



University of Tikrit

College of Education for Women

English Department

Second year/Short Story

Lect. Dr. Salwa T. Fizee

E.mail: sfaezi@tu.edu.iq

Cat in the Rain

Summary

American novelist Ernest Hemingway's short story *A Cat in the Rain* was published in 1925 in a collection titled *In Our Time*. As a signature style, his works always leave room for ambiguity, and hence the open-ended nature of his stories paves a way for multiple interpretations. Though the story is set in a scenario post the First World War, nothing about the war holds any significance. Instead, gender expectations crop up to be a dominant theme in the narrative which also caters to the multiculturalism that 20th-century writing masters in.

The story begins with a description of an American couple who are the only people of their nationality residing in an Italian hotel that faces the public garden and the war monument. It is raining as the American wife looks out of her window. She observes a cat trying to protect itself from the harsh rain and decides to rescue it. Her husband George offers to do the task out of courtesy but she is adamant to go down herself. On her way, she passes the hotel keeper, and the two exchange greetings. The wife grows fondness for the hotel keeper.

Further, as she steps out of the hotel to look for the cat, an umbrella comes over her. The hotel keeper sends it through their maid for the wife's benefit. On reaching the spot of the cat's shelter, she finds it missing and feels disappointed. Upon her return, the padrone (the hotel keeper) greets her again which she associates with her importance in his eyes and feels flattered. When she enters her room, George is lying on his bed, reading. The wife in a fit of release begins to express her desires- first to have a kitten and then to grow out her hair. She does not wish to look like a boy with her short hair. But George resists change. The wife also desires to have a home of their own but George dismisses her and continues to read again. In a change of tone, the wife presents a firm stance on keeping a cat, and with this said, the story ends with a knock at the couple's door where the maid is holding a tortoise-shell cat that the padrone sends for the wife.

Cat in the Rain | Analysis

Hemingway's narrative has a third-person omniscient narrator who observes the cultural isolation through the life of an American couple residing in an Italian hotel. While the husband seems distant and indifferent to the life he is living which are modernist presumptions, the wife experiences unsettlement. The story's setting in the post-war years leaves room for a modernist reading of the text that focuses on individualism, self-consciousness, and isolation.

Hemingway has always preferred straightforward writing instead of flowery metaphors and jargon to make his point. At the same time, he avoids spoon-feeding his readers and expects them to visualize his intent. His precise writing focuses on employing energized words to render a greater meaning. The story follows his iceberg theory and many critics believe it to have autobiographical references. Hemingway's wife Hadley too wished for a cat and when she was expecting a child, he wrote this story.

In the entire story, the wife is unnamed while her husband's mentioned. The generality of the "American wife" makes the woman protagonist a macrocosmic representative of all the wives with a similar fate. In the early decades of the twentieth century, women were not working professionally and were expected to be good homemakers. The wife does not complain about the lack of opportunity to her for carving out a professional identity but she does resent the non-fulfillment of her latter role. She craves to be a mother and this is evidenced in her wish to pet a cat, specifically a kitten. At first, the desire seems controlled but as the story progresses, it transforms into a demandable right. A close reading would suggest it to be an implicit suggestion to her husband to plan a child.

A similar implicit endeavor lies in the description of her relationship with the hotel keeper. The serving nature, the respect, and attention to her needs, and a willingness to make her comfortable are what she expects from her husband, or ideally, her husband should be providing her with them but it is the hotel keeper who fills this void. All romantic inclinations can be put aside since Hemingway does not spill any beans on the keeper's feelings towards her. Even the wife is not portrayed as romantically attracted to him. It is his earnestness towards her that makes him a likable character.

American novelist Ernest Hemingway's short story *A Cat in the Rain* was published in 1925 in a collection titled *In Our Time*. As a signature style, his works always leave room for ambiguity, and hence the open-ended nature of his stories paves a way for multiple interpretations. Though the story is set in a scenario post the First World War, nothing about the war holds any significance. Instead, gender expectations crop up to be a dominant theme in the narrative which also caters to the multiculturalism that 20th-century writing masters in.

The story begins with a description of an American couple who are the only people of their nationality residing in an Italian hotel that faces the public garden and the war monument. It is raining as the American wife looks out of her window. She observes a cat trying to protect itself from the harsh rain and decides to rescue it. Her husband George offers to do the task out of courtesy but she is adamant to go down herself. On her way, she passes the hotel keeper, and the two exchange greetings. The wife grows fondness for the hotel keeper. Further, as she steps out of the hotel to look for the cat, an umbrella comes over her. The hotel keeper sends it through their maid for the wife's benefit. On reaching the spot of the cat's shelter, she finds it missing and feels disappointed. Upon her return, the padrone (the hotel keeper) greets her again which she associates with her importance in his eyes and feels flattered. When she enters her room, George is lying on his bed, reading. The wife in a fit of release begins to express her desires- first to have a kitten and then to grow out her hair. She does not wish to look like a boy with her short hair. But George resists change.

The wife also desires to have a home of their own but George dismisses her and continues to read again. In a change of tone, the wife presents a firm stance on keeping a cat, and with this said, the story ends with a knock at the couple's door where the maid is holding a tortoise-shell cat that the padrone sends for the wife.

Cat in the Rain | Analysis

Hemingway's narrative has a third-person omniscient narrator who observes the cultural isolation through the life of an American couple residing in an Italian hotel. While the husband seems distant and indifferent to the life he is living which are modernist presumptions, the wife experiences unsettlement. The story's setting in the post-war years leaves room for a modernist reading of the text that focuses on individualism, self-consciousness, and isolation.

Hemingway has always preferred straightforward writing instead of flowery metaphors and jargon to make his point. At the same time, he avoids spoon-feeding his readers and expects them to visualize his intent. His precise writing focuses on employing energized words to render a greater meaning. The story follows his iceberg theory and many critics believe it to have autobiographical references.

Hemingway's wife Hadley too wished for a cat and when she was expecting a child, he wrote this story.

In the entire story, the wife is unnamed while her husband's is mentioned. The generality of the "American wife" makes the woman protagonist a macrocosmic representative of all the wives with a similar fate. In the early decades of the twentieth century, women were not working professionally and were expected to be good homemakers. The wife does not complain about the lack of opportunity to her for carving out a professional identity but she does resent the non-fulfillment of her latter role. She craves to be a mother and this is evidenced in her wish to pet a cat, specifically a kitten. At first, the desire seems controlled but as the story progresses, it transforms into a demandable right. A close reading would suggest it to be an implicit suggestion to her husband to plan a child. A similar implicit endeavor lies in the description of her relationship with the hotel keeper. The serving nature, the respect, and attention to her needs, and a willingness to make her comfortable are what she expects from her husband, or ideally, her husband should be providing her with them but it is the hotel keeper who fills this void.

All romantic inclinations can be put aside since Hemingway does not spill any beans on the keeper's feelings towards her. Even the wife is not portrayed as romantically attracted to him. It is his earnestness towards her that makes him a likable character.

The climax of the story witnesses an outpour of emotions and desires by the wife who affirms to pet a cat if she cannot lay her hands on the other luxuries of life such as owning a house or growing her hair out. She is compliant with her husband's wishes but when he dismisses hers, it is unacceptable. Hemingway heightens the discord by allowing the hotel-keeper to shine once again as he sends a cat to the wife while her husband had already dismissed it. The cat then becomes a symbol of her unfulfilled desires including that of becoming a mother and she has to find solace in the cat as both her companion and her child.

The reality was not going to alter and the tortoiseshell of the cat predicts the hard and cold future for the wife. Also, it is not revealed whether she actually desired a cat or not and thus was even pleased to have one sent by the hotel keeper.

Another interesting aspect of the story is its language and cultural interactions with many Italian phrases forming the basic communication between Americans and Italians. It is also noticed how Europeans look down on English, especially American English. The maid who accompanies the wife in rescuing the cat tightens her face as the wife converses with her in English. While English has been the colonizers' language and thus a powerful symbol in the world, it is perceived differently in the story.

A Cat in the Rain | Characters

The American Wife – She is the protagonist of the story whose pent-up desires meet a release in her wish to pet a cat. She is often ignored by her husband and is showered with attention by her hotel keeper. As an unnamed woman, she becomes a representative of all the wives living a similar fate in the post-war setting.

George – He is the indifferent husband who appears to be courteous and caring towards his wife but simultaneously dismisses her wishes.

Hotel-Keeper – He manages the Italian hotel where the American couple is residing. Each time the wife passes through his office, he greets her and exchanges pleasantries. He is quite attentive to her needs, even the unsaid ones. While the wife likes him for his readiness to serve her, Hemingway opts to not disclose the padrone's intentions towards her.

Maid – She looks after the basic requirements of the American couple.

Cat in the Rain | Literary Devices

SYMBOLISM –

Rain: It is a symbol of hope and new life that water is associated with. The dull life of the American wife requires freshness and new experiences which she is devoid of. Also, her release of emotions and desires towards the close of the story mirrors the natural outpour i.e. the rain itself. Thus, rain signifies both an internal and external release of energy.

Cat: The American wife's desire to pet a cat could be read as her desire to become a mother. She wishes to have a child who she can love and nurture. In the absence of a child, she believes the cat can compensate momentarily.