

SHORT STORY ANALYSIS “Cat in the Rain” By Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway’s story “Cat in the Rain” is a short story which depicts the relationship between an American couple which was affected by the consequences of the war period and they continued their existence facing the problem of misunderstanding and loneliness in a marriage. The writer focused his attention on the loneliness of the wife’s heart because of the indifference of her husband, but on the other hand he underlined indirectly that many men came there to see the bronze war monument. So the writer described how that monument looked like, but in fact he might have described the monument with the aim of pointing the reader’s attention to the fact that there was a war and the human continued to live but they did not forget about the tragic event.

“Cat in the Rain” was written in the 20th century and during that period many of the writers based their works on the consequence of the war describing the result of that tragic period upon the man’s life and man’s feelings. That’s why in this very story the reader might find out that there was a lack of communication between those two married people. The wife and her husband George were so distanced that they even had no idea what one wanted and what was in their mind. One of them, namely George, was passionately reading his books (“...The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed. “) while his wife was longing for having someone to take care of (“I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her..”).

The author began with depicting the characters of the story: the American couple. Then he described that they stood at a hotel near which was a war monument. The wife was looking through the window and she saw a cat which was in the rain. The wife wanted to take the cat, that’s why she left the room. As she went downstairs, she had met the house-keeper. She liked him. When she went out she understood that the cat wasn’t already there. Thus she returned to the hotel. She had a conversation with George, her husband. But George was not listening. At the end of the story, the maid of the hotel brought a big cat to the wife from the part of the house-keeper.

The title of the story is a suggestive and a symbolic one. As we know, it is in the nature of the cats to dislike the rain at all. If it begins to rain, they hide where it is a warm place not to get wet. But in this case, the cat is “in the rain”. The writer

could emphasize the faintness of this cat to overcome the situation, the rain. It is unclear why the writer chose the cat. His choice might be commented that possibly he could compare the cat with the baby for whom the wife may want to devote her time and attention. The “cat” might have been the symbol of the wife’s loneliness caused by the fact that her husband was incapable to understand her feelings. In other words, she probably needed more attention and compassion from the part of her husband.

The story has a precise setting and namely in a hotel (“There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel.”). The action took place in Italy because the staff of the hotel (the hotel-keeper, the maid) spoke Italian language. Because the room was situated on the second floor the couple had the opportunity to have a good panorama from their room. There was a public garden near the hotel and the war monument. The garden comprised big palm trees which beautify the garden. It was a rainy day and the square was empty. No one was outside except a waiter who stood in the café which was placed across the square. The writer pointed these settings directly, however he mentioned more than two times the war monument. In this way, the writer drew the attention, in an indirectly way, to the fact that the action took place after the war.

As the story has narrative elements, it is not so difficult to determine its structure. Thus the story opened with an exposition where the author depicts the two main characters of the story, the setting (“There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel.[...] “ and then he moved slowly to the conflict of rising action (“The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.”). As the story developed, the author revealed the conflict (“I’m going down and get that kitty,’ the American wife said. ‘I’ll do it,’ her husband offered from the bed. ‘No, I’ll get it”). When the climax was announced (“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.”), the reader could understand that the wife wanted a change and she was longing for the life that was before the war. She announced her wish to have a cat (“If I can’t have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.”). That was the moment when came the dénouement (the outcome of the conflict). The narrator went on saying that George was not listening and he was still reading his book when the maid brought “a big tortoiseshell cat” which the house-keeper sent to

the wife. The author put an emphasis on the “tortoiseshell cat” which could represent the wife’s hope that there would come a change in their life.

Actually there are two main characters in the story (the American couple), and two minor characters (the house-keeper and the maid). Throughout the story it is evident that the cat was also present directly or indirectly in all the scenes, for example at the beginning of the story the wife saw the cat outside; then the woman talked at first with her husband about the cat, then with the house-keeper and finally the maid brought a cat. As a consequence we can consider the cat as a minor character of the story.

The story is based on depicting the relationship of the American couple. It is very interesting that the wife had no name, but the author gave to her husband a name: George. This means that the husband was superior in that family. At the beginning of the story he was rather polite and he held a dialogue with his wife (“I’m going down and get that kitty,” the American wife said. ‘I’ll do it,’ her husband offered from the bed.”). Later on, he disguised himself and became more indifferent and rude toward his wife (“Oh, shut up and get something to read,”). While her husband was nonchalant, the wife had a lot of wishes for their future and she wanted some changes in order to have their own home with all the necessary things (“I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. [...]”).

As the wife liked the house-keeper’s seriousness, politeness and dignity (The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints [...]) it becomes evident that she needed someone to talk to. The house-keeper was gentle and because of that he sent her a cat at the end of the story.

To conclude, Hemingway’s story “Cat in the Rain” deals with the most important problem of the humans that of the relationship in a couple. In fact, it is a story which highlights that there could not be a good relationship where the loneliness, the misunderstanding, selfishness and solitude exist. This story is suggestive even nowadays and it can serve as an example of how people shouldn’t behave with the person’s they love.

The cringing kitty under the table in the rain is the ultimate image of isolation in "Cat in the Rain." Not only is it alone; it's also trapped. Like the cat, the American wife and her husband are both isolated from each other, which is made all the more palpable since they're living in such close quarters. Their isolation from everyone else as the only Americans in the hotel also reinforces the strangeness and discomfort of their feelings towards each other. The isolation between them is something you read in their lack of real communication, in the way they barely seem to hear or respond to one another. This gap between them is indeed wider and more difficult and hostile than any language barrier. This was definitely *not* a match made in heaven. The wife's restlessness is a mounting force in this story. She's unable to say what exactly is making her dissatisfied in her life; instead, she harps on a multitude of small things. Her dissatisfaction with the life she leads with her husband is particularly problematic because, like the cat trapped under the table in the rain, there's not really any way to escape—or so we think.

The wife in this story is almost constantly in motion, but her husband is the complete opposite of this. He's perfectly content with his reading. He even suggests that his wife does the same after throwing a cranky "shut up" in her direction.

George is the most inactive figure in the story. His eyes look up from the book now and then, he "shifts" at one point, but the guy never actually leaves the bed. George's sense of stability and satisfaction is in the life of books, you might say, rather than in his own life—the one that he shares with his wife, and it's clear in this story that she's starting to feel and voice dissatisfaction.

In a way, George's character represents everything the wife wants to escape. Her wish list is full of material goods, which can be seen as at odds with her husband's fondness of intellectual fulfillment. George might sense her dissatisfaction with him, which would explain the slightly touchy "shut-up." Then again, he's just trying to read his darn book.