Analysis on *Cat in the Rain*

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**Abstract.** In *Cat in the Rain*, Ernest Hemingway depicted a couple’s stay in an Italian hotel on a rainy day. The wife saw a cat under the table outside and wanted to get her back, but when she got out, she found that the cat had gone. What the wife wanted is not simply the cat, the long hair, or the new clothes, but the care, the protection, the individuality and the attention. The wife did not want to be bounded by her husband, and tried to break such constraint unconsciously, tried to seek her own position and power in the man-dominating society, but all her endeavor ended in vain.

**Introduction**

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) is famous for as an American novelist, short-story writer, and journalist. He is one of the most celebrated and also frequently criticized writers in the 20th century, is regarded as a literary giant and stylistic genius of that century, and is also considered as a sensitive and dedicated artist, legendary adventurer American history has ever produced. He received the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in literature in 1954. Hemingway's distinctive writing style is his economy and understatement, which has an important impact on the development of 20th century fiction writing. The iceberg principle theory is a classical writing theory of Ernest Hemingway's. According to him, In *Cat in the Rain*, Ernest Hemingway depicted a couple’s stay in an Italian hotel on a rainy day. The wife saw a cat under the table outside and wanted to get her back, but when she got out, she found that the cat had gone. She returned her room with a sad mood, and told her husband what she wants, but end up with her husband’s rude reply “Shut up” (Hemingway). Superficially, this story is a common unhappy occurrence between the husband and the wife, but Hemingway, who is most famous for his iceberg technique, must tell much more than it seems to be. What the wife wanted is not simply the cat, the long hair, or the new clothes, but the care, the protection, the individuality and the attention. The wife did not want to be bounded by her husband, and tried to break such constraint unconsciously, tried to seek her own position and power in the man-dominating society, but all her endeavor ended in vain.

**Social and Historical Background of "Cat in the Rain"**

Apart from the central notions of power and ideology, the concept of context or social historical background also plays discourse analysis. It is claimed that the significant part in the process of critical plot development of the protagonists' character and their moral standards cannot novel, the portrayal of be separated from the background the novel set in. So it is essential and beneficial to have a full understanding of the social and historical background of the story.
Ernest Hemingway is regarded as a remarkable icon in American literature and he has a legendary life experience in American history. He exerts great influence on his generation that is called lost generation. He was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois. As the second of Dr. Clarence and Grace Hall Hemingway's six children, he had one brother and four sisters. Like others of his generation, he grew up in an environment of losing gender distinctions. His mother's early interest in feminism and his father's cultivation of the skills of fishing and camping have great influence on him, which makes Hemingway become a writer of androgynous, at least to some degree. By studying his some short stories, we can see that Hemingway is able to observe things and events from the female point of view. This androgynous sensibility allows Hemingway to transcend his own sexual identity and objectively depict women as human beings with their own feelings and actions instead of only a private creature of men.

Outside it was raining hard, and the square was empty, no car, no people, but a cat crouching under a table and trying to make her not to be dipped on by the dripping rain (Hemingway). The rain was everywhere and it could not stop though the cat wished so. In this man-dominating society, the man's power was just like this omnipresent rain, and had the supreme authority over the woman, especially over his wife, and the wife was the same as the cat in the rain, who tried to escape from the husband's control passively. When the wife saw this cat, she wanted to get her back, protect her, own her and love her, because the cat's situation evoked the same feeling for her own. The husband showed no real care or concern for her when she decided to get that kitty. He only replied with "I'll do it" (Hemingway) without getting off the bed, even moving his eyes from the book he was reading. He only offered his wife's insistence of getting by her own with "Don't get wet" (Hemingway), without providing the umbrella. Deep in her heart, the wife really wanted the care, the protection. So when she saw a man in a rubber cape crossing the square, she might feel that need stronger. But without the cape or umbrella, she could only think of going along under the eaves. The wife's thought of saving the cat in essence is the saving of herself in an unconscious way. But when the wife got to the place, she found out that the cat disappeared, and then her wish for the cat was blasted. She failed to save the cat and save her own at the first try.

When the wife came back to her room, the failure of getting the cat ignited the spark of her desire. She wanted to eat at a table with her own silver and she wanted candles. She wanted a kitty and she wanted some new clothes (Hemingway). Because her husband had never satisfied and would never satisfy those of her desires. Despite of those unsatisfactory material desires, the wife would be satisfied if she could have her individuality, she could brush her hair out in front of a mirror. Even such a minor wish, the husband would not let her to fulfill, but she could only had the shortcut liked by her husband. What's worse, the husband did not want to hear those words anymore and asked to "shut up" (Hemingway) and the wife failed again in the pursuit of her wish. "Outside it was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees (Hemingway). The man's dominating power was still there, and was getting stronger. There was no light at all for the wife and her unconscious rebellion had been suppressed in this dark world. The wife was only the appendage to her husband. When he needed her, she must be there to serve all his needs, materially and emotionally. When he did not need her, she was just like a statue, deprived of the ability to think and act. Even though the wife got a cat at the end of the story, it was another one given by the padrone, not the one she wanted. This was the situation of the woman, that it was really hard for her to obtain what she wanted, hard to find her own position in the society, hard to say out
her own thought. What the woman desired could only be provided by the man, and it seemed to be the same as she wanted from the surface, but quite different in nature. The padrone on behalf of the man, deprived this American wife of the chance to get rid of the constraint, and made all her endeavor to be worthless.

Conclusions

Besides the care, the protection and the individuality, the wife aspired to the attention as well. The wife liked the padrone, liked the way he wanted to serve her, liked the deadly serious way he received any complaint (Hemingway). All these attentions for her cannot be received from her husband and made her to desire them more. When the wife passed the office, the padrone bowed from his desk (Hemingway). She got the attention and respect, and made her to feel her existence and supreme importance. However, the wife was destined to be lack of such attention, because throughout the story, the wife’s name was never known, but mostly referred as “the American wife”. This title lacked the individuality and the attention for her, signifying that she was just an American woman and nothing else (“The Rain and the Cage”). Compared with the husband, whose name was George; the wife was just a nobody. She could only live under control of her husband, never get herself out the hole where the society had placed her (The Rain and the Cage”), and became a victim of marital neglect.

The wife was the same as the cat in the rain; both of them had been confined, by her husband, or by the rain. No matter how many things she desired, she could only ended up with a reply of “shut up”. Though the wife tried with the unconscious impulse, she could only be overwhelmed by the strong and conscious force of suppression. The wife could not get the care, the protection, the individuality and the attention as she desired. Social practice is the third and last dimension in Fairclough's three-dimensioned framework. It is concerned with different levels of social organization such as the institutional context, the situation and the wider group or social context. Social practice relates to the broader historical and socio-political contexts, which involve consideration about whether the discursive practice restructures or reproduces the existing social reality and about what influence this has for the broader social practice. This dimension can show how the discourse is determined by social structures, and what kind of reproductive effects discourse can have on those structures. At this stage, the criteria of social and historical determinants will enable readers to see the hidden unequal gender ideologies and power relations laden in the discourse, and further to comprehend female's awakening against the male dominance and struggle for independence socially and spiritually.

References


