

An Analysis of Ernest Hemingway's 'Cat in the Rain'

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Abstract:

Ernest Miller Hemingway was an American novelist, short story writer, and journalist. He wrote most of his work between mid 1920s and the mid 1950s. He wrote many applauded novels, acclaimed short stories and non-fiction collections. Ernest Hemingway called his style the Iceberg Theory: the facts float above water; the supporting structure and symbolism operate out of sight. The concept of the iceberg theory is sometimes referred to as the 'theory of omission'. He believed the writer could describe one thing though an entirely different thing occurs below the surface. In the most of the short story, Hemingway deliberately tries to keep this theory in his mind. His stories describe one thing, but they represent different thing below the surface. It is not only that the surface meaning of the story is important, but the deeper meaning gives more facets of the story to represent the certain traits of his characters. The present paper is to analyze Hemingway's short story 'Cat in the Rain' with the perspective of structural analysis including characters, setting, structural and point of view. It is also focused the attention on theme and symbolic representation in it.

Keywords: Characters, setting, structure, point of view, cat in the rain, husband, wife.

Introduction:

Hemingway's story 'Cat in the Rain' first published in 'In Our Time' in 1925. It is too short, but suggests more than the writer puts in the words. The main characters in this story are an American couple - George and his unnamed wife, an Italian padrone (hotelkeeper), and a hotel maid. The couple is on vacation in Italy. They are stayed in their hotel room on a rainy day. Isolated in their room from the rain and from the Italian tourists, the American wife and husband speak to each other, but do not truly listen. Their isolation in the room extends to the personal isolation of the couple. We can analysis the short story by characterization, setting, structure and point of view.

a. Characterization:

Ernest Hemingway follows the rules of short story in 'Cat in the Rain'. There four characters in the story and one animal - The American husband- George, American Wife- whose name he disclosed at the end as Avanti, the hotel owner, maid and animal- tortoiseshell cat. The American wife is the protagonist of the story. The story is around her and it is she who moves from one place to other along with maidservant. Only two characters have given the name. The author has not described detailed about any characters. The protagonist is a typical woman who wants what she saw or what she thought. The author gave the example of her nature in her first utterance - 'I'm going down and *get that kitty*'. [My emphasis] George is described as indifferent husband. He formally offered her his help, but he continued his reading. He neglects his wife's needs and desires. She wants to rescue a cat she sees out in the rain, but he makes no move to help her. It shows that she is always wanting something which are possible to give or not, but husband neglected her and careless about her demand. She pursued her search for the cat which was futile. When she returned in the room, she sat in front of the mirror and wanted to grow her hair. She is tired of her look in the short hair. She expresses a desire to grow her hair long so she can wear it in a knot, but he prefers that she keep her hair short "like a boy's." The wife is restless and bored. She doesn't want to read; she wants to rescue the cat, which she seems to resemble with her. After sometimes she put the list of her wanting which was an irate to her husband. It seemed that American husband knew better his wife so he is heedless of her wanting. It is possible that he is bored of

her wanting and demands, so he is buried himself in reading books and reluctant to fulfil her unsatisfied demands.

Hemingway's married couple in the uncrowded hotel room in Italy is representative of the "lost generation" of Americans who became ex-patriates in Europe seeking what they were unable to find in the United States where they had become disillusioned may be after the horrors of World War I. The husband, however, has become further secluded as he is aloof and disinterested in his wife's needs and desires. He is uncaring husband. He lets his wife go out in the rain without protection in the new place. He is interested more in his books than his wife on a beautiful rainy day. He also requests her to find and read the book which she doesn't like. The husband is disinterested in anything perhaps, because he is incapable of satisfying his wife's desires.

The American Wife has not given the name until the end when he calls her by name. She is lonely and empty. She wants something which she couldn't fulfil. She is searching for love. So, when she sees a desperate cat - often the feline is symbolic of the feminine - in the rain, she identifies her with it. She is like the cat. She, too, is isolated without comfort of woman since her husband ignores her and just reads his book. Her expression of longing for the kitten suggests her feminine desire and her eagerness to fulfill her feminine role as a mother. If she cannot have attention from her husband, then she can at least devote her attentions to a baby. Her desire for mother can be expressed by her words - 'I get so tired of looking like a boy.' She further added that she wants her hair long to knot at the back and 'have a kitty to sit on my lap...' She doesn't like the poor cat being in the rain. She insists again, 'I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.' The protagonist's desire is not fulfilled by her husband which indicates the emptiness of her life. The cat is also representation of her emotional state and feminine desires which her husband couldn't fulfil after the marriage. Her marriage life is not fruitful as they don't have child. The husband is unemotional, disinterested, and taciturn. He is not responded her. He never puts his book down and moves from his supine position. Their conversation suggests the lack of loving affection between their relations. The wife likes hotel-keeper, his seriousness, his dignity, serving way, his old, heavy face and big hand, but she doesn't his husband who puts his head in the book. The communication between the husband and the wife are not sound. Her husband wants her to be 'like a boy' and never let her keep her hair long which indicates femininity. Even he ignores her suggestions of her desire to be caressed and touched in an erotic manner as she mentions her desire to 'stroke' a kitty and hear it purr. Moreover, she strongly suggests her desire for lovemaking by repeating her desire for a cat:

"I want a cat. I want it now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat."

The wife tells here her husband that if she cannot have any feminine attention or loving-'fun' and delight together with him in this room, she needs an alternate to whom she can give her love and derive some satisfaction for her longings with its purring gratitude. Her desire for material things comes from an inability to acquire fun and affection from her marriage life. It suggests that she longs for cat, for children, for material possessions, for sex, for attention, for affection, for love and for better companionship which her husband couldn't satisfy in the story.

The cat is most important in this story because the writer has selected the title to this short story by referring her. The cat is also symbolic and similar with the woman characters. The woman is alone and the cat is also alone and both are without care in their life. The cat symbolized the feminine like wife and it also represented sterile life. There are two submissive and passive characters- the hotel keeper and the maid who are loyal to satisfy their customers' demands. They both made an attempt to help the protagonist to rescue the cat and keep her away from being wet in the rain by holding an umbrella to shield the wife. The wife likes the hotelkeeper than her husband. The wife's response to the attention of the Italian hotel keeper- "he liked the way he wanted to serve her" - and her pleasure when he sends a woman out with an umbrella certainly indicate her emotional desire for male attention. He doesn't let the woman go out alone in the rain. He cares for her demand of cat and gives her it at the end. He sent the maid to bring a cat for the woman from the rain. He satisfies her needs quite easily.

b. Setting :

The story starts in the room on the second floor of the hotel in Italy which was facing the sea, the garden and war monument. The writer describes the scenic view of nature from the window. The background of the story is indicated by the author in two paragraphs. The story starts in the afternoon and ends in the rainy evening- 'It was *quite dark now* and *still raining* in the palm trees.' {My emphasis} 'the sea, the rain, public garden, the war monument, palm trees, window, the motor car and waiter looking out' are the phrases which developed the visualization of the readers to understand the story properly. The war monument symbolized honour, respect, self-sacrifice of the soldiers. It is also indicated the death, the end of life and infertility. The public garden is indicated nature, Garden of Eden. It is also suggested freedom. There is no one on the roads and the motor cars were gone. The café is also empty and a waiter is looking at the empty square. The American couple is separated from any countrymen and would like to be in hotel room. Further, their residing in a hotel room in Italy, rather than going out the seaside or public parks. They isolated from the many Italians who visit the beaches as well as a war monument just below the Americans' window. The story suggests secluded, isolated, and dismal atmosphere. The rain is symbolic of fertility and hope to get something desirable.

The story started in the room and shifted to gravel path and again in the room. The rain and cat are very significant in story because it is included in the title. The cat has the symbolic meaning. It is one of the demands of the American wife which did not fulfil by her husband, but by others. The demand of the American wife seemed her psychological problems which cannot be fulfilled by her husband. It seemed that her attitude is different and unsatisfactory forever. She will ask for other thing after fulfilling her one demand. The husband is heedless about her demands and at last he felt angry with words- 'Oh, *shut up* and get something *to read*,' [My emphasis] It is the irony of the story that the American wife wants 'cat' but she does not know why did she want it. 'the window' and 'glass' are symbols for the perception of American wife and she looks through it.

c. Structure:

The story opens in the late afternoon when there was raining and ends in the evening. It has ironical reversal that her husband is unable to fulfil her desire, but somehow her demand is fulfilled. The story starts with description of the place and the scenic background of it. The title suggests that there is something with 'cat' in the 'rain'. The writer described the effect of the rain on 'war monument, the palm trees, pools, the sea, empty square, the café waiter etc' in the third paragraph. The American wife saw a cat under the table from the window. She wants it immediately. Her husband offered the help to get her the cat, but he didn't rise from his posture. She knew him better, so she said she will bring the cat herself. She gets down though the weather was not good. She liked the hotel owner. She went out in search of cat under the table. A maid stood behind her opening an umbrella. She didn't find the cat and returned with disappointment. Her husband asked her about the cat and busied himself in the reading. She came upset and then sat in front of the mirror. The irony of the American wife is that she is not satisfied with her hair style. The husband is heedless on her nonsense talking. She put more demands before her husband 'long hair, a big knot at the back, to eat with her own silver, candle, brush her hair, new clothes' and last and first demand 'want kitty.' Ironically husband neglected her all demands and buried himself in reading, but at last her demand is fulfilled by the maid. The writer maintains the time, place, and brevity in the structure of the story.

d. Point of view:

Hemingway adopts the technique of third-person narration to tell the story. The narrator is somebody outside the story who chooses to look at the story mainly from American wife's view point. The narrator focused the story of American wife. He didn't express here the movement, desire and the reading of husband, but the story delineated the wife only. We are told the thoughts of Wife e.g. She liked hotel-keeper. The writer has used a dramatic element into the story by having a lot of dialogue. The viewpoints of characters come through their dialogue. The third person narration allows the writer to use plenty of flexibility for authorial comments. Hemingway masterly uses third person point of view in this brief story.

Hemingway's style is terse, short and to the point. It is easy to read, his writing is often misinterpreted as simple. The story has more meaning than the words put there. Hemingway, however, attributed to what he called his 'iceberg theory' in which he declared what he meant to convey was beneath the surface, just as the same percentage of an iceberg is submerged. Even we can get insight into the behaviour of American husband and wife and their reaction to each.

e. Conclusion

Hemingway used certain words to indicate the symbolic meaning in the story. The story is simply about an American Women's longing for a cat. This American way of living, staying inside the hotel room in a state of ennui and desiring material objects such as cat, long hair, new clothes etc has been described by Hemingway. The atmosphere of emotional separation and lack of intimacy between the couple is created by the husband's reading on the bed alone while the wife looks out the window at a cat. The writer has selected the imagery which indicates that the female protagonist's wish for a child. The 'cat', the 'rain', 'the window' and 'reading' are three phrases which very important from the beginning to the end of the story. The American wife –Avanti and the cat have similarity here which author liked to express symbolically. The cat is surrounded by the rain and try to find the shelter and the wife is surrounded by snobbish husband who is always indulged himself in reading books. The writer has pointed out the barren and infertile life of American couple in this story.

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