

# Language of Representation in Ernest Hemingway's 'Cat in the Rain'

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**Abstract:** The language in general use in society and culture exhibit those features that tend to project a devalued image of women. Literary language too represents the devalued image of women and the structure of power relations between the sexes that it portrays. There are some general features that differentiate the language of men from that of women writers. One of them is about the language of representation, used especially in literary discourse, in the description of the sexes, male and female persons or characters in poetry, fiction and drama. It has been observed that in the description of women by male writers, there is a kind of fragmentation, a kind of analysis of the female and anatomical features. On the other hand, we do not find this kind of anatomization or fragmentation in the description of males. Generally the physical description is confined to the head, the face or their overall appearance and then the description moves on to the mental or intellectual qualities. The paper aims at studying men's perception of women through the analysis of the language of representation. The way women describe men and the men describe women clearly underlines the difference in their perception of each other. Ernest Hemingway's short story 'Cat in the Rain' is chosen for the present analysis.

**Key words:** language representation, men, women, description, fragmentation

Gender discrimination has been one of the major concerns of the social as well as literary discussions. The world has been witnessing the instances of gender discrimination from ages. The language in general use in society and culture exhibit those features that tend to project a devalued image of women. Literary language too represents the devalued image of women and the structure of power relations between the sexes that it portrays. Feminist stylistics is an attempt to make a systematic study of the language of literary (as well as other) texts from a feminist theoretical point of view. Feminist stylistics is concerned with a systematic study of linguistic features keeping in mind the ideology and assumptions of feminist theory.

There are some general features that differentiate the language of men from that of women writers. One of them is about the language of representation, used especially in literary discourse, in the description of the sexes, male and female persons or characters in poetry, fiction and drama. It has been observed that in the description of women by male writers, there is a kind of fragmentation, a kind of analysis of the female and anatomical features. On the other hand, we do not find this kind of anatomization or fragmentation in the description of males. Generally the physical description is confined to the head, the face or their overall appearance and then the description moves on to the mental or intellectual qualities.

According to Sara Mills, the anesthetization and romanticization that this kind of description produces in poetry and other forms of "high" literature may be absent in pornographic literature and art but there is the same fragmentation of the female in both. This fragmentation is associated with "male focalization- the female represented as an object, a collection of objects, for male gaze". (Mills 172)

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In 'Cat in the Rain' by Ernest Hemingway we have the theme of discontent, struggle, selfishness, helplessness, loneliness, conflict and insecurity. The story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator. Hemingway effectively employs minimalistic aesthetic to convey the various themes pertaining to human nature. The use of short, simple sentences, mostly without descriptive language, is a distinctive element of minimalism which helps to emphasize the theme of loneliness in the story. The basic qualities of minimalism like not using adjectives or adverb to color the noun and verb transcend a lonesome feeling.

Hemingway in this story is trying to paint a picture with his words—a study of a restless American tourist on a rainy day in a sleepy Italian village. It is set in a hotel on the Italian coast and takes place on a rainy day as an American couple hangs out in their hotel room. The story is about a woman who spots a cat in the rain. Hemingway does not articulate the feelings and frustration directly but whatever happens in the story makes us feel the unspoken tensions between the husband and wife.

The story presents the American couple as emotionally barren, isolated by their own self-absorption. The husband is completely unconcerned with his wife's feelings and aspirations. He remains passive not only in the story but in her life too. He never rises from his supine position on the bed, and even gets angry when she attempts to express her desires. The wife is nameless in the story. Her namelessness itself defines her identity. The nameless wife is like the "poor kitty out in the rain." It is significant that the hotelkeeper is more concerned with the American wife's desires. He is also willing to do what it takes to fulfill her desires.

Apart from the theme of loneliness the story also focuses on the theme of gender discrimination through language representation.

The story takes place in a hotel on the Italian coast on a rainy day. The husband is reading and the wife is looking out of the window. She sees a cat outside, huddling under a table in the rain and decides to go out and get it. Her husband tells her not to go and gets back to his reading. However, she goes down to get the cat and saw the hotel owner. The wife finds his way of behavior interesting and appealing. This is how the narrator describes her feelings for the hotelkeeper. :

*He stood behind his desk in the far end of the dim room. The wife liked him she liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands.*

The above passage is mainly from a point of view of the wife as she comes downstairs. She saw the hotel owner bowing to her. We do not find any anatomization in the way she describes him. There is only one sentence related to his physical appearance where she talks about his old, heavy face and big hands. The rest of the description is about his mental qualities, his ways of behavior. It is not his physical appearance but his manners and dignity in his behavior that impresses the wife.

When she goes outside, she doesn't find the cat and returns to her room. Her husband is still reading. Not knowing what to do now, she sits in front of the mirror. The way the writer describes the wife clearly marks the difference between the description of a man and that of a woman:

*She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck.*

This is the description of a woman from the author's (man) point of view. Here we see anatomizations and fragmentation. Here he refers to her sides, back of her head and neck. The following conversation between the wife and her husband also shows anatomization in the wife's description:

*George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy's.  
'I like it the way it is.'*

*'I get so tired of it', she said. 'I get so tired of looking like a boy.'*

The above conversation refers to the wife's physical appearance; the way she looks and not to the way she feels. The wife who is looking for emotional fulfillment in her marriage is desperate and wanders restlessly in its pursuit. Unable to understand how to get it, she searches for it helplessly. She tries to get it by means of objects like 'a big knot at the back that she can feel', a kitty and new clothes. She says,

*'I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel', she said. 'I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.'*  
*'And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes'.*

When we compare the wife's description of the hotel owner and the conversation between the wife and the husband, we see a remarkable difference in the wife's responses. When she sees the hotel owner she is sure about what she likes and thus what she wants from her relationship with her husband. On the other hand, in the conversation with her husband she looks confused, not sure about what she is really searching for. It is quite evident from the conversation that there is a rift in their relationship. While the husband is cold and unmoved, the wife is restless. She is clearly searching for some means to escape from the routine. She is searching for a new identity. The hotel-keeper is apparently more sympathetic than her husband. The search for the kitty serves to rejuvenate her and break the monotony of her married life in which she is trapped.

Another significant aspect of the language representation is the way the husband and the wife are referred to in the story. The wife has no name. She is referred to as the American wife, the wife, the American girl and his wife. On the other hand the husband has a name, George. The husband remains passive throughout the story. It is the wife who occupies the central role in the story. Still she has no name.

Thus not only the theme of the story but the language of representation in the story also highlights the gender discrimination. The difference in which man and woman consider and evaluate each other is reflected in the language the writer uses for the description of man and woman.

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