

Both are Cats

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Abstract

Most of the novelists make female character as a major character (whether protagonist or antagonist) in their texts. And the readers do not wait to finish reading the novel to discover the character whether it is the protagonist or antagonist. In Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" (1925) and Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) there are female characters as major characters. Although their role is different and they face different circumstances but their truth and personality are the same. Both novels portray women as victims whose identities are constrained by their husbands. This research aims to clarify this point, showing similarity (fragility, suppression, and victimization) despite their differences (actions, reactions and their attitude).

Key words: Cat, woman, victim, husband, rain, death, Hemingway, Chopin.

كلاهما قطتان

المستخلص

معضم الروائين يضع الشخصية النسائية (سواء كانت شخصية البطل او شخصية الخصم) كشخصية اساسية في نصوصهم. ولا يحتاج القاريء ان ينتظر لانهاء قرائته كي يكتشف فيما اذا كانت الشخصية ايجابية او سلبية. في "قطة في المطر" لايرنست همنجوي و "قصة ساعة"

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لكيـت جـوـبـين هـنـاك شـخـصـيـات نـسـائـيـة كـشـخـصـيـات رـئـيـسـيـة. بـالـرـغـم مـن ان لـديـهـم اـدـوارـهـم مـخـتـلـفة وـوـاجـهـو ظـرـوف لـا تـشـابـه لـكـن حـقـيقـتـهـمـا وـشـخـصـيـاتـهـمـا الدـاخـلـيـة مـتـشـابـهـهـ. كـلـا القـصـتـيـن صـورـتـا النـسـاء كـضـحـاـيـا حـيـث شـخـصـيـاتـهـنـ مـهـيـمـنـ عـلـيـهـا بـوـاسـطـة اـرـوـاجـهـنـ.

هـدـف الـبـحـث لـيـوـضـح هـذـه الـفـكـرـة وـيـعـرـض التـشـابـه (الـهـشـاشـة، القـمـعـ، والـاضـطـهـادـ) بـالـرـغـم مـن الـفـروـقـات (الـاـفـعـالـ، رـدـاتـ الـاـفـعـالـ، وـالـتـوـجـهـاتـ).

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" (1925) and Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) may seem separated by cultural, stylistic, and temporal boundaries, yet both narratives revolve around women whose lives are confined by patriarchal frameworks. At first glance, Hemingway's unnamed American wife appears petulant and fragile, while Chopin's Louise Mallard seems overly emotional and physically frail. However, beneath these portrayals lies a more nuanced truth: both women are victims of environments where male dominance silences their subjectivity. The "cat" in Hemingway's story becomes a metaphor for muted female desire, while Chopin's Louise glimpses freedom for only a moment before it is denied. In both cases, the protagonists embody women who are misinterpreted as weak or selfish but in reality reveal the tragic cost of a life constrained by gender norms (Donaldson 57; Jassam and Hatif 4).

Male Domination

One of the clearest intersections between the two stories lies in the subtle but pervasive influence of male domination. In Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," George, the American husband, is not overtly cruel, but his detachment reveals a profound disregard for his wife's inner life. When she expresses her longing for the cat outside, George does not engage with her emotional need; instead, he dismisses her concerns with the flat remark,

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“Don’t get wet.” Critics argue that George embodies the emotional sterility of modern masculinity, preferring the intellectual company of his book over human connection (Spilka 212; Donaldson 59). Robert W. Lewis expands this by noting that Hemingway portrays George as “indifferent to her womanly yearnings,” presenting an image of marriage where male self-absorption overshadows empathy (Lewis 34).

Similarly, Chopin presents Louise Mallard as a woman long confined by marital expectations. Unlike Hemingway’s couple, Louise and Brently Mallard’s marriage is not depicted as cruel or hostile. Yet, when Louise hears of her husband’s supposed death, her whispered response—“Free, free, free!”—unveils the quiet domination she endured. She realizes that “there would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself.” Critics such as Mary Papke interpret this as a feminist declaration, in which Louise momentarily experiences autonomy in a world otherwise dictated by male presence (Papke 58). Selina Jamil adds that Louise’s supposed fragility—her “heart trouble”—functions as a metaphor for the restrictions placed upon her desires by patriarchal society (Jamil 217).

In both stories, men need not be tyrants to enforce domination; rather, it is the institution of marriage itself that structures female subordination. Emily Toth, in *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, notes that Chopin’s heroines often reveal “the subtle imprisonment of women who appear loved but are in fact circumscribed” (Toth 149). Hemingway’s American wife and Chopin’s Louise both reflect this paradox: they are outwardly provided for, yet their identities remain neglected or suppressed. The two stories underscore how women’s voices are diminished not through overt cruelty, but through systemic disregard for female selfhood (Moddelmog 122).

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Women's Fragility

At first glance, both Hemingway and Chopin depict women as fragile figures, defined by their physical or emotional delicacy. The American wife in “Cat in the Rain” appears childish in her desires: she wants “a cat,” “a table with a lamp,” and “some new clothes.” Critics such as David Lodge argue that this fragility should not be read literally; rather, her desires symbolize “yearnings for stability, warmth, and intimacy that are not being met within her marriage” (Lodge 66). The image of the cat—small, vulnerable, exposed to rain—mirrors the wife herself, trapped in a sterile hotel room with an inattentive partner. Hemingway’s minimalism conceals layers of symbolic fragility, where the wife’s seemingly trivial requests reflect profound emotional needs (Benson 23).

Louise Mallard is similarly framed as fragile from the outset. Chopin begins her story by noting Louise’s “heart trouble,” a physical weakness that justifies the family’s careful handling of her upon hearing of her husband’s death. Yet, as Lawrence Berkove argues, this “heart trouble” is more symbolic than medical, representing Louise’s repressed desires and inability to express autonomy within a patriarchal framework (Berkove 153). Rather than collapsing under grief, Louise experiences a sudden surge of vitality, whispering “Free, free, free!” as she looks toward “spring days and summer days.” This fragility, then, becomes ironic: her weak heart is not a sign of incapacity but of the constraints placed upon her vitality (Papke 62; Jamil 220).

Both Hemingway and Chopin therefore use fragility not to reinforce stereotypes of women’s weakness, but to critique how society projects fragility onto women. The American wife’s longing for the cat masks deeper resilience, just as Louise’s heart condition masks her capacity for strength and self-recognition. These women appear fragile to male eyes but

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are in reality endowed with an inner vitality that circumstances deny them (Moddelmog 124). Their fragility is imposed, not innate.

Similarities Despite Differences

Despite their stylistic and contextual differences, both protagonists share striking similarities. Hemingway's narrative is minimalist, presenting an almost cinematic series of images: the wife gazing out at the rain, the cat crouching under a table, the closed-off atmosphere of the hotel room. These images all convey confinement, reinforcing the wife's muted desire for warmth and connection (Spilka 218; Lodge 68). Chopin's narrative, in contrast, uses irony and natural imagery: Louise's joy manifests through her recognition of "new spring life," symbolizing renewal and liberation, before it is tragically cut short by her husband's return (Toth 151).

Despite these formal differences, both women reflect the same underlying condition: their identities are trapped within male-dominated frameworks. Hemingway's American wife, like the cat, waits for someone to rescue her but is denied genuine recognition from her husband. Chopin's Louise, after tasting freedom, is denied by the cruel irony of fate. Both stories show women who are dismissed as weak or selfish but are actually victims of systemic constraints. Lawrence Berkove calls Louise's death an act of "fatal self-assertion" (155), while critics of Hemingway argue that the wife's desires remain unresolved in an ambiguous cycle of neglect (Donaldson 61).

Thus, both women embody "the cat" of Hemingway's metaphor: creatures symbolically caged by circumstance, vulnerable yet yearning for recognition. Their surface fragility masks profound humanity, bridging two very different literary traditions into a shared critique of women's place in patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Ernest Hemingway and Kate Chopin, despite their differences in gender, culture, and style, converge in their portrayal of women as figures misread by their societies. The American wife and Louise Mallard both appear to be fragile, selfish, or overly emotional; yet, beneath these appearances lies the reality of victimhood within male-dominated institutions. Whether through Hemingway's symbolic cat or Chopin's ironic heart condition, both women embody the paradox of female subjectivity—longing for recognition, silenced by patriarchy, and tragically denied fulfillment. Much like Hemingway's cat in the rain, these women remain symbols of muted desire and suppressed individuality, fragile in appearance but strong in their unspoken yearning.

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