

Sample Student Paper from a Lower-Division Course (100 or 200-level course)  
with Comments

Conquering Gender Roles

In current times, we concern ourselves with affirmative action and whether women are being given all the same opportunities as men are. There is a clear feeling that women are men's equals and that they should be treated as such. Traditionally, however, women were not treated as equals of men, but almost as accessories of men. Both Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour" and William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" explore traditional gender roles and their effects on women. While both stories suggest that women are traditionally subordinate to and defined by their men and that this is damaging, Faulkner's story shows a woman who accepts this role but who ironically defies it, while Chopin's depicts a woman who does not accept this role but who ultimately cannot desert it.

**Comment:** Note how this introduces the common element between the two stories that will lead to the thesis but that it is not an arguable thesis in itself.

**Comment:** Thesis statement makes an argument that is clearly defined, sufficiently limited, and arguable. This example uses one effective form of thesis in a comparison paper: "Although [similarities], these are the differences."

In traditional society women are viewed as controlled, and rightly so, by their men. Indicative of this is the open line of "The Story of an Hour" in which the main character is referred to solely as "Mrs. Mallard" (Chopin 362). This suggests that a woman's identity lies with her husband and that he helps to define her. This point is reinforced when Mrs. Mallard begins to "[weep] at once, with sudden, wild abandonment" (Chopin 362) over the death of her husband. Until this point she has lived solely for her husband (Chopin 363). She is shattered by the idea of going on without him and foresees nothing but bleakness in her husbandless future. Similarly, in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," men have always defined the title character. Emily is so dependent upon her father that when he dies she refuses to believe it and for three days will not let the ministers take his body away to be buried. The town hypothesizes that she has to do this, as "with nothing left,

**Comment:** Note good use of perceptive, specific piece of analysis (the way that the character is addressed) and proof using a quotation.

**Comment:** Note how the author integrates the quotation into the sentence and changes (in brackets) a verb form necessary to make the sentence grammatically correct.

[Emily] would have to cling to that which had robbed her" (Faulkner 130). They are referring to her father having "driven away" (Faulkner 132) all of Emily's potential suitors as none were deemed "quite good enough" (Faulkner 132) for her. Emily's father had complete control over her life and, reluctant to sacrifice that control to another male, had disqualified all her suitors. Emily had always accepted this; a "slender white figure in the background" (Faulkner 132), she allowed her father to dictate her future. Now, with him dead, she is unable to conceive of an existence unrestrained by her father. In this way, both Mrs. Mallard and Emily find themselves at a complete loss after the deaths of their controlling men.

**Comment:** This concluding sentence reinforces the main idea of the paragraph and draws attention to this particular parallel between the two characters.

The way in which each woman responds to the loss of her controller is, however, starkly different. After having contemplated her situation for a while, Mrs. Mallard of "Story of an Hour" looks out the window and takes in "the delicious breath of rain," and the "tops of trees that [are] all aquiver with the new spring life" (Chopin 363). Presently she begins to feel a "creeping" (Chopin 363) sensation of freedom, a rebirth similar to the rebirth of springtime. She perceives that the world holds something more for her and that she herself can discover it. Her "vacant stare" (Chopin 363) morphs into a "keen and bright" (Chopin 363) outlook. She contemplates whether she had loved her husband and decides that, in actuality, this is irrelevant. "What [can] love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion .. , the strongest impulse of her being?" (Chopin 363) she asks herself. What is important to her is what she can see and discover for herself. This sense of freedom makes her the man whose name she carries; she does not have to be Mrs. Mallard. When her sister comes to check on her, she is called "Louise" (Chopin 363), a self-defined name. Faulkner's Emily, however, is not able to realize her freedom. While Louise is able to pull herself from "physical exhaustion" brought on by her man's death and her subsequent

**Comment:** This topic sentence refers to the previous paragraph: having already established the idea of each woman having a male "controller," it introduces the new idea of this paragraph, the woman's response.

**Comment:** Note the excellent choice of specific words from the story. This sentence contrasts two images of vision and reinforces the previous sentence's assertion that Mrs. Mallard "perceives" something different.

**Comment:** This piece of analysis, which looks at a specific quotation from the text, ties together the earlier analysis of Mrs. Mallard's name and interprets the significance of this shift for the reader.

**Comment:** This sentence provides a transition between the discussion of Chopin's story and Faulkner's story by using a key word of the analysis: freedom. It signals a contrast by using the word "however."

temporary loss of identity (Chopin 363), Emily is not able to overcome *her* illness for some time. When she finally does emerge from it, it is with a man, Homer Barron, a construction foreman from the North. The townspeople first believe that Emily "would not think seriously of a Northerner" (Faulkner 133), but as her romance continues decide that she is indeed "fallen" (133), as she is dating so far below her station. Emily's need for a controlling man and for love is so strong that she ignores class distinctions and pretensions. Whatever the costs, she will find a man to give her some direction and purpose, as well as someone to keep her from feeling lonely. The man she picks controls - "reins and whip in a yellow glove" (134) - just as Emily's father did - "his back to her clutching a horsewhip" (132). She has effectively replaced one domineering male figure in her life with another one; she, unlike Louise, is unable to realize the potential to escape this domination altogether.

**Comment:** Note the connection between the women's illnesses. This indicates a careful and perceptive reading.

**Comment:** An excellent piece of analysis that shows careful reading of the text. This is the sort of detailed connection that characterizes an excellent paper.

Ultimately, Emily realizes that she will not be able to keep Homer with her forever. She poisons him and stores his corpse on her bed upstairs. When the townspeople find Homer laid out in this unusual fashion, they also note an "indentation of a head" with a long strand of "iron-grey hair" (Faulkner 135) on the pillow next to Homer. Obviously, Emily has been lying with his corpse, deriving some sort of comfort from this. The irony is that while she feels a need for a strong male in her life, she overpowers this male and ultimately controls him in order to achieve this goal. So in a sense, she is defying traditional female roles while they are, in fact, the very things that drive her.

**Comment:** By identifying the irony, the writer takes the interpretation to a deeper level. Note the reversal of power that is discussed here.

So too, is the ending of "Story of an Hour" ironic. After drinking in her freedom for some time, Louise triumphantly prepares to get up and begin her life anew, but just as she, "like a goddess of victory" (Chopin 364) begins to descend the stairs, her husband opens the door; he is not dead. Instantly she dies of a heart

**Comment:** Like the previous topic sentences, this topic sentence looks back toward the previous paragraph while introducing the new paragraph's subject matter.

attack. While Louise *was* prepared to live a husbandless, self-asserted life, she is not prepared to exercise that assertion over a man. She could conceive of an independent future *without* a man, but not of an independent future *with* a man.

She, unlike Emily, is unable to break the mold. She cannot exert power over a man.

**Comment:** This sentence helps to connect the two stories.

Society's perceptions about marriage and about the nature of the male-female relationship are too much for her to overcome. Therefore, all the grandiose dreams she had about living for herself are shattered, and with nothing left to live for and a sense of extreme disappointment, she perishes.

Both Faulkner and Chopin are criticizing society's traditional views about male-female relationships in their works. But while some of their complaints seem

to be the same, others are not. Chopin deals mainly with the institution of marriage. She finds it impossible for personal independence and a successful marriage to co-exist. It is a one or the other situation for her. For Faulkner the focus is society's perception that a woman needs a man to control her. He suggests that women conform to this idea, but that it need not necessarily be so; women do have the capability to assert themselves, as demonstrated by Emily's act of homicide.

Though the focuses of each story are a bit different, both suggest that woman can and should assert independent and that the traditional views of society are damaging her ability to live fully.

**Comment:** The conclusion's topic sentence returns to the language of the introduction and is at a more general level of discussion.

## Works Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." Literature: an Introduction to Reading and Writing. Seventh Edition. Ed. Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004. 362-364

Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily." Literature: an Introduction to Reading and Writing. Seventh Edition. Ed. Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004. 130-13.