# The way to death in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Anton Chekhov's "The Man in a Case"

**Victoria Bilge Yılmaz**[*]

**Abstract:** Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) short stories have become the cornerstones in the field of short fiction writing. Mainly influencing the feminist writing of her epoch, Chopin's short stories like "The Story of an Hour", "Désirée's Baby", "The Storm" and many others have established her as one of the most prominent short story writers. Another distinguished short story writer of the same period was Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), a famous Russian author, whose short stories make the readers smile and, at the same time, question themselves. His most popular short stories – "The Man in a Case", "Gooseberries", "A Woman's Kingdom" and many others – depict a simple life but present the author's richness of articulation and narration. This study will analyse Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) and Anton Chekhov's "The Man in a Case" (1898) in terms of the processes that lead the protagonists to their deaths. The comparative study of these two short stories will show that the protagonists in both works go through three main temporal-psychological dimensions: suppression, freedom (change of state), and death. Mrs. Mallard and Belikov, suppress their true selves until a particular point in their lives. After they eventually experience a sense of vague and short freedom and a radical change of state, they suddenly die. This study will analyse the tools of suppression, the ways to freedom and transformation, and the processes that lead the main characters to death. The study will conclude that the close temporal paradigm of the authors paved the way for Chopin's and Chekhov's similar understanding of the concept of freedom.

**Keywords:** Kate Chopin, Anton Chekhov, short story, "The Story of an Hour", "The Man in a Case"

[*] Victoria Bilge Yılmaz ( ✉)
Department of Western Languages and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Ankara Haci Bayram Veli University, Türkiye
e-mail: victoria.yilmaz@hbv.edu.tr

*AGATHOS*, Volume 17, Issue 1 (32): 139-154, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.19949928

## Introduction

Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) name has been associated with her novel *The Awakening*. What is more, "[s]ince its publication in 1899, *The Awakening* has been the touchstone of Kate Chopin's literary reputation" (Ewell 1986, 1). The novel has put Chopin among the eminent short story writers of all times. Kate Chopin was born into an upper-middle-class family in St. Louis where she lived in a Creole neighbourhood. She got married when she was twenty and had six children. After her husband's death, Kate had to earn money, so she started writing short stories. Having been exposed to various cultures in Louisiana, where she moved after marriage, Kate Chopin was receptive to different lifestyles and socio-cultural frameworks. Hence, her short stories are charged with the robust voices of such backgrounds like Creole, black, or Indian. Furthermore, "Mrs. Chopin was an instinctive teller of stories. There can be little doubt that her writings gained in freshness through her method of drawing more or less unconsciously upon her various gifts" (Seyersted 1980, 130). Hence, the overbrimming and culturally alive and aware productive self of the author should not be overlooked. Chopin was an undaunted writer, especially if the time of her writing career is taken into consideration. "Her earliest stories show a marked concern with psychological realism, especially psychological portraiture of women at odds with the world, and distanced or amoral narration" (Papke 1990, 23). Indeed, as it is obvious with reference to her novel The Awakening, it was Chopin's incisive project to write about women. "For her and for her favored authors, art was a form of self-expression that was seemingly amoralistic in its choice of subjects but also extremely radical in that she felt there were no subjects true to the life of the writer that could or should not be presented" (Ibid., 24). In other words, Kate Chopin's focal point was to show life as it is. And it is mostly about intrepid, sometimes overlooked, female characters who try to withstand the perilous conditions of this world. Chopin's fiction "is regularly focused on the way that people shaped by their social environment seek to carve out better lives for themselves" (Koloski 1996, 8). Chopin's stories are charged with an energy that evokes desire to fight against rigid social norms and paradigms. Most of the times, her stories bring some voices from reticence and obliquity.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was born in Taganrog, in southern Russia. While in Taganrog, Chekhov became enchanted with theatre and this initiated the world-wide legacy of such important plays like

*The Seagull*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, and *Uncle Vanya*. "The great playwright of the future had his first encounter with the theatre at the age of thirteen. The play was *La Belle Hélène*" (Laffitte 1974, 52). In 1879, he enrolled in a medical school. Parallel to his studies, Chekhov wrote prose. And as early as 1884, Chekhov learned that he had tuberculosis, from which he eventually died when he was only 44. Chekhov has been accepted in Europe and America as a seminal figure in drama, but he was also a brilliant short-story writer. Chekhov is a unique and quintessential prose writer of all times. Nabokov called him "a Russian intellectual of the Chekhovian type" (Nabokov 1989, 27). Chekhov was a self-identifying author both in prose and drama.

> He belongs firmly in the main tradition of Russian literature as Wordsworth or George Eliot belong in the English tradition. Like theirs, his art extends the expressive possibilities of his chosen forms to the point where they seem innovatory, while at the same time drawing deeply on the resources of a civilization and its language and finally of a national history itself, embodied in character and idiom (Hahn 1979, 39).

Chekhov's talent lies in his ability to imagine something that is encompassing eternity and, at the same time, to refer to something that binds humanity to its roots. Chekhov's short stories are commendably bold, but reticent, suave, but down to earth, and extraordinarily entertaining. Chekhov's stories are momentous fragments of life that reveal everything that is elusive, in the shadow, or garbled.

Chekhov liked helping people and his profession paved the way for his charitable activities. "He never billed the poor. When a cholera epidemic threatened, he organized a campaign of preventive medicine. . . . For two years he wrote very little, because of his work in fighting cholera. He led a campaign against famine" (Meister 1988, 5). He loved helping those in need and wryly criticized those who were smeared with corruption, dishonesty, lie, or deceit. He condemned "laziness and self-indulgence of his fellow-men, of their slothful life in which everything is shallow, stupid, and commonplace" (Patrick 1932, 658). His arduous journey to Sakhalin Island through Siberia, which worsened his health and was utterly lethal, was done for the sake of Chekhov's ideals. "Finding a purpose to life through socially useful activity was one of the main themes expressed at the time of the Sakhalin trip (Borny 2006, 33). Chekhov wanted to experience Russia's most precarious conditions. "By way of self-justification he

invoked his disgust with literary infighting, his need for a change of scene, his responsibility as a writer to experience Russian reality in all its horror, his interest in the possibility of doing a scientific study of the convicts in Siberia" (Troyat 1987, 115). Seeing life in all its vividness in many parts of Russia and abroad enriched his artistic output, though.

> The Chekhovian grasp of Russian life is staggering: in this respect, as in many others, he cannot be compared with anyone. It would seem that there is no profession, no class, no corner of Russian life into which Chekhov has not peered. He set himself the task of giving a picture of all of Russia, because he thought of her and loved her as a whole (Eichenbaum 1987, 23).

In other words, Russia with its beauty, reality, and horror can be read and understood through Chekhov's works. Surely, "[m]edical practice brought home to Chekhov with remarkable fullness the horror of life, the cruelty of nature, and the impotence of man" (Grossman 1987, 34). It was precisely his profession of a physician that opened his eyes to the realities of his surroundings. Probably, that is why "Chekhov came to be known as the bard of twilight Russia" (Freedman 1988, 1).

The aim of this study is to analyse Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) and Anton Chekhov's "The Man in a Case" (1898) in terms of their main characters' existential processes that end in their deaths. In this study I claim that both stories depict the same pattern of life: ineffective agency (obvious or implied), freedom (or change of state) for an instant, and the unexpected or self-induced death.

"The Story of an Hour", which according to Toth (1990, 252), is Chopin's "most radical" story, was firstly published in *Vogue* on December 6, 1894, as "The Dream of an Hour" and later it was reprinted in *St. Louis Life* on January 5, 1895, as "The Story of an Hour". Chopin's controversial short story challenged the verbal traditions of that epoch as it discontinued the main normative endeavours and the literary canonization of the standard makers. The story is about Louise Mallard and her reaction to the death/life news about her husband Brently Mallard. When Louise hears about her husband's death from her sister Josephine, she firstly feels grief and goes to her room. After a while, Louise revives at the thought of unexpected freedom, which drives her into an emphatic thrill. However, her joy is briskly supplanted by an unanticipated shock when she sees her husband alive. Louise, who has struggled with heart

disease for a long time, dies from a heart attack because of the figure of the alive husband foisted on her.

"The Man in a Case" is the first story in Chekhov's *The Little Trilogy* book. The other two stories are "Gooseberries" and "About Love". "The Man in a Case" initially was published in a magazine *Russkaya Mysl* (*Russian Thought*) in 1898. The story is narrated by Burkin to his friends in the countryside. Burkin tells a story of his colleague Belikov, a teacher of Greek. Belikov is characterized by his declarative holding on to numerous official/non-official conventions, social regulations, hierarchies, or supremacies. And what is more, he circumstantially expects others around him to scrupulously follow what he does. His colleagues, who are totally jaded of Belikov's dominant and inconsiderate participation in their private lives, come up with a fanciful project of marrying Belikov to a just arrived at the town, young and cheerful Varenka, who is a sister of their new colleague Kovalenko. It is hard to believe but both parties agree, and a complex relationship is initiated. While the enterprising colleagues observe the mininarrative of Belikov's and Varenka's burgeoning love affair, Belikov's expectations from Varenka are deflated as he confronts her free manners, robust joy and profound self-indulgence. Eventually, when, on these grounds, Belikov comes to Kovalenko to warn him about Varenka's inappropriate behaviours, he is sent down the stairs. Pathologically regulations- and honour-minded Belikov lands right in front of Varenka, who inadvertently starts laughing at the sight. Unable to bear such offence, Belikov goes home and dies within a month.

**Lack of autonomy**

"The Story of an Hour" is "a fine introduction to the imaginative universe of Kate Chopin's short fiction, a universe governed by a vision that is informed, intelligent, and compassionate, sensitive to ambiguity, far ahead of its time in the late nineteenth century and, in ways, still ahead of its time today" (Koloski 1996, 4). It is a very short story that embraces the whole female world and its problems. "Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death" (Chopin 1976, 198). This is the first sentence of Chopin's short story. The narrative suggests that people around Mrs. Mallard foresee the consequences of the news for Louise. It is not Louise who decides; everything is already arranged for her. Louise is

not given the agency, and this is obvious from the beginning of the story. “Indeed, in Chopin’s world view and fiction, the marginalization of women’s lives and desires, the consequent alienation of these individuals within and from their social collectives, becomes the central issue, the boundaries suddenly brought into sharp, clear focus” (Papke 1990, 33).What is more, as it widely appears in critical works on Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, the woman lacks her identity; she is presented through the familial abstract badges of her husband. So, using the husband’s familial name structure for the female main character at the beginning is Chopin’s strategy. She erases female identity to foreground the problematics of the oppressed. She invites the female reader to see such details like Elaine Showalter (1984, 39) in her article “Women’s Time, Women’s Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism” claims that Chopin’s *The Awakening* led to “‘awakening’ itself”. Another thing that strikes the reader in this first sentence of the short story is Mrs. Mallard’s heart problem. In fact, it is closely related to the previous discussion of the female oppression. Physical inconsistencies or health concerns just dissolve the ambiguity related to female weakness; they enrich the belief that women are potentially weak. Or as Distel (2018, 70) claims, “Louise’s body is simultaneously a site and source of shame. . . . it is potentially uncontrollable”. Thus, those, who see women weak in almost all aspects, are ridden with the belief that autonomy for a woman can be calamitous.

The next long paragraph after the first sentence is a contrived (by the author) narrative system that depicts ostensible “cares” about Mrs. Mallard’s health after she hears about untimely loss, but at the same time unveils the convention of jaundiced view on women. Indeed, the text space allotted for the paragraph that talks about the way how the news was told to Mrs. Mallard is larger than that allocated for Mrs. Mallard’s reaction to her husband’s death. The narrative unfolds in this paragraph in a way that shows that Josephine and Mr. Mallard’s friend Richards care about Mrs. Mallard and try to find the best appropriate way to disclose the sad news. They are worried about her. But the next short paragraph dislocates Mrs. Mallard’s weakness, undercuts the others’ expectations and adds an emphatic action on the part of Mrs. Mallard.

> 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. When the storm of grief had spent

> itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her (Chopin 1976, 198).

The unsettling moment for a conventionally driven public in this paragraph is Mrs. Mallard's wild cry, which implies her uncontrollable nature. When she goes to her room, after a long period of thinking she realizes her "self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!" (Chopin 1976, 199) The moment of self-assertion implies her inability to assert herself hitherto. In other words, Mrs. Mallard's contemplation brings forth a congealed form of her typical dependence. Distel (2018, 67), who analyses Chopin's story from a Foucauldian disciplinary theory, argues that the "Mallard home is the seat of Brently Mallard's power". The narrative implicitly conveys Mrs. Mallard's garbled condition in relation to her incarceration in a patriarchal discourse: "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" (Chopin 1976, 199). Through the narrative overbrimmed with the remarkable sense of upcoming joy and freedom, Mrs. Mallard is seen contemplating on her happiness. And from this contemplation it is seen that up to now she has gone through the process that daringly suppressed her identity, freedom, happiness and joy.

Even when Josephine worries about her sister and asks her to open the door and let her in, there is an implied context that ruffles one's thoughts: "Louise, open the door! I beg, open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing Louise? For heaven's sake open the door" (Chopin 1976, 200). Louise is not allowed autonomy. Conventionally driven Josephine unwittingly (or not) becomes the mouthpiece of the system that dislocates female power. A formulaic expression – "What are you doing Louise?" – reassures Louise's confinement in a male oriented world. It is a world that makes Mrs. Mallard "shudder" at the thought "that life might be long" (Ibidem). It is the world where Louise does not want to stay for a long time because of her life with her husband. And now this world is totally deflated leaving the trajectory of freedom, which, after all, is not long termed because Mr. Mallard happens to be alive. The last blow on Louise's autonomy comes from Richards who tries to hide Brently Mallard from his wife in the last scene. This tiny act is the reflection of

a sinewy and devastating manipulation of a woman's agency. She must be protected, she must be cared for, or she must be away from harshness of reality outside of her house. All these acts are delusive; they create a protective wall for a woman, but it is ostensible.

As regards Chekhov's protagonist Belikov, his lack of agency is also obvious, though the source of it may vary. Borny states that "Chekhov appears to have hated extremism of any sort" (2006, 42). And "The Man in a Case" is precisely about such extremism. Belikov is an extremist in his obsession with rules and regulations and Chekhov's portraiture of Belikov is incisive. Yet, "Chekhov did not pose as a moral teacher" (Patrick 1932, 658) in this story, but Belikov does. And as Pritchett (1988, 8) claims "[h]e represents something that had been a chronic evil in Russian life". Belikov is an audacious construct in a narrative in that he patterns the most radical choices and behaviour of a particular mentality. This mentality is clearly defined by the narrator of the story Burkin at the beginning of the narrative: "hermit-crabs and snails, are always trying to retire into their shells" (Chekhov 2002, 47). But this is not the complete signification of such a mentality. I should quote a long explanation of Belikov's appearance and mentality to deliver the exact picture:

> He was remarkable for one thing: no matter how fine the weather was, he always went out in goloshes, carrying an umbrella and wearing a warm, wadded overcoat. And his umbrella he always kept in a case and his watch was in a case of grey chamois, and when he took out his penknife to sharpen his pencil that, too, was in a little case. Even his face seemed to be in a case, for he always kept it concealed behind the turned-up collar of his coat. He wore dark spectacles and a warm waistcoat, and he kept cotton-wool in his ears and he had the hood raised whenever he got into a cab (Chekhov 2002, 48).

Belikov's sombre appearance suggests his burden of duty that he must perform. His sophisticated system of life controls him and he is constrained in its paws. He is afraid of being exposed. The cases that Belikov almost frantically takes out or puts in are the reminders of his imprisonment in his fears, anxieties, traumas, or insecurity. Although it seems as if Belikov behaves like this because he wants to keep everything under control, it is precisely he who is kept under strict control. He is not free to behave as he wants to; he has buried himself prematurely into a coffin. And this is not a metaphorical statement. "Belikov's bedroom was like a little box and curtains hung round his

bed. When he went to sleep he would pull the blankets over his head" (Chekhov 2002, 50).

Belikov is projecting on to the physical appearance his authentic perturbed self because he "tried to confine in a case" his opinions too (Ibid, 48). He is obsessed with rules and regulations, "bulletins and newspaper articles in which something was prohibited" (Ibidem). When somebody disobeyed any rule, there is always Belikov lurking somewhere to spy and warn. Belikov stifled everybody around him. He holds that it is his responsibility to make people follow the rules. His favourite phrases are "I shouldn't wonder if something unpleasant would come of it" (Ibidem) and "it will reach the ears of the trustees" (Ibid, 55). So, Belikov has a particular corporeal authority in mind when he follows the rules. When somebody committed "transgression and deviation", it "plunged him into dejection (Ibid, 48); observing people is a pressing issue for Belikov. He visits his colleagues, "but it was plainly a heavy burden for him to come and sit with us, and he only did it because he considered it his duty as our comrade" (Ibid, 49). At one point it is possible to see Belikov as a surreal automatic robot that performs its functions in a downbeat manner. Indeed, Belikov is captured in a relentless whirl of social machinery that accepts the function of controlling everybody as its primary aim. What is interesting is that Belikov is successful in his odd exploits because "teachers were afraid of him. Even the director feared him. . . . The whole town!" (Ibidem)

When there occurs a possibility of Belikov's marriage, everybody in the town thinks that it can change him. Yet, "he did not change his way of living one atom. On the contrary, his resolve to get married affected him painfully; he grew thin and pale and seemed to shrink still farther into his case" (Chekhov 2002, 52). Marriage is sharing, but for Belikov it is impossible. His life is arrested in the unending circle of establishment of regulations and the strict and solemn acts of obeying them. Falling in love, having emotional bonds, or branding himself as a husband means violation of his arrested condition. Marriage means an extra risk of committing something undesirable or being ridiculed. Belikov is afraid to make a choice, a choice to love, to share his life with somebody else, or to indulge in absolute freedom. And one of the reasons of his fear to transcend his contemporary reality, presumably, is his perception of Varenka. This is the beginning of the ending, indeed, as will be seen in the forthcoming parts of this study. Varenka, if seen from Belikov's point of view, exhibits a dissipated behaviour.

When he sees Varenka ride a bicycle, his "face turned from green to white, and he seemed paralysed" (Ibid, 54). Although not scurrilous in his intentions, but with a dry poke Belikov exclaims: "Is it proper for schoolteachers and women to ride bicycles?" (Ibidem) Varenka's boisterous nature unsettles Belikov and all his philosophy of life. He cannot accept the fact that people behave in accordance with their freedom.

**A drop of freedom or a change of state and death**

"The Story of an Hour" is a story of an hour when Mrs. Mallard experiences her heightened sense of freedom presumably for the first time. The story is mainly about what she goes through during one hour – indulging in the beauty of nature, imagining living only for herself, seizing an opportunity to enjoy gleeful future. The story "details a very ordinary reality and conscientiously analyses that moment in a woman's life when the boundaries of the accepted everyday world are suddenly shattered and the process of self-consciousness begins" (Papke 1990, 62). When Mrs. Mallard starts to perceive her triumphalist sense of freedom, she, nevertheless, feels "pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul" (Chopin 1976, 198). This exhaustion is the remainder of her previous life that banished freedom, autonomy, choice from Mrs. Mallard's existence. But now is the time of freedom; the trees emphatically hail "new spring life", "the delicious breath of rain" (Ibidem) alludes to a poignant mood of happiness, and sparrows' twittering promise resplendent future. And the open window through which Louise meets her new life is a symbol of "possibility of freedom and self-discovery" (Khan, Shah, Khan 2022, 27). "'Free! Body and soul free!' She kept whispering" (Chopin 1976, 199). Mrs. Mallard's one hour of freedom is like a drop of water in the desert for her. "[S]he was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window" (Ibid, 200). Looking at Chopin's story through the lens of Irigaray and her concept of the divine, Tseng claims that Louise as a "female divine can be seen as representing woman's own ideals, self-representations and horizons, beyond the confines of patriarchal hegemony and paternal law" (2014, 32). In other words, Louise is able to transcend her immediate surroundings.

Kate Chopin's uniqueness – or her "effective weapon" as Cutter (1994, 18) calls it – lies in her ability to meticulously depict female pernicious patterns of existence in a patriarchal world through the

language that elucidates how the female character perceives her freedom. The story does not convey the images of downtrodden and meek women under the authority of a grisly man. And this is exactly what Berkove (2000, 152) states when he claims that Louise is an "unreliable protagonist" who has "unrealistic expectations of absolute freedom" (Ibid, 158). Yet, Louise's imaginative drop of freedom tells a lot. Brently Mallard's image is limited – "little travel-stained, composedly varying his grip-sack and umbrella", "amazed" (Chopin 1976, 200) at the reaction of the others. It does not mean that his agency is limited. According to Distel (2018, 67), "Brently's exertion of disciplinary power is subtle . . . essentially invisible . . . because, according to Foucault, the person who exerts power does not need to be visible". In other words, if analysed from a Foucauldian perspective, the story projects female suppression. Hence, Mrs. Mallard's emotional outburst does not allow the reader to overlook the possible oppressive circumstances in her life.

There is something that frightens Louise though: "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" (Chopin 1976, 199). It was something that she experiences for the first time in her life –freedom and self-assertion. "It is frightening because it is not of her true womanhood world; it reaches to her from the larger world outside" (Papke 1990, 63). According to Podlasli-Labrenz (2016, 65), who analysed Chopin's story in terms of Sartrean Existentialism, what Louise experiences is existentialist anguish. Being unfamiliar, the feeling makes Louise alert. "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" (Chopin 1976, 199). Louise is not strong enough, though, to come against this new feeling. "The habit of repression has so weakened Louise that her glimpse of freedom – her birthright – does not empower her, but leaves her unable to cope with the everyday reality to which she is abruptly restored" (Ewell 1986, 90) – her death at the end.

In the last scene of the short story, Mrs. Mallard dies, presumably of a heart attack. And the last phrase "of joy that kills" (Chopin 1976, 200) encompasses an elusive essence of Mrs. Mallard's fundamental reality. The ironic phrase is the reflection of the others' belief, which Chopin suavely integrated into the narrative. For Mr. Mallard, Richards, and Josephine, Mrs. Mallard dies because her heart becomes

overbrimmed with joy after seeing her husband alive again. What Louise goes through in this one hour is unintelligible for them. However, for Louise, the chance of being absolutely free just slips through her consciousness forever. "For Chopin, each individual – particularly each woman – possessed infinite potential for self-fulfillment and expression but also, at the same time, the greater possibility for self-compromise and self-destruction" (Papke 1990, 30). Although some critics believe that the end of the story does not clearly say whether Mrs. Mallard sees her husband or not (Cunningham 2004, 49), Brently's entrance through that door is a peculiar deflation of Louise's dream and it leaves her beneath a heap of suppression, authorial interference, and garbled condition. The key idea here is the fact that from now on it is impossible for Louise to go back to her previous existence. The supremely important freedom turns to be a fanciful dream and this transformation perturbs Louise and leads to her untimely death. "Far from being a melodramatic ending, the conclusion both informs and warns: should a woman see the real world and her individual self within it only to be denied the right to live out that vision, then in her way lies non-sense, self-division, and dissolution" (Papke 1990, 64).

When it comes to Chekhov's story "The Man in a Case", it is not possible to say that Belikov becomes free in the same sense that Mrs. Mallard does. In Belikov's example, it is a change of state. The most abominable condition for Belikov is his being exposed, caught in an inappropriate circumstance. And he assiduously rips himself out of common social life for the sake of the life that fits into the official or non-official regulations. So, finding himself outside of such a life is a radical change of state for Belikov. At the same time, it is his reason to die, which is very close to what Colley experiences in William Golding's novel *Rites of Passage*. When Belikov is kicked out of Kovalenkos' house and sent down the stairs by Kovalenko himself, Belikov finds himself in condition that he has been escaping all his life:

> The staircase was long and steep, but he rolled safely to the bottom, picked himself up, and touched his nose to make sure that his spectacles were all right. At the very moment of his descent Varenka had come in with two ladies; they stood at the foot of the stairs and watched him, and for Belikov this was the most terrible thing of all. He would rather have broken his neck and both legs than to have appeared ridiculous (Chekhov 2002, 56).

Finding himself in a surrounding where people disapprove his ideas and behaviour is a devastating circumstance for Belikov. He assumes that everything he does is worthwhile applause and acceptance. But the erratic and intrepid behaviour that Kovalenko exhibits towards Belikov unsettles the latter's whole world. Belikov idealises himself and keeps the town under his control; and Kovalenko disregards and ignores his truth. This was the first blow that Belikov gets. "It is the humiliation of the rebuff – not the fall down the stairs – that ultimately brings about Belikov's rather Gogolian death" (Freedman 1988, 4).

The next and the lethal blow comes from Varenka and her reaction to Belikov's fall. Belikov's fall is the destruction of his achievement that has cost him all his life, and it happens in front of the others:

> As he picked himself up Varenka recognised him. When she caught sight of his absurd face, his wrinkled overcoat, and his goloshes, not knowing what had happened but supposing that he had fallen downstairs of his own accord, she could not control herself and laughed till the whole house rang: 'Ha! ha! ha!'
> This pealing and rippling 'ha! ha! ha!' settled everything – it put an end to the wedding and to the earthly career of Belikov (Chekhov 2002, 56).

Belikov's despondent condition in this scene leads to his transformation. Belikov undergoes calamitous change that brings him to a recognition of the impossibility of living after this event. Belikov's bathos leads to his self-denial because his previous existence was utterly based on his self-idealised image. His being exposed in front of Varenka and the others is a moment of his so-called freedom from the stifling regulations, conventions, and rigid traditional patterns of existence. The difference between Mrs. Mallard and Belikov in this drop of freedom and transformation lies in their perception of it. While for Mrs. Mallard it is gleeful, for Belikov it is a catastrophe.

After the event, "he first took Varenka's picture off the table, then he went to bed and never got up again" (Chekhov 2002, 56). Belikov dies in a month. Although Belikov dies in a month, the force that drives him to his demise occurred in a moment. It was a moment of change of life. And being a very conservative man, Belikov cannot stand any kind of change. Belikov believes in the collective approval of his way of life and seeing that there might be people who disapprove of his so-called correcting function leaves him utterly frustrated. Moreover, being exhibited as an animal in a circus, where people come to laugh and entertain themselves makes Belikov lose his faith in the meaning of life.

## Conclusion

Believing that they have a stable and unified life, Mrs. Mallard and Belikov suddenly find themselves in an unpredictable condition after which they die. The two short stories analysed in this study – Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Chekhov's "A Man in a Case" – seek to question human existence in terms of its relation to freedom, transformation, obsessions, fears, traumas, and social norms. "Chekhov's aim was to make his readers and spectators aware of the stagnant, stupid and mediocre lives they all lived and, by doing so, make them aware that this was not the inevitable fate of humanity" (Borny 2006, 49). The theme of time also seeps into the contexts of the stories. Time's unity disintegrates when Mrs. Mallard's and Belikov's moments of freedom and change of state are narrated as it loses its consistency. In other words, the moments become eternity for these characters. Mrs. Mallard's and Belikov's moments of freedom and change dismantle their previous existence, their depths of routine lives, and their ostensible selfhood. The illusions/disillusions into which they were thrown into, and which seemed to be sinewy are vaporised when they find themselves in the moments of transformation. These transient moments, nonetheless, are experienced just to move these characters into the realm of eternity.

To conclude, I want to claim that the proximity of temporal paradigms has created an affinity in Kate Chopin's and Anton Chekhov's understanding of the concept of freedom. Though Belikov's moment of freedom confounds the reader a bit, the whole idea of freedom worked out in the story gives the same outcome. The freedom that Chopin creates for Mrs. Mallard is similar to the freedom that Chekhov provides for Belikov's colleagues and the other characters in the town. Both stories vividly portray the fact that life is very short and that we should strive to expand our moments of freedom and transformation.

## References:

Berkove, Lawrence I. 2000. Fatal Self-Assertion in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." *American Literary Realism*, 32(2): 152-158. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27746974

Borny, Geoffrey. 2006. *Interpreting Chekhov*. ANU Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jbjpn.6

Chekhov, Anton. 2002. *Selected Stories*. Wordsworth Classics.

Chopin, Kate. 1976. *The Awakening* and *Selected Stories of Kate Chopin*. A Signet Classic. Penguin Publishing Group.

Cunningham, Mark. 2004. The Autonomous Female Self and the Death of Louise Mallard in Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour." *English Language Notes*, 42(1): 48–55. DOI: 10.1215/00138282-42.1.48

Cutter, Martha J. 1994. Chopin's Short Fiction. *Legacy*, 11(1): 17-36. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25679112

Distel, Kristin M. 2018. "Free! Body and Soul Free!" The Docile Female Body in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour." In S. Bhattacharjee and G. N. Ray (Eds.), *New Women's Writing: Contextualising Fiction, Poetry and Philosophy*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Eichenbaum, Boris. 1987. "Chekhov at Large." In R. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice-Hall International.

Ewell, Barbara C. 1986. *Kate Chopin*. The Ungar Publishing Company.

Freedman, John. 1988. Narrative Technique and the Art of Story-Telling in Anton Chekhov's "Little Trilogy." *South Atlantic Review*, 53(1): 1-18. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3200397

Grossman, Leonid. 1987. "The Naturalism of Chekhov." In R. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice-Hall International.

Hahn, Beverly. 1979. *Chekhov: A Study of the Major Stories and Plays*. Cambridge University Press.

Khan, Imdad U., Syed M. Shah, and Afaqullah Khan. 2022. Awakening into Selfhood: Feminine Oppression, Self-Discovery, and Illusive Freedom in "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin. *The Women*, 14: 15–29. https://sujo.usindh.edu.pk/index.php/THE-WOMEN/article/view/6139/4185

Koloski, Bernard. 1996. *Kate Chopin: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

Laffitte, Sophie. 1974. *Chekhov 1860-1904*. Translated by Moura Budberg and Gordon Latta. London: Angus & Robertson.

Meister, Charles W. 1988. *Chekhov Criticism: 1880 through 1986*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Nabokov, Vladimir. 1989. "Chekhov's Prose." In T. A. Eekman (Ed.), *Critical Essays on Anton Chekhov*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co.

Papke, Mary E. 1990. *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Warton*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Patrick, George Z. 1932. Chekhov's Attitude Towards Life. *The Slavonic and East European Review*. 10(30): 658-668. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4202713

Podlasli-Labrenz, Heidi. 2016. "Revealing the Essential Self": Sartrean Existentialism in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and "A Pair of Silk Stockings." *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*, 23(2): 62–78.

Pritchett, Victor S. 1988. *Chekhov: A Spirit Set Free*. New York: Random House.

Seyersted, Per. 1980. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Showalter, Elaine. 1984. Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 3(1/2): 29-43. https://www.jstor.org/stable/463823

Toth, Emily. 1990. *Kate Chopin*. New York: Morrow.

Troyat, Henry. 1987. *Chekhov*. London: Macmillan.
Tseng,Chia-Chieh. 2014. “Joy That Kills”: Female Jouissance in Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour.” *Short Story*, 22(2): 29–38.