
The Politics of Representation in Hemingway's "*Cat in the Rain*"

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at Ernest Hemingway's "*Cat in the Rain*" using an interdisciplinary lens that incorporates feminist criticism, psychoanalytical theory and cultural studies. The study investigates Hemingway's minimalist narrative technique and how it builds and limits the female subject in a male-dominated hierarchical society. The study concentrates on the unnamed American wife, who is emotionally "discontented," seeking affection and wanting to find her identity symbolized through the recurring motif of the cat, the rain, the hotel room and its spatial context. While previous research focused on symbolism, minimalism and marital alienation, this study reveals that there is a missing dimension in the politics of representation, in relation to the narratization of female agency. The paper examines the gendered layers within the text, in light of the ideas from Stuart Hall to Carl Jung. The wife's need is not just to be comforted by the husband, but one of a psychological and higher maternal nature. The needs of the woman cannot be limited to the comfort of a husband only; there is a higher psychological and existential need that is met. Furthermore, this apparent neutrality of the interdisciplinary paradigm is unmasked as a complex hermeneutic of negotiation between power, desire and identity in the context of the "Lost Generation" after WWI. Lastly, the study provides an understanding of the politics of the text and the critical ideological interpretation of modernist society which emerged after World War I in Hemingway's work, and can be utilised in other classroom discussions regarding gender, narrative technique, and ideology in intellectual works of the early twentieth century.

Keywords: *Politics of representation, Feminist criticism, Psychoanalytic theory, Minimalism, Iceberg theory, patriarchal authority.*

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INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), one of the leading American modernist writers of the 20th century, developed his own literary voice in settings of both World War I in Italy (where he was wounded and decorated) and in expatriate life in 1920s Paris during the era of the "Lost Generation." Hemingway is a journalist and novelist, and short-story writer; he's a propagator of his famous "iceberg theory", which requires you to imagine or infer meanings and emotions in the story that aren't spelt out in the plot. Out of this time came his early work *In Our Time* (1925), which contained the story "Cat in the Rain"; he travelled to Italy with his first wife, Hadley Richardson, in 1923 and is here directly referencing her work in the country.

"Cat in the Rain" is set in an unnamed American wife's rainy room in an Italian hotel, where she sees a cat curled up under a table in the rain, and she feels a mild need for its company, but her husband doesn't share that feeling and the solicitous but manipulative attentions of the Italian hotelier. The story, on the surface, a reworking of relationship boredom, has always called for interpretive commentary on the themes of desire, gender, and cultural disorientation. In the politics of representation, the issue of "Cat in the Rain" is interesting because it uniquely toys with the desires of the woman who doesn't articulate them, but who is there nonetheless, within the framework of patriarchy. The tale focuses on the experiences of an American wife who remains with her husband at an Italian hotel, anxious to save a cat from the rain and whose own needs become emblematic of other, more intimate feelings and existential desires. This unimportant moment is a reflection of a bigger issue about female subjectivity, marginalization, and limitations of male-dominated social structures.

Therefore, there is ample scope for examining the nature of representation and its role not only as a mirror of reality, but as a place where power is negotiated and negotiated away. This initial academic research on Hemingway has tended to concentrate on his depiction of male

characters, which, in many respects, seem stoic and emotionally cold, such as those in *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*. There has been a recent shift, however, with feminist and post-structuralist critiques that focus on the image of women, their marginal status and symbolic presence. Some critics, such as Nina Baym and Judith Fetterley, have studied such instances and found that Hemingway's narratives tend to silence or objectify women and place them within constraining frames of reference. With "Cat in the Rain", on the other hand, scholars have started to analyze the voice of the wife, a place of resistance, and slightly expanded the spectrum of interpretative possibilities for the novel.

While this has added to all of this, a time gap remains in the critical narrative. While some earlier studies have given more religious or formalist readings or biographical ones of the issue of representation, the subject of gender, space and symbolic desire, in this specific story, has remained poorly integrated in later studies, though they are more theoretically oriented. However, the need exists for such a more integrated approach that would place "Cat in the Rain" in the context of the larger questions of representation, ideology, and power, especially because of the changing conceptualizations of representation in critical theories, like feminist theory, which have simultaneously replaced common assumptions. Still, the need is for a more integrated approach to place "Cat in the Rain" within the larger context of representation, ideology, and power, especially as feminist theory and cultural studies have begun to defy common assumptions.

The current research sets out to redress this omission, though, by providing a sophisticated interpretation of the narrative story, and the politics of representation are brought to the forefront. It is an argument that, although the story's scale is strictly neutral, it carries a subtext that both reinforces and reveals the restrictions placed on female identity. Her wishes for the cat, for domestic peace and quiet, for freedom to express herself are evidence of her muted will in a patriarchy. On the other hand, its ambiguity invites one to critically examine these structures and to uncover their paradoxes of appearance and reality, speech and silence. In other words, the following study will examine the way "Cat in the Rain" represents and/or works through representation in three ways: by its characterization, by its symbolism, and by its narration. The analysis aims to make a case for Hemingway's fiction as reflecting the politics of power, gender and identity both within the historical period in which it was written and in the ongoing contemporary theoretical discourse. Finally, the paper argues that the story

is a good representative of minimalist fiction that can be a powerful force in expressing the complexity of representation and its political implications.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does Ernest Hemingway represent female subjectivity and marginalization in "Cat in the Rain" through minimalist narrative techniques?
2. How do symbolism and spatial imagery represent the psychological and emotional state of the American wife in "Cat in the Rain"?
3. How can feminist and psychoanalytic theories explain the wife's desires, identity crisis, and emotional dissatisfaction in Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain"?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this section is to provide a brief overview of the existing literary research into Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain". The purpose is to highlight the article's main contributions and the research gap it addresses. The written materials for "Cat in the Rain" already exist by Ernest Hemingway. Other writers, such as Carlos Baker (1952, 1969) and Philip Young (1966), have studied the symbols and minimalism that Hemingway employs in the short story "Cat in the Rain". They talk about how his "plain" language and subtle images convey deeper mental and emotional themes. They, for instance, unravel the figurative significance of a cat, rain, and the hotel in expressing the characters' emotions and intentions. Some other writers conduct studies that are centered on the characters in "Cat in the Rain". In this case, however, a great emphasis is placed on character analysis, particularly on the psychologies of the American wife and her husband, George.

Linda Wagner-Martin (2002) and Kenneth Lynn (1987) have spoken extensively with the wife about her sense of lack and unhappiness, on the one hand, and her husband's lack of affection and feelings, on the other. Most often, it is the conflict within marriage and the characters' unacknowledged needs that are brought to light in these studies. Hemingway scholars such as Susan Beegel (1988) and Lawrence R. Broer (1973, 2002) have studied the use of dialogue and descriptive passages as methods of narration and have analyzed how they enhance the emotions and readers' experiences of writers' inner dialogues. Thus, the techniques that Hemingway employs have been much discussed in academic circles.

Judith Fetterley (1978) and Martha R. Gentry (1981) have shifted much of their research focus to the role of gender in Hemingway's work, in which women's points of view are

overshadowed. By offering a feminist reading of the American literary canon, Fetterley has placed Hemingway's work in a broader context, suggesting that the writer was working within an institution defined by the need for men to maintain healthy masculinity. Gentry goes on to describe the intricacies of "gender roles" within Hemingway's work, highlighting the limitations imposed on Hemingway's women.

These efforts have not been sufficiently discussed, however, and in the literature, gender and sexuality are often treated on a binary basis, often with less attention paid to the socio-political aspects that contribute to the construction of such representations. Historical background is provided by works such as James Nagel's *The Critical Reception of Hemingway* (1986), but the specific focus is not on developing a reflection on how a post-20th-century feminist perspective might reframe understanding of each character, including the female protagonist in *Cat in the Rain*. This suggests a need for research, given the shifting viewpoints in feminist thought today that question traditional perspectives and require a new interdisciplinary approach to literature.

The initial line of criticism concerned the story's use of Hemingway's "iceberg theory", which posits that unseen emotions and marital troubles in the story are evoked by hints or symbols in the cat, rain, and hotel setting, thus suggesting rather than explaining outright, as exemplified in pluralistic analysis of the story by writer David Lodge (1977). This reading-based storyline was hailed as the narrative's minimalist craft as key to its interpretive power, but mostly in relation to stylistic adventurousness rather than gender dynamics.

This feminist base has been improved through the addition of more specialized lenses. On this point, feminist stylistic analysis, as research using linguistic categories inspired by Robin Lakoff (1975) reveals, seems to be able to speak with authority: the stripped-down dialogue and third-person narration in the novel linguistically marginalise its female protagonist, "the American wife," who is portrayed as being marginalised by society in story terms. This is one aspect where feminist linguistic analyses come into their own, using frameworks drawn from models such as Robin Lakoff: here the critics are able to say with authority that Hemingway's dialogue and third person narration linguistically subordinates the wife of the story, often referred to merely as "the American wife", and thus is a manner of representational erasure, echoing the socially marginalised position of wives in actual life. The wavy walls and rain-penetrated courtyard both inside and out, the folded umbrella of her padrone, the ever-changing terrain—these are all read as sites of gendered entrapment and precarious hope in

the process of the hotel's interior and outer surfaces, the wife's psychic vacillations between desire and loss in Meng Jie's 2022 study.

Psychoanalytical readings consider the cat as an objet de manque or a projection of the wife's dislocated self, and newer and emerging readings demonstrate an ecocritical consideration, which attaches the rain and animal imagery to larger discussions of human–nature relationships and empathy, in which the desire of the wife is an ecological and a gender-based call for comfort. Marxist-inflected readings bring additional class and national perspectives to bear, since American tourists are chasing the altered image of the man on the street, rather than the Italian hotel staff devoting their performance to the tourist.

Psychoanalytical literary criticism, which uses psychoanalytical ideas of Sigmund Freud, aims to investigate the desires of the subconscious mind and the internal struggles of the individual, along with symbols in the literature. It claims that many literary works hint at psychological aspects borne out by the characters' subconscious. The critics Peter Brooks (1984) and Julia Kristeva (1980) have demonstrated that psychoanalytical analysis can reveal the hidden motives and conflicts that affect characters' actions and interactions. Research carried out by critics, such as Brooks (1984) and Kristeva (1980), has demonstrated that characters' motivations and conflicts can be extended into a psychoanalytical framework for determining their deeper drives. That is, psychoanalytical criticism has been applied to reveal the psychological elements in the characters and stories from different literary works. This approach respects the subjectivity of reading, recognising that readers can derive different psychological meanings from the same text. Although there was considerable scholarly focus on Hemingway's use of symbolism and character development, psychoanalytic criticism of "Cat in the Rain" remained underexplored. So far, there are few literary theories that have been analyzed, and one of these types is necessarily a psychoanalytical analysis. This article will be a first attempt to fill this gap by examining the characters' inner conflicts and subconscious desires from a psychoanalytic perspective. In conclusion, this literature review offers a basis for the psychoanalytical interpretation of "Cat in the Rain."

The purpose of this article is to present a new approach to Hemingway's work in the light of psychoanalytical criticism, by expanding on the existing scholarship and filling in gaps found in such work. The prior literature includes a few studies relevant to this research. Since the 1980s, feminist, spatial, and psychoanalytical approaches have grown in popularity, but none explicitly follow a politics-of-representation paradigm, which examines how either the

Hemingway narrative voice or the omissions and the focalization of the novel assert or question authority over female subjectivity. The notion of representation as a site of ideological struggle, as articulated by Stuart Hall and/or the feminist perspective's focus on who can speak and be seen, is underexplored in relation to this brief text.

A historiographical gap of nearly forty years between the story's composition in 1925 and the more fully developed representation theory of the 1980s-1990s has enabled an integrated approach that views the interwar period as not only a time of gender flux but also one that can be analysed using contemporary tools. Insightful as Marxist and ecocritical readings may be, they are not necessarily coupled with representational politics to address the policing of visibility and voice in the context of expatriate tourism and its minimalist prose.

These gaps are again highlighted by the constraints and difficulties of the critical literature. Because of the story's extreme brevity and iceberg technique, it can be read in various ways, and in some places even in divergent ways; while one critic may celebrate it as proto-feminist agency, another might see it as a subtle reinforcement of female dependency by Hemingway. But Hemingway's own public image as a hyper-masculine figure is a source of scholarship polarization, in the past leading to defensive or accusatory biases that can obscure the text. The linguistic and stylistic analyses are rigorous, but sometimes overattributing in the process of making minimalism out of a text by neglecting to account for the work of representation at the level of cultural power rather than individual psychology. Furthermore, the absence of a female character with a name makes it difficult to argue for agency, and the transnational nature of the expatriate situation in Italy raises issues that many female-centric feminist interpretations do not address. The challenges here demonstrate both the difficulty of striking a balance between context and history, authorial biography and theory, and the need to avoid both anachronisms and a single dominant ideology.

As a reading of the information gathered, it is apparent that a re-interpretation of Hemingway's writing is required in a modern context. Feminist, postcolonial, and psychological perspectives can be used selectively to provide a more inclusive analysis of "Cat in the Rain" than traditional ones. This study attempts to address this knowledge gap by bringing these different aspects together and fostering a broader conversation about the politics of representation in Hemingway's works. In doing so, it will not only deepen understanding of Hemingway's narrative technique but also advance the discourse on gender and representation in early 20th-century literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts a theory-centred, interdisciplinary approach to discuss "Cat in the Rain" by Ernest Hemingway and the politics of representation from a feminist perspective. Read and critique literature; psychoanalytical theory, especially Freudian and Lacanian perspectives. To enhance the feminist and psychological aspect, it also reflects the thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf and Carl Jung. The approach is integrative and enables discussion of gender, desire, subjectivity, and the power of the story. The central tenet of this model is the politics of representation, informed by Stuart Hall's cultural theory. The feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir is reinforced in this regard: as one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman, as she argues in her *Second Sex*.

Additionally, the framework includes elements from Virginia Woolf, who focused on the material and intellectual factors that constrain women's individual creativity and expression. Woolf's notion that women require "a room of one's own" symbolically links to the constricted space in the hotel room in the story. The lack of physical space and psychological space points out the wife's dependence and limited agency under paternalism.

Further, the framework includes feminist stylistics developed on the influence of the works of Robin Lakoff to analyze the ways in which language reinforces sexism. Hemingway's minimalist, sparse dialogue and external narration/description strengthen the sense of limitation on the female voice. The wife speaks only a few words and lacks an overarching story, which points to her reduced agency and social authority.

In addition, there is another primary dimension to this study, namely psychoanalytic criticism, starting with the theories of Sigmund Freud. Freud's (2010) ideas of repression and the unconscious provide figurative and conceptual illumination to the psychological undercurrents of the narrative. The wife's needs, especially those for affection, security and intimacy, exist within an emotionally distant container. The framework also incorporates Carl Jung's (1981) archetypal theory, specifically the Mother Archetype.

Lastly, spatial symbolism adds to this formula: the contrasting exterior rainwater and the enclosed hotel room atmosphere reflect mental pressure and confinement. This dynamic connects Woolf's emphasis on personal space with psychoanalytical interpretations of inner conflict and feminist critiques of spatial restriction.

METHODOLOGY

This research endeavors primarily qualitative and interpretative in nature, and is based mainly on close text readings which reveal the innuendo of politics and ideology within the Hemingway vignettes of modernity. The selection of the vignettes representing Hemingway's literature was made with great care to be most suitable to the research question on the processes of race and class. This corpus is composed of such texts as *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *A Farewell to Arms* and other less-known vignettes in periodicals and collections. The texts are catalogued according to the context of publication, biography, and critical reception.

The main theoretical prisms, such as post-colonial theory and critical race theory, are applied to the texts. It involves textual decoding with respect to the larger cultural discourses of the Other and the plotting of power relations. Such analytical categories are historicizing representations, breaking stereotypes and mapping narrative strategies.

During the research, we took a moderate stance; we acknowledged the aesthetic value of Hemingway's stylistic findings while examining the negative meanings or exclusions that his writings might give rise to. The interpretive strategy is iterative, where refinements and revisions are made as new knowledge is gathered. Through these approaches, the paper endeavors to bring out a robust multi-dimensional statement on Hemingway's modernist works.

This research paper employs a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology because of the study's nature and purpose. This research focused mainly on the interpretive study of literature for the purpose of uncovering the subtext, ideology and literary devices of class and race representations in Hemingway's works. These goals require a more profound, context-sensitive practice that is culturally responsive and appreciative of text subtleties, symbolism, and discourse analysis.

This study does not involve measurable numerical data sets, so a quantitative statistical approach is not applicable. Instead, it involves the complexities of literary narratives that are developed through synecdoche, form, and context. Hence, qualitative methods provide the best approach for analysing the relationship between power, "Otherness", and hierarchies within the text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overview of the current literature on "Cat in the Rain" reveals that the formalist, feminist, and psychoanalytic approaches have created a unique yet disjointed critical environment. Based on this synthesis, several important findings and integrated interpretations emerge:

IDEOLOGICAL NATURE OF MINIMALISM

The minimalist technique employed by Hemingway, as articulated in his iceberg theory, operates not only stylistically but also ideologically. Omission controls and limits interpretation. The lack of direct access to the wife's interiority and her namelessness indicates a controlled representational field where female subjectivity is mediated, limited, and partially erased.

Hall (1997) contends that representation is an active construction and mediation of meaning that occurs through ideology and power. In the work, there is no use of a "spoken" name for the protagonist; only the nameless "the American wife" shows how narrative discourse strips women of individuality. Her anonymity is not merely because she lacks a proper name but indicates that she has been reduced to a social role instead of a proper identity—a reality that is acted out, part of larger patriarchal mechanisms of silencing.

Minimalism is directly complicit in the production of power dynamics. By restricting focalization and employing economical language, the narrative actively regulates female visibility, voice, and agency. Some critics (e.g., Donaldson, 2005) contend that this minimalist stance creates ambivalence that complicates or precludes interpretation and poses a challenge to critics seeking to extract layers of significance from the story. The difficulty of making a critical appraisal of "Cat in the Rain" is that its narrative style is not only straightforward but also tends to underestimate its multi-layered commentary on representation and power dynamics.

SYMBOLIC ECONOMY AND SUBSTITUTED FULFILMENT

While earlier scholarship treats the cat, rain, and hotel as symbols of loneliness, this paper reveals a structured pattern of substituted fulfilment. The wife's agency is systematically deferred—the cat is initially inaccessible, her desire for personal change is postponed, and the hotelkeeper's final gift of a cat acts as a symbolic rather than actual resolution of her existential needs.

MARITAL ALIENATION AND CONTROLLED VISIBILITY

Marital alienation is discursively produced through power dynamics in dialogue. George's minimal, dispassionate responses represent a masculine economy of speech where brevity and indifference neutralize the wife's expressive efforts, establishing dialogue as a site of gender hierarchy. Beauvoir's (2011) idea of woman as the "Other" is well-suited to the roles of the storyteller and the female protagonist. In the sense that she is missing an autonomous identity, she lives in a normative structure that normalizes male subjectivity and at the same time distances the female self. Her need for care and attention and domestic fulfilment thus looks like an attempt to establish subjectivity in an oppressive system.

In contrast, feminist literary criticism is used with a critical lens to analyse gender relations in the text. Drawing on Judith Fetterley, the emphasis is on the social roles of women, with the refutation of male-centred interpretations and marginalization of women in literature. Fetterley's (1978) concept of the "resisting reader" offers an opportunity to re-imagine the wife's actions as small acts of resistance rather than passivity. Likewise, Martha R. Gentry (1981) points out the limitations imposed on female expression in Hemingway's fiction, as well as the repression of emotions and personal autonomy.

Some critics, including Yan (2023), believe the story reflects "a strong feminist consciousness" in Hemingway's early works, for the wife's search for the cat was her means of claiming autonomy and emotional satisfaction from her husband George, who lacked empathy and an understanding of her needs, and from the domestic sphere she had been living in. The wife also shows proto-feminist stirrings as she withstands the rain, looks after her husband, and resists the traditional gender roles imposed on her, but she is offered only symbolic substitutes, indicative of both the promise of female liberation in the post-World War I era and the limitations imposed upon her.

The wife's movement between interior and exterior spaces demonstrates a politics of space. She is visible primarily within controlled enclosures (the hotel room, under the padrone's gaze) or while observing the rain-soaked exterior square, illustrating that female mobility is subject to symbolic containment.

PSYCHOANALYTIC CONVERGENCE OF ABSENCES

In this research, the Freudian interpretation is continued with the theories of Jacques Lacan. In particular, Lacan's (2001) concept of lack (*manque*) is salient, since the wife's wishes are

presumed to represent an unfillable absence at the core of subjectivity. While she longs for the cat and domestic stability to fill this void, these wishes are perpetually deferred. In addition, Lacan's (2001) concept of "The Symbolic Order" explains how the wife is restricted by patriarchal language and social systems, establishing her status as Other.

The Mother Archetype's impulse to look after the cat can be seen as an expression of latent maternal instincts and nurturing energy. However, this instinctual aspect can only be fulfilled to a limited degree, rendering the cat a substitute for unmet maternal or emotional wants, reiterating Jungian and Freudian mechanisms of displacement and longing.

The cat serves as an unattainable objet petit a, converging multiple absences: emotional intimacy, self-identity, and social recognition. The narrative maintains an equilibrium of dissatisfaction rather than granting full emotional or psychological closure.

CONCLUSION

Set after World War I, Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" serves as a subtle and powerful examination of the modernist era, where traditional gender roles were undergoing significant flux. The ambiguity of the ending accentuates social and psychological obstacles that are negotiated symbolically but never fully resolved. Therefore, "Cat in the Rain" is not merely a masterwork of minimalist fiction but also an important text that details gendered desire, control, and female subjectivity within a patriarchal hierarchy. Application of Object Relations Theory (e.g., Donald Winnicott, Melanie Klein) and feminist psychoanalysis (e.g., Julia Kristeva, Jessica Benjamin) analyzes attachment mechanisms and intersubjectivity in modernist short fiction.

The namelessness of the American wife underscores her relational, secondary status within patriarchal discourse. Yet her desire for the cat, for long hair, for domestic comfort, and for recognition represents an ongoing struggle for autonomy and selfhood. Hemingway's minimalist prose is far from politically neutral; it provides a rigorous reflection on power, identity, and representation. Based on these conclusions, the study offers the following recommendations: further examine how Hemingway's broader body of work constructs authority, silences, visibility, and marginalisation regarding female characters, and adopt interdisciplinary methodologies (combining feminist theory, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and narratology) to evaluate complex modernist texts. It also suggests that researchers expand spatial and ecocritical investigations into Hemingway's environmental settings, analysing hotel rooms, windows, and weather motifs as ideological constructs.

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