

Feminine Self-Assertion in “The Story of an Hour”

Xuding Wang¹

English Department, Tamkang University

Abstract

This essay attempts to prove that Kate Chopin explores feminine selfhood in a patriarchal society through the heroine’s spiritual journey to freedom in “The Story of an Hour.” In this story, Chopin presents us with a picture of a complicated and complex development of Louise Mallard’s spiritual awakening triggered by the false news of her husband’s death in a train accident. Louise is a pioneering feminist searching for selfhood and freedom, not “an immature egoist and a victim of her own extreme self-assertion” (Berkove 152) as some critics like Lawrence I. Berkove maintain. While questioning Berkove’s argument that “Louise is sick, emotionally as well as physically” (Berkove 156); “Louise is not thinking clearly” (Berkove 157) and is suffering from an “early stage of delusion” (Berkove 156), this essay suggests that Chopin’s exploration of feminine selfhood and freedom is vividly displayed in a rich and colorful literary style, especially the use of symbolism and ironies. Although Chopin’s presentation of Louise’s self-assertion is in a positive and sympathetic manner, she acknowledges that Louise’s search for ideal feminine selfhood and freedom in a hostile environment of a patriarchal society is extremely difficult, as it has to face strong denial, refutation and powerful resistance from the conventional institutions such as marriage, family, friends and other social establishments. By the death of Louise at the end of the story, Chopin clearly implies that any woman’s search for ideal feminine selfhood is impossible in an age dominated by patriarchs, but by Louise’s search for selfhood and feminine emancipation, Chopin obviously shows her visionary foresight for a possible hopeful feminist era to come.

Key words: female self-assertion, spiritual journey, freedom, language manipulation, symbolism, patriarchal society, conventions.

¹ 淡江大學英文系助理教授

In his reading of “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, Lawrence I. Berkove argues that “there is evidence of a deeper level of irony in the story which does not regard Louise Mallard as a heroine but as an immature egoist and a victim of her own extreme self-assertion” (152). Although Berkove may have a few good points in reading the story and develops his argument with some textual references, he has really twisted many important references to suggest that Mrs. Mallard’s heart trouble is not only a physical illness but also an emotional one: “In truth, Louise is sick, emotionally as well as physically” (Berkove 156.) He even goes on to argue that “Louise is not thinking clearly” (Berkove 157). “What Chopin is doing, very subtly, is depicting Louise in the early stages of the delusion that is perturbing her precariously unstable health by aggravating her pathological heart condition” (Berkove 156).

But it is quite obvious that Chopin does not depict Louise as a mentally or emotionally sick woman even though she describes her as an idealistic innocent woman having a heart trouble physically and symbolically. Rather she presents us with a picture of a complicated and complex development of Louise’s spiritual journey to her selfhood triggered by the false news of her husband’s death in a train accident. Right after hearing the tragic news of her husband’s death, Louise starts her spiritual journey by going upstairs to her own room. By going up the stairs to her own room, Louise symbolically elevates herself into a spiritual world where an inspiration becomes possible. In symbolic terms, the setting of Louise’s room with an open-window is full of signs of a potential new life. Outside the open window, there are the sprouting tops of trees, the fresh breath of air, the sweet song, the countless twittering sparrows, the open square and the blue sky with patches of clouds which are all filled with vigor, energy and liveliness that are symbolically pregnant with a potential new life:

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 some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves. (537)

Contrasted to the things down to the ground that stand for the conventional reality of the patriarchal society, all the natural things above the ground are symbolically used to form a spiritual world where Louise is about to have a new-born soul. What is more, it is in the season of spring. As the very beginning of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* shows, spring is

the time that has the power to generate therein and sire the flower (Chaucer 215), to bring new lives to the world and revive the hibernated creatures with new spirits. As everything viewed through the open window is up and above the ground, Chopin makes it clear that the open window serves as an extremely important and symbolic role in developing Louise's spiritual journey in the story.

Readers who are familiar with the other works by Kate Chopin have no difficulty finding out that Chopin favors the symbol of open windows. In her famous novel, *The Awakening*, Chopin clearly describes that Mademoiselle Reisz's windows are always open, and we know that Mademoiselle Reisz is an independent, self-sufficient expert pianist, an unconventional woman who serves as an inspiration to the heroine Edna Pontellier throughout her gradual awakening in the novel. Mademoiselle Reisz is a living symbol of feminine solitude and freedom, as she is an entirely self-supported woman, who is governed by her art, her heart and her passions, rather than by any expectations of society. Thus like Mademoiselle Reisz's open windows which symbolize the open passages to feminine selfhood and freedom, the open window in "The Story of an Hour" also symbolizes the open path to a new inspiration leading to a new enlightenment and to a new spirit for a new life, as Chopin later clearly depicts that Louise is "drinking in a very elixir of life through *that open window* [emphasis mine]" (537). All these symbolic references imply that Chopin is preparing for a birth of a new spirit or a rebirth of an old one. Thus, there, in her own room, Louise is having her spiritual rebirth, and her rebirth is vividly shown in the image of the innocent new-born baby² who is having dreams in her sleep in a new spiritual world:

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, 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. (Chopin 537)³

The sobbing image in this passage that vividly shows an innocent and pure baby who seems to be abused or wrongly treated reflects the images of the abused innocent children in William Blake's *Songs of Experience*. It also foreshadows the suggested suppression and

² Chopin's use of the impersonal pronoun "it" instead of the personal pronoun "her" to describe the baby image of Louise strongly displays the picture of a new-born baby having dreams in the context of the story.

³ All the page number references of the story refer to the text of Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" in Paul Lauter et al ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 3ed ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998) 536-8.

repression that Louise has experienced in her life. But in the innocent “dreams,” an inspiration leading to enlightenment is approaching:

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. (537)

This “something” is coming with the new-born soul, and it is the enlightenment, “creeping out of the sky,” that brightens the path of her journey to her true selfhood. It is nothing of any emotional sickness as Berkove claims, but rather a suspended “intelligent thought” (537), as the narrator of Chopin’s story informs us. It has finally broken through all the invisible conventional suppression and surfaced itself into Louise’s conscious mind and firmly consolidated itself in her deep soul. This time, Louise finally and fully acknowledges it as something of her true being, something important to her spiritual existence: “A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial” (537). Indeed, as Louise herself feels it, this is the “possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!” (537) It is this “possession of self-assertion” that strongly urges her to oversee all the strongest and hardest conventions to recognize the true nature of her being, and it is also this “possession of self-assertion” that enables her to make her own decisions for her independence, for her new free life and for her imagined bright future. Being bathed in such a “possession of self-assertion,” “she [is] drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window” (537) which explicitly symbolizes the passage to the spiritual world of both freedom and beautiful dreams.

The development of Louise’s spiritual journey is checked and resisted by the invisible forces of conventions. As mentioned earlier, Chopin uses everything up as a symbol of Louise’s spiritual reality while anything down as a symbol of the physical reality of conventions:

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul. (536)

What has really caused Louise’s “physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul”? It seems that it is caused not only by “the storm of grief” (536) experienced by Louise after hearing the news of her husband’s death, but also by a long-time

self-control or suppression in the conventional and patriarchal environment. If anything down stands for the physical conventional world in the story, the invisible force that causes Louise's physical exhaustion that is pressing her *down* obviously symbolizes the conventional and patriarchal power that grips Louise and refuses to let her body and soul go free. Even in Louise's own mind, there is a serious conflict between a conscious will that is molded by the transforming influence of the conventional environment in her life and a subconscious potential that can possibly come to life only through circumstantial opportunities for spiritual inspiration and awakening. Louise's mental conflict is vividly illustrated with the symbols of the "patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above another in the west facing her window" (537). The "clouds that had met and piled one above another" show the serious on-going conflict in Louise's mind. Her conscious will is actively policing potential rebel against conventional codes of behavior: "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" (537). The circumstantial opportunity here is the false news of her husband's death that triggers the potential spiritual awakening. Of course, "her will" will not disarm itself so easily and let her subconscious longing for selfhood and freedom come to life without any interference. Yet, "her will" is no longer strong enough to embank the rushing current of the enchanting "something," which finally breaks her will's strong siege and surges itself free. Thus, Louise's subconscious longing for selfhood and freedom finally breaks free and reaches the peak when she comes out of her room, imagining, "Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own" (537) with "a feverish triumph in her eyes [...] like a goddess of Victory" (538).

But Chopin is not so naïve to believe that any search for female selfhood and spiritual emancipation can go on a smooth track without any strong resistance in a strongly patriarchal society. She recognizes the potential danger to suppress and stifle any search for feminine selfhood by the social and moral conventions. From the very beginning of the story, she indicates that Louise's longing for self-assertion will have to face intolerant suppression and refutation by the invisible but unrelenting forces of the patriarchal conventions. Although Chopin sympathetically and positively depicts Louise's innocent longing for freedom and selfhood, she unhesitatingly indicates that Louise's longing for freedom and self-emancipation is but an innocent and ideal dream, as the original title "The Dream of an

Hour” obviously implies.⁴ Although such an ideal “dream” reflects the well-promoted “American Dream,” it does not belong to women in historical and traditional terms, rather it belongs to men like Ralph Waldo Emerson, David Henry Thoreau and Walt Whitman who regard selfhood, independence, and individualism as the sacred integrity of man: “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (Emerson 1623). “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind” (Emerson 1624). “What I must do, [sic] is all that concern me, not what the people think” (Emerson 1624). “I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you” (Emerson 1632). “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself” (Emerson 1638). Although what Louise is doing in the story is exactly what Emerson proclaims, she cannot succeed because as a woman she will be suppressed. Indeed, the beautiful dream for freedom, selfhood and independence is the sacred integrity of men, rather than women. As Barbara C. Ewell clearly points out:

To be a self, to be independent in a democracy of independent men (for only men were meant), to become self-conscious, even self-created, the “self-made man,” or in R. W. B. Lewis’s memorable formulation “the American Dream”—these were, and remain, important elements of the dream of America. (157)

Ewell makes it clear that selfhood and independence of the “American Dream” are for men rather than for women in historical and traditional terms. Chopin understands it serenely, and she hints in the story that feminine self-assertion does not have the ripened opportunity and right time yet, so it will be surely suppressed by the patriarchal society. As an inevitable result, it cannot survive in the harsh reality of a patriarchal society.

Thus, even in preparing Louise’s spiritual rebirth, Chopin does not forget to hint that the free world is man’s world rather than woman’s. If we recall the earlier quoted passage about the view outside the open window showing all those lively, vigorous and energetic signs indicating a potential new spirit for a new life, we remember that all the sentences describing the things of nature and music are written in a lyrical poetic manner, except the sentence, “In the street below a peddler was crying his wares” (537). Obviously this sentence has nothing to do with nature and music; therefore, it does not seem to fit in the context in the passage.

⁴ “The Story of an Hour” was first published in *Vogue*, December 6, 1894, but the original title was “The Dream of an Hour.” The present title was obviously changed by the later editors of her works.

Then, why does Chopin insert such a disharmonious sentence in the passage, and what does she really mean by putting it there? It is certainly unique, and it also forms a contrast to all the other sentences. If the sentences about nature and music provide Louise with an inspiration that transcendently leads her to enlightenment, the unique sentence about the peddler in such a context must suggest something else. In symbolic terms, it seems to be about the human world that is contrasted to the natural world. If everything up and above the ground symbolizes the spiritual reality of Louise's internal world, then anything below, such as "the street below," stands for the physical reality of the external world. We should note that in this external world, the "peddler" is not a woman but a man who is freely "crying his wares." In other words, men can sell their "wares," their goods, values or ideals freely, but not women. Thus the freedom of the external world symbolized by the "open square" is for men rather than for women. In this way, Chopin inexplicitly hints at the harsh reality that the outside world may not have any room for Louise's ideal "dream" for self-assertion and freedom.

Emily Toth is not wrong to point out, "Although Louise's death is an occasion for deep irony directed at patriarchal blindness about women's thoughts, Louise dies in the world of her family where she has always sacrificed for others" (24). But Berkove strongly disagrees with Toth's point by arguing that "in the text of this very story there is no hard evidence whatsoever of patriarchal blindness or suppression, constant or selfless sacrifice by Louise, or an ongoing struggle for selfhood" (Berkove 153). If we read the story carefully, it is not difficult to find that Toth is right about "the patriarchal blindness" while Berkove himself is too blind to see the reality in the story. Quite obviously, Brently Mallard, his friend Richards, and the doctors have never had a slightest clue about Louise's self-assertion, and they perhaps will never figure out what has really happened in Louise's deep mind. It is indeed their blindness in misunderstanding of the potential self-assertion of Louise that leads to their misconception that "she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills" (Chopin 536).

By claiming that "in the text of this very story there is no hard evidence whatsoever of patriarchal blindness," Berkove either fails or refuses to recognize the reality that Brently Mallard's and his friend Richard's complete misunderstanding of the deep true mind of Louise and the doctors' erroneous diagnosis of the true cause of her death are "hard evidence"

of “patriarchal blindness” in the story. When we reach this point, we should also note that Josephine, Louise’s sister, also fails to feel Louise’s true feelings, and her complete misunderstanding of Louise’s true mind is not different from that of the men’s. But, the question is: can Josephine, a woman and a family member, be considered part of the “patriarchal blindness”? The answer is: if she has conformed to the patriarchal society, she is certainly a part of it. In the historical and traditional context of the story, it is most likely that Josephine is made to conform to the patriarchal society, and the fact that the way of her thinking and her misjudgment of Louise that are exactly like those of Richard’s strongly supports the point. Thus, ironically she is also a part of the “patriarchal blindness” that fails to see the potential awakening for female self-assertion in Louise’s deep mind.

Moreover, the following quotation should be certainly considered as hard evidence of patriarchal suppression: “She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength” (537). First, if she is young, there should not be “lines” or wrinkles on her fair face. The “lines” themselves speak out loud about long time mental pressures, stresses or burdens, as only serious mental pressures, stresses and burdens can cause young people to have wrinkles or grey hair before they reach their natural and normal old age for such things. Further, the word “repression” directly points out that Louise has to repress her natural feelings and thoughts with “a certain strength.” Furthermore, the “repression” is also from the moral demand of the societal institutions such as the marriage, the family and the friend. If these societal institutions do not cause the repression, what else can do it? Even when the deeply suppressed awakening is surging to the surface of her conscious mind, Louise is still automatically struggling to suppress it: “She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striking to beat it back with her will...” (536). Naturally the invisible force that urges her conscious will to voluntarily screen or censor her emerging awakening is from the social conventions and moral traditions of the patriarchal society that has formed the social codes for individual conduct. Angelyn Mitchell clearly points out: “Patriarchy’s social conditioning creates codes of social behavior to ensure the suppression of feminine desires” (60). Quite obviously, the “codes of social behavior” have strong invisible confining power that tightly grips Louise’s conscious mind. Such force itself is a kind of invisible but powerful suppression over the

individual, especially the female individual like Louise who will not easily achieve any selfhood emancipation unless she has “abandoned herself” and given in to the long suppressed potential of self-assertion in her subconscious mind. Indeed, the words “abandonment” and “abandoned” in the text of the story also suggest the final letting go of the suppression by her conscious will. Only “when she abandoned herself,” can “a little whispered word” “free, free, free” escape “her slightly parted lips” (537).

Another quotation from the story can further prove that Berkove is not convincing in arguing that there is no hard evidence to support patriarchal suppression in the story:

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. (537)

This statement of Louise’s mental activity shows that she has been suppressed to a certain degree, and again at least that is what she feels in her deep mind in the story. Perhaps the ambiguity of the suppression is that the “blind persistence” on imposing “a private will upon” her is not only from men but also from women. But it can be argued that in social and historical terms, the nineteenth century was still a patriarchal century, and women without a strong rebelling voice traditionally conformed to that patriarchal world. Thus, even though the suppression on Louise is by both men and women, it could be from the patriarchal conventions, values, principles and philosophies, as Ewell indicates that in the nineteenth century, “In the United States as in most nations and cultures, patriarchal custom explicitly defined women as self-less” (158). The fact that Louise is called Mrs. Mallard from the very beginning of the story certainly suggests that she is defined as a self-less woman who is attached or affiliated to Mr. Brently Mallard as his wife, who does not have her own social status and who surely lacks her self identity. This female selflessness and lack of self-identity should be also considered part of the patriarchal suppression. The only time she gets back her own name, the symbol of her self-identity, is when her sister Josephine is calling her through the keyhole, and that is the time when Louise has achieved her self-assertion in “that brief moment of illumination” (537). In sharp contrast, while both Richards and Brently Mallard have their own names from the beginning to the end, Louise ironically dies as Brently Mallard’s wife at the end: “He stood amazed at Josephine’s piercing cry; at Richards’ quick

motion to screen him from the view of his wife” (538).

Further, when Louise uncontrollably repeats, “free, free, free!” (537) and when she keeps whispering, “Free! Body and soul free” (537), we can obviously recognize the reality that she was not really free before, neither body nor soul. Logically when one is not free, one is confined or suppressed either physically, or morally, or spiritually: “It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long” (537). Together with the earlier mentioned textual references, this sentence certainly implies that Louise is even tired of her life because she has not been free, because there have been “powerful wills bending hers in that blind persistence” (537), because people have imposed “private wills” upon her. All these references are certainly hard evidences to prove that Louise has been suffering from patriarchal suppression if not physically, surely mentally and spiritually.

As mentioned earlier, Berkove strongly refutes Toth’s claim that Louise “has always sacrificed for others,” by arguing that there is no hard evidence to show “constant or selfless sacrifice by Louise.” First, if there is any problem for Toth’s assertion, the problem may be the word “always.” But what the narrator of the story tells the reader is:

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. 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. (537)

According to this statement of Louise’s thinking revealed by the omniscient narrator, Louise has indeed lived for others to a certain degree in the past because at the very moment she is thinking that she will not live for anyone anymore in her future life.

The patriarchal suppression can be further proven by many deep ironies applied in the story. While other characters (Josephine and Richards) in the story think that Louise is in deep grief because of the news of her husband’s death, ironically she is actually experiencing “a monstrous joy” in her room. Josephine believes that Louise may make herself sick by shutting herself in her room, but in fact, Louise is “drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window” (537). It is indeed ironic that when Louise has “breathed a quick prayer

that life might be long” (537), her life lasts for only a brief and short hour, that when Louise hopes to live her own life and to enjoy her own freedom, her awakened longing is abruptly terminated, that the story starts with the false death of Brently Mallard, but ends with the real death of Louise, and that Louise truly dies of the shock caused by the unwelcome and unexpected return of her husband, but the doctors, typical representatives of the patriarchal society, have claimed that Mrs. Mallard has died of “joy that kills.”

On a deeper level, any careful readers can see that through the story, Chopin indicates that Louise’s aspiration to fulfill her deeply suppressed longing for freedom and selfhood is ironically sparked not by good will from the society, not by blessings from family members, friends and people around her, but rather by the false, mistaken and tragic news of her husband’s death. Thus, Chopin implies that Louise’s spiritual journey to the ideal world of feminine freedom and selfhood is abruptly and tragically brought to an end by the powerful forces of the intolerant patriarchal conventions, symbolically represented by Louise’s husband, Brently Mallard. If we carefully observe the minute details of some references, we will discover that Chopin indeed symbolically indicates that Louise’s husband tightly controls his wife. At the end of the story, Louise’s husband, Brently Mallard, comes into the house with only two things: “his grip-sack and umbrella” (538). If we split the compound word “grip-sack” into “grip” and “sack,” we will easily find that the word “grip” means “a tight hold, strong grasp, the power to grasp,” while the word “sack” means either a large bag for holding grain, flour, potatoes, etc, or “a woman’s loose-fitting straight dress, a woman’s loose gown.” As a verb, “sack” also means “to plunder and lay waste,” according to *The New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus*. It seems that by using the compound word “grip-sack,” Chopin symbolically suggests that Brent Mallard not only firmly grips Louise’s life but also tightly controls Louise’s fate by plundering and laying waste of her freedom and self-identity. This point can be further proven by the fact that Louise lives as Mrs. Mallard in life and dies as Brently Mallard’s wife, as she is called Mrs. Mallard in the very first sentence of the story and “his wife” (538) at the very end of the story. The only time when she wins her own name back is the moment when she has achieved her “self-assertion which she [has] suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being” (537), and this is the time she has gained her self identity. The rest of the time Louise is referred to as “she” for “thirty-three times” and

“her” for “forty times,” as Madonne M. Miner points out:

She is referred to once as “Mrs. Mallard,” twice as *Louise* (within three sentences), *thirty-three* times as *she*, and *forty* times (including objectival and genitive forms) as *her*. (31)

Of course, the subject personal pronoun “she” and the object personal pronoun “her” are general without a specific identity, and Chopin’s uses of them are deliberate, with an intention of symbolism.

If anyone thinks that the above analysis is far fetched, he/she needs only to examine the other thing that Brently Mallard is carrying with him when he comes into the house: his umbrella. Traditionally an umbrella usually symbolizes some kind of protection, and in the context of this story under discussion it still symbolizes a kind of protection—the protection of marriage, the protection that Brently Mallard provides Louise as a husband to a wife, as a man to a woman in social and conventional terms. But this “so-called” social and conventional protection exactly proves that a woman exists only as a men’s wife without her own selfhood and self-identity, just as Barbara C. Ewell puts it:

In the United States as in most nations and cultures, patriarchal custom explicitly defined women as self-less. They were named and described only in terms of their relationship to men—*daughter, wife, mother, sister, widow*—or more specifically, in terms of their sexual relationships to men: *virgin, whore, mistress, spinster*. Women were, as Simone de Beauvoir so eloquently explained, simply men’s “other,” defined as whatever men were not: not rational, not strong, not self. Women were not subjects but objects, of sexuality, of discourse, of art—of men. (158)

Moreover, if we recall the sentence “The delicious breath of rain was in the air” in the earlier quoted passage about the scene outside of Louise’s window, we can surely recognize another layer of the symbolic meanings of the umbrella. Literally an umbrella is used to prevent rain from falling on one’s body, but the rain here is the “delicious” source of inspiration, enlightenment and potential new life, exactly as the spring rain in the very beginning of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* suggests. Thus, it becomes clear that the umbrella here really prevents the source of an inspiration leading to a self-liberated free new

life from Louise, the source of a potential enlightenment resulting in a spiritual awakening in Louise's journey to true selfhood, the sacred integrity of her true spiritual being.

Thus even Louise's death is symbolic. By Louise's spiritual journey for feminine liberation, Chopin clearly suggests that any woman seeking for ideal feminine selfhood and freedom is innocent, naïve and idealistic in a hostile patriarchal society that certainly does not allow any feminine self-assertion for the time being. Thus the fate of Louise's selfhood and freedom is bound to be doomed. Like the tragic death of Edna Pontellier at the end of *The Awakening*, Louise's death reveals the impossibility of an idealistic feminist searching for selfhood and freedom at a wrong time. By the death of Louise at the end of the story, Chopin clearly implies that any woman's search for ideal feminine selfhood is impossible in an age dominated by powerful patriarchs, but by Louise's search for selfhood and feminine emancipation, with a prophetic vision and foresight, Chopin obviously shows that hopeful feminine selfhood and freedom are possible in a new era to come.



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