

Both are Cats

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Abstract

The majority of the novelists have a female character as a major one (protagonist or antagonist) in their books. And the readers don't wait till the end of the novel to learn 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) the female characters are the main protagonists. Their role is different, their circumstances are different too but their truth and their personality are the same. The stories portray women as oppressed and limited in their identities by their spouses. This research attempts to clarify this topic. It shows commonality (fragility, suppression and victimization) despite their distinctions (actions, reactions and their attitude).

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

كلاهما قطنان

المستخلص

معظم الروائين يضع الشخصية النسائية (سواء كانت شخصية البطل او شخصية الخصم) كشخصية اساسية في نصوصهم. ولا يحتاج القارئ ان ينتظر لانتهاء قرائته كي يكتشف فيما اذا كانت الشخصية ايجابية او سلبية. في " قطة في المطر " لايرنست همنكوي و "قصة ساعة" لكيت جويين الشخصيات نسائية هي شخصيات رئيسية. بالرغم من ان لديهم ادوارهم مختلفة وواجهو ظروف لا تتشابه لكن حقيقتهما وشخصياتهما الداخلية متشابهة. كلا القصتين صورتا النساء كضحايا حيث شخصياتهن مهيمن عليها بواسطة ازواجهن.

هدف البحث ليوضح هذه الفكرة ويعرض التشابه (الهشاشة، القمع، والاضطهاد) بالرغم من الفروقات (الافعال، ردات الافعال، والتوجهات).

Introduction

While divided by cultural, stylistic and temporal limits, Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" (1925) and Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) are two stories that address women whose lives are circumscribed by patriarchal frames. Hemingway's American wife, unidentified, is, on the surface, petulant and fragile, while Chopin's Louise Mallard appears oversensitive and physically delicate. But beneath these images there lie a more nuanced reality, both women are victims of a situation where the male authority silences their subjectivity. To highlight all what is mention above, feminist literary approach is adapted, where the woman is the center of the focus. The "cat" in Hemingway's story is a symbol of thwarted female desire; in Chopin's novel Louise only sees freedom before it is taken away. Both stories have female characters that are seen as self-interested or weak, but actually show the terrible cost of a life constrained by gender preconceptions (Donaldson 57; Jassam and Hatif 4).

Male Domination

The most obvious similarity in the two tales is the subtle but ever present power of masculinity. In “Cat in the Rain” by Hemingway, the American husband is not deliberately harsh, but his emotional detachment suggests a deep indifference to his wife’s inner world. So, when she says to him how much she misses the cat outdoors, George does not answer her emotional demand. He brushes off her worries with the flat comment, “Don’t get wet.” Critics contend that George represents the emotional sterility of modern masculinity, opting for the cerebral companionship of his book rather than interpersonal contact (Spilka 212; Donaldson 59). Robert W. Lewis extends this argument, arguing that Hemingway depicts George as “indifferent to her womanly yearnings,” and offers a vision of marriage in which masculine self-absorption replaces empathy (Lewis 34).

In a similar fashion, Chopin paints Louise Mallard as a lady long constrained by her marriage. The Mallards’ marriage is not portrayed as nasty or unfriendly, as in the case of Hemingway’s couple. When Louise learns of her husband’s apparent death, however, her whispered reply, “Free, free, free!” reveals the subtle dominance she suffered. She understands that “there would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself.” Such critics as Mary Papke view this as a feminist statement, as Louise finds herself briefly in a position of autonomy in a world otherwise governed by the presence of men (Papke 58). Selina Jamil adds that Louise’s seeming fragility - her ‘heart trouble’ – is a metaphor for the limits placed upon her desires by patriarchal society (Jamil 217).

In these tales, men do not have to be tyrants to enforce their power; the institution of marriage itself promotes female loyalty. Chopin's heroines continually expose "the subtle imprisonment of women who seem to be loved but are in fact circumscribed" (Toth 149). As Emily Toth notes in *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, Chopin's heroines frequently expose This contradiction appears in both Hemingway's American wife and Chopin's Louise who are cared for on the surface but who are not seen or actively repressed in their identities. Both examples illustrate the suppression of women's voices not via overt brutality but through institutional disregard for female selfhood (Moddelmog 122).

Women's Fragility

Both Hemingway and Chopin begin describing women as fragile creatures, by physical or emotional delicacy. In 'Cat in the Rain' the American wife appears infantile in her wishes, she wants 'a cat', 'a table with a lamp' and 'some new clothes'. "This fragility, according to David Lodge and other critics, should not be taken literally, but rather that her demands are "yearnings for stability, warmth, and closeness that are not being supplied inside her marriage" (Lodge 66). The cat was like the wife, locked in a sterile hotel room with a distracted lover, little, frail, open to the rain. The austerity in Hemingway is a technique of concealing a metaphorical level of fragility, where the wife's small requests conceal deep emotional needs (Benson 23).

Louise Mallard is portrayed as fragile from the beginning. Chopin begins her story with the statement that Louise has "heart trouble," a physical condition that explains the family's gentle handling of her after they learn of her husband's death. However, as Lawrence Berkove notes,

this “heart trouble” is not so much a physical malady as a symbolic one, representing Louise’s repressed desires and her inability to articulate them in a patriarchal context (Berkove 153). Louise does not succumb to the weight of grief; she experiences a quickening of life and whispers “Free, free, free!” as she anticipates “spring days and summer days.” The comedy of her frailty, her weak heart, is not an indicator of her incapacity but the measure of her stamina (Papke 62; Jamil 220).

Thus, both Hemingway and Chopin employ fragility not to promote the stereotype of the weak woman but to challenge the way society projects fragility onto women. The ache of the American woman for the cat is a masking of a deeper resilience, for Louise's heart issue is a masking of her ability to be strong and to know herself. These ladies are frail in the view of men but are actually blessed with an inner vigour that circumstances deny them. This fragility is not natural to them but imposed (Moddelmog 124).

Similarities Despite Differences

Though stylistically and contextually different, the two characters do have some striking similarities. Hemingway’s story is minimalistic, with an almost cinematic series of images: the wife looking out at the rain, the cat crouching behind a table, the closed-off mood of the hotel room. All of these images are about confinement, in line with the wife’s muted desire for warmth and relationship (Spilka 218; Lodge 68). Chopin’s story also uses irony and environmental imagery. Louise’s impression of ‘new spring life’, a symbol of regeneration and independence, indicates her delight before it is brutally destroyed by the arrival of her husband (Toth 151).

But these formal differences are symbolic of the same problem in both women, their identities locked within male-dominated frames. Like the cat, Hemingway's American wife waits for a saviour, but her husband does not offer her any genuine acknowledgement. Chopin's Louise has known liberty but the tragic irony of fate robs her of it. Both stories are about women seen as selfish or weak, but actually as victims of institutional limitations "fatal self-assertion" (155) is how Lawrence Berkove describes Louise's death, while Hemingway critics claim that the wife's demands are left unanswered in an unclear cycle of neglect (Donaldson 61).

Both women exemplify "the cat" from Hemingway's metaphor: enclosed yet yearning to be noticed. Despite their seeming fragility, they embody a deep empathy that bridges two distinct literary canons to condemn patriarchal society's treatment of women.

Conclusion

Despite their gender, cultural, and stylistic differences, Hemingway and Chopin both depict women as social misfits. Despite the victim complex, both the American wife and Louise Mallard are depicted as fragile, self-centred, or too sentimental. This is all hidden under the mask of male-dominated institutions. Whether it's the irony of Chopin's heart ailment or the symbolism of Hemingway's cat, these women represent the contradiction of female subjectivity: the repressed longing for attention that patriarchy sadly denies. Like Hemingway's "cat in the rain," these ladies represent suppressed desires and hidden independence. Fragrant in appearance, yet resolute in their silent need.

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