also underscores Chopin's critique of the limitations placed on women in the 19th century and the complex choices they faced. The story could be seen as an exploration of the conflict between fulfilling societal expectations and pursuing individual autonomy and pleasure.

In this manner, these three stories of Chopin, "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Woman" and "A Pair of Silk Stockings" have received numerous reviews

from various perspectives like female identity, the pursuit of independence, racial prejudices, the irony of desire, prevailing cultural assumptions and socio-cultural imposed. Departing from the critics and writers discussed above, this study claims that Kate Chopin's three stories present a powerful feminine perspective that challenges societal norms and addresses pressing issues of how Chopin's narratives challenge prevailing gender norms and advocate for women's liberation.

Simone de Beauvoir's feminist perspective focuses on the social construction of gender, women's liberation, and the concept of 'the Other'. A trailblazing French philosopher and author, de Beauvoir has left an indelible mark on the exploration of gender dynamics and the quest for women's empowerment. Her influential masterpiece, *The Second Sex*, stands as a cornerstone in the evolution of contemporary feminist theory. de Beauvoir's profound insights delve into the intricacies of how gender roles are shaped by societal norms, and how women find themselves relegated to the fringes while existing within patriarchal frameworks. At the heart of de Beauvoir's perspective lies a compelling analysis of the constructed nature of gender. She keenly dissects how society's expectations and preconceived notions about femininity and masculinity shape individuals' experiences and opportunities. This deconstruction serves as a powerful tool in comprehending the systematic biases that have historically confined women to subordinate positions.

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir illuminates the pervasive mechanisms of oppression that women encounter within patriarchal structures. Her writings delve into the ways in which women are relegated to secondary roles, often defined in relation to men. De Beauvoir's exploration of women as 'the Other' unveils the intricate web of societal attitudes that perpetuate their marginalization, limiting their autonomy and relegating them to predefined roles. Central to de Beauvoir's

philosophy is the call for women's liberation from these constraints. Her work resonates with the urgency of dismantling societal barriers that hinder women from realizing their full potential. She advocates for women to cast off the shackles of inherited norms and assert their agency in shaping their own destinies.

Elaine Showalter's feminist criticism, articulated in her essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, is a dual approach encompassing the 'feminist critique' and 'gynocriticism.' The feminist critique examines how literature portrays women, often revealing stereotypes and patriarchal biases in texts authored by men, while gynocriticism focuses on literature written by women, aiming to develop a distinct literary history and theoretical framework that highlights women's experiences and unique contributions. Showalter's approach emphasizes the importance of understanding literature through the lens of gender, challenging male-dominated literary traditions, and advocating for the recognition and appreciation of women's voices and perspectives in literary studies.

In essence, de Beauvoir's and Showalter's contributions are a clarion call for society to recognize and challenge the deeply ingrained biases that perpetuate gender inequalities and helps for women liberation. Through their insightful exploration of gender construction and women's subjugation, they ignited a transformative discourse that continues to inspire contemporary feminist thought and action. Their legacy endures as a beacon of hope, guiding the ongoing pursuit of gender equity and liberation.

Chopin stories are significant because they challenge gender norms and expectations of how women are supposed to respond to news of significance. Instead of exhibiting emotional paralysis, Louise's tears signify a complex emotional state, a mixture of grief, relief, and perhaps even a hint of something more profound. Going

through the text “The Story of an Hour” it is found that; “She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms” (11). This suggests that Louise’s reaction is distinct from what is often expected from women in similar situations. Chopin contrasts Louise’s response with a common stereotype, those women tend to be ‘paralyzed’ or emotionally overwhelmed when confronted with significant news. The phrase ‘paralyzed inability’ implies a sense of emotional shock and an inability to fully comprehend or process the news.

In her book *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir discusses the concept of ‘the Other,’ where women are often treated as the ‘second sex’ in a patriarchal society. She observes, “Women are defined in relation to men, and their roles and identities are often subordinated” (654). de Beauvoir argues that women have historically been oppressed and reduced to passive roles, which limits their agency and autonomy. “The protagonist’s emotional response in the story reflects the typical societal expectation of women’s emotional vulnerability and dependence on others” (Butler 37). Louise’s immediate weeping in her sister’s arms portrays her as a passive and emotionally fragile individual, aligned with de Beauvoir’s notion of women being treated as the ‘Other.’ This aligns with de Beauvoir’s argument that women are often reduced to emotional and dependent beings in a patriarchal society which should be taken out for their liberation.

The protagonist, Mrs. Louise Mallard, experiences a profound and conflicting emotional response upon learning about her husband’s supposed death. The intricate interplay between her emotions and societal expectations, providing insight into her complex inner world is shown in the story. “She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to

dismiss the suggestion as trivial” (16). Louise’s failure to ‘stop to ask’ reflects her visceral reaction that bypasses rationalization. This could be seen as a subversion of societal norms that often dictate how a widow should feel primarily sad or grieving. Chopin, through Louise's response, highlights the depth of human emotions that defy categorization. Whereas, ‘monstrous joy’ suggests an intense and overwhelming emotion, which may seem contradictory given the circumstances. The word ‘monstrous’ emphasizes the enormity and complexity of her feelings, indicating that her emotional response transcends conventional expectations. It also reveals Louise's introspection and a heightened state of awareness. Her ‘clear and exalted perception’ signifies a moment of clarity and self-awareness. This awareness allows her to reject the idea that her feelings are trivial or inconsequential. Here, the suggestion of triviality may refer to societal expectations that she should feel grief at her husband’s death.

In this manner, de Beauvoir’s feminist theory emphasizes the importance of women’s self-discovery and liberation from societal constraints. She discusses how women have historically been defined in relation to men, often unable to fully assert their individuality and desires due to societal expectations. De Beauvoir’s theory aligns with this portrayal, as she argues that “women should reject the notion of being passive and embrace their authentic emotions” (672). Louise’s ‘exalted perception’ and her ability to dismiss societal expectations of grieving for her husband align with de Beauvoir’s call for women to break free from the limitations imposed on them.

Sonia Kruks, in her article “Gender and Subjectivity: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism.” suggests that Louise’s internal conflict and emotions convey a distinct feminine perspective that defies societal expectations. Kruks observes that “Louise’s response to her husband's apparent demise is captivating,”

(97) indicating a nuanced blend of feelings that surpass conventional norms. Kruks finds Louise's reaction to the news of her husband's supposed death fascinating and multifaceted. Instead of conforming to the expected response of sorrow and despair, Louise experiences a complex array of emotions. This reaction includes not just grief but also a sense of liberation and profound introspection. The term 'captivating' suggests that Louise's response is not only unexpected but also deeply engaging, revealing a rich emotional landscape that challenges traditional views of how women should feel and behave in such situations. This reaction, according to Kruks, exemplifies the depth and intensity of Louise's emotional experience, marking a significant departure from the conventional, more subdued expressions of feminine emotion.

This physical reaction is often associated with intense emotions or heightened states of awareness. Chopin asserts: "Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body" (21). Louise's physical and physiological reactions to the news. The phrase 'pulses beat fast' conveys her heightened heartbeat, indicating a rush of adrenaline and excitement. The use of 'fast' underscores the urgency and intensity of her feelings. The mention of 'coursing blood' further emphasizes the visceral nature of Louise's response. The term 'coursing' suggests a rapid and dynamic flow of blood throughout her body. This not only underscores her emotional arousal but also symbolizes a sense of energy and life force surging through her. The phrase 'warmed and relaxed every inch of her body' carries a dual significance. The 'warming' of her body can be interpreted as a metaphor for the awakening of her senses and emotions. It's as if her body is responding to a newfound vitality or awakening from a state of emotional dormancy. The notion of her body 'relaxing' is equally significant. It suggests a release from

tension, constraint, or perhaps even a release from the emotional burdens she might have been carrying. This relaxation can also be seen as a metaphor for her emotional liberation, as if her body and spirit are unburdening themselves.

In context of Showalter's framework, this aligns with her focus on the gynocritical approach, which seeks to explore and validate women's experiences and expressions in literature. As Showalter writes, "women reject both imitation and protest two forms of dependency and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art, extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature" (24). It highlights how literature reflects the lived experiences of women, would appreciate the detailed physiological description that Chopin provides. Chopin uses Louise's physical reactions to symbolize a deeper emotional and existential release from the confines of patriarchal oppression. By examining the phrases, it would likely be interpreted as a metaphor for Louise's emotional and psychological liberation. The 'warming' suggests an awakening of her suppressed desires and individuality, while the 'relaxation' indicates a release from the societal and emotional constraints imposed on her. It highlights how Chopin uses these physical reactions to encapsulate the transformative experience of female emancipation, a theme central to feminist literary criticism. In summary, it is an example of how Chopin uses the physical and physiological responses of her female protagonist to convey deeper themes of awakening, liberation, and the struggle against patriarchal constraints, aligning with the feminist critique of exploring and validating women's experiences in literature.

In the context of de Beauvoir's feminist theory, this resonates with the idea of women embracing their physicality and sensuality. de Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of women reconnecting with their bodies and rejecting societal norms that

relegate them to passive or objectified roles. Louise's physical sensations can be seen as a reclaiming of her body as her own, free from the confines of societal expectations and gender roles. It aligns with de Beauvoir's call for "women assert their agency and reject the objectification of their bodies" (668). This encapsulates a central tenet of feminist theory, emphasizing the importance of women taking control of their own lives and bodies, while challenging societal norms that reduce them to mere objects for the gaze or use of others. "Self-control aligns with the core principles of feminist theory in advocating for women's autonomy, equality, and the dismantling of oppressive structures" (Heinamaa 33). By portraying Louise's physical sensations in such a vivid way, Chopin gives voice to the feminine experience, reflecting women to reject objectification and embrace their bodies as integral components of their identities. In "The Story of an Hour" Chopin presents moments that echo Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory, portraying a feminine voice that challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations. The text reveals a complex and authentic representation of Louise Mallard's emotions, desires, and physical sensations, aligning with de Beauvoir's call for women's liberation and self-expression.

Similarly, the protagonist of the story "A Respectable Woman" Mrs. Baroda's act of daydreaming about the jasmine and heliotrope carries deeper symbolic meaning, reflecting her desire for a sense of escape, imagination, and the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. "She liked to sit in the window and dream that the jasmine starred over the wall and the heliotrope bloomed just beneath. It was charming to have a young girl's fancy take such a flight over a commonplace" (13). It primarily reveals her longing for the beauty and serenity of nature. The imagery of the jasmine and heliotrope evokes a sense of tranquility and aesthetics. This act of daydreaming suggests that she seeks moments of respite and

enchantment amid her daily routine. It also highlights the protagonist's desire for something beyond the ordinary. The term 'young girl's fancy' implies a sense of innocence, imagination, and unburdened desire. By engaging in such daydreams, the protagonist is indirectly expressing her yearning for a form of escape from the constraints of her conventional roles as a wife and the expectations associated with being a 'respectable woman.'

Mrs. Baroda's words align with the concept of women embracing their desires and seeking moments of personal fulfillment. Her daydreaming reflects her yearning for authenticity and a break from the mundane. De Beauvoir encourages women to recognize and assert their agency, even in the smallest acts of imagination and self-expression. By daydreaming about the jasmine and heliotrope, the protagonist is asserting her agency in her own subtle way, reclaiming a sense of personal desire and freedom within the confines of her life. "Women transcend objectification and societal norms to embrace their own desires and aspirations" (841). This encapsulates the idea of empowering women to rise above being reduced to mere objects and to challenge traditional societal expectations that confine them. It advocates for women to embrace their unique desires and ambitions, fostering a sense of individuality and autonomy. By transcending objectification and societal norms, women can reclaim agency over their lives, making choices that reflect their true selves rather than conforming to prescribed roles, ultimately leading to self-discovery, empowerment, and fulfillment.

Mrs. Baroda's daydreaming represents her desire for escape and imagination within the confines of societal expectations. This act aligns with de Beauvoir's feminist theory by illustrating the importance of women recognizing their desires and asserting their agency. The passage captures the feminine voice's yearnings for

autonomy and moments of personal indulgence, offering insights into the protagonist's inner world and the tension between her inner desires and external roles. "The feminine voice portrays the inner yearnings and longings for moments of escape and indulgence" (Greene 13). The concept of the feminine voice captures the inner emotional yearnings and desires that women experience, often reflecting a longing for moments of respite and self-indulgence from the constraints of societal roles. This perspective sheds light on the complex interplay between personal aspirations and external expectations, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and addressing these inner longings within the broader context of women's lives. Her daydreaming represents her inner world, which is distinct from the roles she is expected to fulfill. This duality of her desires and societal expectations characterizes the struggles many women face in asserting their individuality within a society that often confines them to predefined roles.

Mrs. Baroda's lack of awareness regarding her husband's intentions serves as a lens through which the story explores themes of expectations, autonomy, and the complexities of marital relationships. This lack of insight into her husband's plans reveals not only a communication gap between them but also the societal norms and gender dynamics that influence their interactions. "She had not divined that he had resolved to stay at home that day and that he was in a mood to enjoy his wife's society" (28). It emphasizes the disconnect between the protagonist and her husband. The word 'divined' suggests that her ability to understand his intentions was not anticipated or considered. This points to a lack of effective communication between them, which can be attributed to the societal expectations of the time. To support this statement, Sace Elder, in his article "Prostitutes, Respectable Women, and Women from 'Outside': The Carl Grossmann Sexual Murder Case in Postwar Berlin" argues

that, “Gender norms often limit open communication within marital relationships. Women are often expected to fulfill domestic roles and cater to their husbands’ needs, while men’s desires and intentions are sometimes assumed rather than communicated explicitly” (205). The fact that the husband’s decision to stay home and enjoy his wife’s company is seen as a resolution implies that such an occurrence is not the norm. This speaks to the rigid gender roles that defined the era. Women were often expected to manage the home, while men pursued activities outside. Subtly underscores how her husband’s desire to spend time with her is seen as noteworthy, possibly due to a common assumption that men may not prioritize such interaction. It also hints at power dynamics within the marriage. The husband’s resolution and mood to enjoy his wife’s company suggest that he may hold a certain authority in deciding how their time is spent. The protagonist’s lack of awareness points to a potential lack of agency within her own life, where decisions about their time together might be made by her husband without her active input.

From Elaine Showalter’s perspective, it would be examined through the lens of how societal norms and gender roles constrain women’s experiences and expressions within literature. Showalter’s feminist criticism emphasizes the representation of women’s struggles with traditional roles and the need to validate their experiences. In the context of Chopin’s portrayal, it would likely focus on how the protagonist’s difficulties in maintaining autonomy while navigating her role as a wife reflect broader issues of female oppression and limited self-expression. This depiction reveals the restrictive impact of societal norms on women’s ability to assert their individuality and desires. As she argues in her feminist criticism, that “women literature is a means of challenging traditional gender roles and expanding the understanding of female experiences” (31). Showalter highlight how women’s

literature resonates with the emphasis on the importance of representing women's agency and resistance to societal constraints. The protagonist's struggle can be seen as a commentary on the broader challenge women face in reconciling their personal desires with imposed roles. Showalter would underscore the need for literature to reflect and address these issues, advocating for a portrayal of women that supports their autonomy and validates their perspectives.

From de Beauvoir's perspective, the lack of awareness aligns with her critique of how societal norms and gender roles can limit women's ability to assert their individuality and desires within relationships. De Beauvoir's theory encourages women to recognize and assert their agency, even in situations where societal expectations might dictate otherwise. The passage provides a subtle commentary on the protagonist's potential challenges in navigating her role as a wife while maintaining her own sense of autonomy and self-expression. Also resonates with her emphasis on women asserting their agency and resisting societal norms that confine them to prescribed roles. "Open communication and mutual respect within relationships, enabling women to assert their desires and actively participate in decision-making" (679). This statement underscores the significance of healthy relationships built on open communication and mutual respect. Such dynamics empower women to voice their desires and contribute to decision-making, fostering an environment where their perspectives are valued and their agency is affirmed.

In summary, it delves into the complexities of marital dynamics influenced by societal norms and gender roles. The lack of communication and the protagonist's unawareness of her husband's intentions serve as a commentary on the challenges women faced in asserting their autonomy and desires within relationships. Analyzed through a feminist lens, the passage aligns with Showalter's and de Beauvoir's call for

women to recognize and assert their agency, even in situations where societal expectations might impede their ability to do so. And underscores the challenges women faced in asserting their autonomy and desires within marital relationships. Mrs. Baroda lack of awareness of her husband's intentions highlights the potential suppression of her own agency and individuality.

Mrs. Baroda's marital relationships are also unveiled through her lack of awareness about her husband's intentions. This lack of understanding reflects both the societal expectations of the time and the individual complexities of the characters. "She had not divined that he had resolved to stay at home that day, and that he was in a mood to enjoy his wife's society" (41). It reveals the unspoken expectations that were often tied to gender roles during that era. The use of 'divined' suggests a lack of insight or clairvoyance on the part of the protagonist. This implies that there might be unspoken assumptions about how her husband would spend his time and what his desires might be, rooted in the norms of their society. The husband's decision to stay home and enjoy his wife's company is not something she anticipated. This reveals a societal presumption that men's priorities usually lie outside the home, and women's roles primarily revolve around domestic duties. The fact that the husband's desire to be with his wife is noteworthy enough to be considered a 'resolution' indicates that such occurrences are not the norm. It also touches on the complexities of autonomy and individuality within a marriage. Mrs. Baroda's lack of awareness might signify a lack of autonomy in her own choices.

This resonates with the idea of women breaking free from societal constraints and asserting their autonomy. De Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of women recognizing their agency and challenging roles that limit their individuality. She argues, "Societal norms and gender expectations can restrict women's ability to fully

participate in decision-making and express their desires” (852). Societal norms and gender expectations often impose limitations on women, curbing their capacity to engage fully in decision-making processes and freely articulate their wishes. These constraints can hinder women from asserting their autonomy and contribute to disparities in opportunities for personal agency and self-expression. It raises questions about whether she’s limited in her activities or decisions due to societal expectations or her husband’s preferences. The idea that she didn't know about his intentions underscores a potential power dynamic where her desires and opinions might be overshadowed.

This delves into the complexities of gender roles, societal expectations, and marital dynamics. Her lack of awareness reflects how unspoken assumptions and norms can impact women’s autonomy and self-expression within relationships. Analyzed through a feminist lens, the passage aligns with de Beauvoir’s call for women to break free from societal constraints and assert their agency, even when those constraints are subtle and unspoken. The potential struggle to assert her individuality and desires within the confines of societal expectations. “The societal norms of the time dictated that women prioritize their husbands’ needs and the domestic sphere” (Kruttschnitt 224). During the specific historical period that the story is written, societal norms placed a strong emphasis on women’s duty to prioritize their husbands’ well-being and tend to household matters. This cultural context often confined women's roles within the domestic realm, reinforcing their expected subservience to their husbands and limiting opportunities for broader engagement in public or independent pursuits. This can lead to situations where women’s own desires and preferences are marginalized or overlooked.

Finally, the protagonists of the story “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” Mrs. Sommers sudden realization that her shoes and stockings are missing carries symbolic and emotional significance, reflecting her internal conflict and the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. “She looked down to see that she had on no stockings, her shoes and stockings were gone. She caught her breath and glanced keenly at the man beside her” (18). The absence of the protagonist’s shoes and stockings can be seen as a metaphorical representation of her temporary escape from societal norms and constraints. Stockings are often associated with notions of propriety, respectability, and adherence to societal expectations. The protagonist’s missing stockings symbolize her departure from these norms, suggesting a momentary break from her usual role and obligations. Her reaction to the missing stockings reflects a complex blend of emotions. The phrase ‘She caught her breath’ suggests a sudden surprise or shock. This could indicate that she is taken aback by her own daring actions, as if she has crossed a boundary she hadn’t expected to breach. ‘Glancing keenly at the man beside her’ indicates her heightened awareness of the man’s presence and the potential societal judgment that could come from him or others. This momentary interaction with the man underscores her internal conflict, she is both aware of the societal norms she is challenging and the allure of her newfound liberation.

Mrs. Sommers’s act of asserting her individuality and defying societal norms is evident in her decision to shed her stockings, which can be seen as a subtle act of rebellion against the constraints imposed on her by society. This small gesture represents a step towards reclaiming her personal autonomy and desires in a context where women are often dictated by societal expectations. Showalter emphasizes that “Women are often defined by their relationships to men, and societal norms can

impede their self-expression” (38), highlighting how gender roles are socially constructed and how they limit women’s freedom and self-expression. The protagonist’s actions illustrate the need for women to transcend the roles and expectations imposed on them. Her brief moment of freedom reflects Showalter’s advocacy for women to assert their agency and reject the objectification inherent in traditional gender roles, symbolizing a temporary escape from societal norms and the internal struggle between societal expectations and personal desires.

The tactile experience of touching silk evokes a profound sense of luxury and personal indulgence for the protagonist. This brief moment holds deeper symbolic meaning, reflecting themes of desire, agency, and the complex interplay between societal expectations and individual pleasure. “The touch of the silk seemed to give to her fingers a feeling of luxury” (45). It captures the protagonist’s sensory experience as she runs her fingers over the silk stockings. The word ‘luxury’ conveys a sense of opulence, comfort, and rarity. The protagonist’s tactile interaction with the silk creates a momentary sensory escape from her daily routine and responsibilities. The act of touching the silk stockings represents a moment of agency and self-indulgence. Despite her responsibilities and societal expectations, she chooses to engage in a small act that brings her personal gratification. This contrasts with the roles and duties typically assigned to women in her society, reflecting her desire to assert her own desires and momentarily break free from societal constraints.

This aligns with the concept of women embracing their individual desires and pursuing their own pleasures. The protagonist’s act of engaging with the silk stockings signifies her assertion of agency and her rejection of the idea that her desires should be subordinated to societal expectations. De Beauvoir’s emphasizes the importance of women reclaiming their autonomy and embracing their own desires.

“Women embrace their individual desires and pursue their own pleasures rather than being confined to roles defined by society” (860). The protagonist’s moment of self-indulgence resonates with de Beauvoir's call for women to challenge objectification and passive roles. Finally, encapsulates the feminine voice by depicting the protagonist’s yearning for personal gratification and sensory pleasure. Her engagement with the silk stockings represents a nuanced exploration of women's desires and the ways in which they seek moments of self-expression and indulgence within a society that often marginalizes their agency.

The protagonist, Mrs. Sommers’s sentiment about her mother reflects a complex mixture of emotions and highlights the tension between personal desires and societal expectations. This thought encapsulates a deeper exploration of individual agency, self-expression, and the impact of societal norms. “And she was glad her mother had not lived to see her sitting there beside the window” (58). Her feeling of relief that her mother had not witnessed her current situation reveals her awareness of the societal norms and values that might have influenced her mother’s judgments. This sentiment suggests that her actions and choices are in contrast to what her mother might have expected or approved of. The protagonist’s presence by the window, enjoying her brief moments of personal indulgence, can be seen as a departure from the traditional roles and expectations that may have been passed down through generations. Her gratitude for her mother’s absence signifies her desire to break free from the confines of societal norms and assert her own agency and desires. Appreciation for her mother’s absence reflects her yearning to define her own identity and make choices that align with her personal wishes. This sentiment suggests a desire to escape the limitations that societal expectations may have imposed on her, and it embodies a pursuit of individuality and autonomy.

Her appreciation for her mother's absence signifies her desire to free herself from the expectations that may have been placed upon her, allowing her to make choices based on her own desires and agency. "The feeling of relief aligns with the concept of women reclaiming their autonomy challenges societal constraints" (817). De Beauvoir's emphasizes the importance of women transcending the roles and expectations imposed upon them by society and tradition. Mrs. Sommer's moment of self-awareness reflects her call for women to assert their individuality and make choices that align with their own values. "The tension between societal expectations and individual autonomy, highlighting the complexities of women's experiences within a patriarchal society" (Bruley 70). As de Beauvoir's underscores the protagonist's pursuit of autonomy and self-expression in the face of inherited norms and values. By highlighting the internal struggle that many women experience between societal expectations and personal desires the protagonist's sentiment about her mother's absence reflects the complexities of navigating one's own path within a framework of inherited norms and values that challenges the women liberation.

Overall, the perspectives of Showalter and de Beauvoir on the objectification of women, societal limitations, and the importance of asserting agency serve as a framework for understanding the characters' experiences and decisions. This approach reveals how the characters' voices, desires, and struggles align with these theories, illustrating both their moments of adherence to and resistance against societal norms. The analysis highlights how the characters navigate their roles as women, wives, and mothers within a patriarchal context, focusing on instances of agency, self-expression, and defiance against societal expectations. It draws connections to Showalter and de Beauvoir's advocacy for women to overcome objectification and assert their individuality.

The exploration of the feminine voice in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Women" and "A Pair of Silk Stockings" through the lens of Showalter and de Beauvoir's feminist theory illuminates the intricate interplay between societal expectations, individual desires, and the quest for agency within a patriarchal context. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that Chopin's characters navigate a complex landscape of identity, autonomy, and self-expression, often challenging traditional gender roles while confronting the constraints imposed by their society.

In "The Story of an Hour", Louise Mallard's fleeting moment of liberation captures the essence of de Beauvoir's call for women to transcend societal norms and claim agency over their lives. Louise's journey from grief to empowerment serves as a microcosm of the broader struggles faced by women as they negotiate their roles and aspirations in a male-dominated world. Her assertion of selfhood in the face of societal expectations is emblematic of de Beauvoir's emphasis on women's autonomy and self-definition. "A Respectable Woman" provides a captivating portrayal of its female protagonist Mrs. Baroda's intricate emotional journey, allowing readers to peer into the subtleties of her feelings and thoughts. Set within the context of its historical era, the novel effectively unveils the multifaceted nature of the feminine experience, shedding light on the challenges, societal expectations, and personal aspirations that shaped women's lives during that time. Through its protagonist, the story skillfully navigates the interplay of societal norms and individual desires, enriching our understanding of the complexities faced by women of that period. "A Pair of Silk Stockings" offers a glimpse into the intimate realm of personal desire and autonomy. The protagonist's acts of self-indulgence signify a rebellion against traditional roles and expectations, embodying Showalter and de Beauvoir's vision of

women embracing their individual desires and challenging the objectification inherent in societal norms. This tale serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of women reclaiming their agency and asserting their right to pleasure.

Collectively, the three stories highlight the resonance between Chopin's characters and Showalter and de Beauvoir's feminist theory. They emphasize the multifaceted nature of the feminine voice, ranging from moments of rebellion to quiet introspection, from resistance to reconciliation. The characters' journeys intersect with Showalter and de Beauvoir's call for women to transcend their objectification and societal limitations, illustrating the universal struggle for self-expression and autonomy that persists across time and cultures. As Kate Chopin's characters navigate the intricate terrain of societal norms and individual desires, their voices echo the tenets of Showalter and de Beauvoir's feminist theory. Through their stories, the constant negotiation between conformity and defiance, revealing the timeless relevance of advocating for women's agency and empowerment is witness. The analysis of these works not only sheds light on the enduring challenges faced by women but also serves as a testament to the enduring power of the feminine voice to inspire change, liberation and reshape the course of history.

In conclusion, analyzing Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," "A Respectable Woman," and "A Pair of Silk Stockings" through the perspectives of Showalter and de Beauvoir's feminist theories has provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the feminine voice within a patriarchal society. These stories together portray the diverse experiences of women as they maneuver through societal norms, expectations, and personal desires. Each narrative highlights the feminine voice as a potent form of resistance and self-assertion in the quest for liberation. Despite the distinctiveness of each story, they share a common theme of challenging societal expectations and

striving for self-expression. By interpreting these narratives through the frameworks of Showalter and de Beauvoir, we gain a deeper insight into the characters' struggles and the broader, universal challenge faced by women in a world that often seeks to restrict and define them.

Ultimately, the examination of these works highlights the lasting significance of literature in revealing the complexities of the feminine experience. Through Chopin's characters, we observe the development of the feminine voice as it confronts, questions, and asserts itself within a patriarchal framework and established gender norms. This analysis underscores the continued necessity to elevate and celebrate the diverse voices of women, as they persist in defining and redefining the discourse on gender and autonomy in the broader world.

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