



CAT IN THE RAIN-A PSYCHO-SOCIAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Aim: People believe that the story, “Cat in the rain” by Ernest Hemingway had theory of omission, which delves deep into the recesses of reader’s minds, stimulates their thoughts, and make them to seek answers by reflecting upon self. This story is analyzed from a psycho-social perspective.

Methods and Materials: The Plot, theme and characters of the story are taken as the template for things happening in objectivity. They acted as stimuli for the assessor to interpret the dynamic interplay of human interactions and communication. Transactional analysis (TA) techniques of strokes, hidden motives, moves, counter-moves and emotional trajectories deliberately left readers in lurch and create its everlasting impact on resolving their problems.

Results: The uniqueness of the story is that it can be used for personality assessment akin to projective TAT- test (Thematic Apperception Test). However, in TAT subjects responses are about ambiguous pictures and thus reveal thyself and others. It’s popularly known as the *picture interpretation technique* whereas Hemingway’s story is in written format requires basic level of education in reading, writing and understanding by the readers and creates *picturesque form* in their minds. Psychodynamic psychotherapy is a form of depth psychology; the primary focus is to reveal the unconscious content of a client’s psyche in an effort to alleviate psychic tension. However, Eric Berne’s Transactional analysis postulated three "ego states"- Parent, Adult and Child that differ from Freud's ego, id and superego, which focused on the mental processes involved for human interactions.

Conclusion: Hemingway’s writing technique and genre not only applied theory of omission but also transactional analysis for dynamic interplay of social interactions.

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INTRODUCTION

Ernest Miller Hemingway (July 21, 1899 – July 2, 1961) was an American novelist, a short story writer, and a journalist who won Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954 for “The Old Man and the Sea.”¹ The writing style of Hemingway is called as Iceberg Theory, wherein the facts or 1/10th conscious level interactions float above water and the supporting structure and symbolism operate at the 9/10th level of sub-consciousness. It is also known as the "theory of omission".² He is a remarkable story teller. He skillfully narrates an enchanting psycho-social story of a husband and wife who try to escape from the harsh realities of life by engrossing in their worlds. The story is a master-piece of characterization where characters moving in concentric-circles with perceptible and palpable changes; speak their minds and reveal inner conflicts; emotional turmoil is weaved in a web of life with its complexities. The scenes are enumerated like cinematic snap-shots with detailed environmental setting and the characters take turn to convey

their plight through the cinematographer’s lens, which either is zooming in or out of the frame. The storyline looms and haunts in the readers’ minds and engage them to take either side, as per their own conflicts. At the very outset, he shows George and his wife as almost strangers. The husband is a flat character who remains indifferent, passive and placid. The wife is a nameless character lacking in selfhood.

This story has a profound and permanent social appeal as it is free from personal bias. There is a coherent unity of the past to the present. It is in this context that we have to evaluate it as all art is the product of its socio-economic and cultural environment. The problems of husbands and wives have always been there since the beginning of the system of wedded life. The earnest couple can easily curb and control their lives with sweet emotions of love and complete understanding of their likes and dislikes in a sublimated and steadied manner. If they don’t do that, life becomes barren and a burden.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The story, “Cat in the rain” by Ernest Hemingway acted as template for the assessment of human interaction. Instruments used for psychiatric diagnoses were DSM-5 and ICD-10.^{3,4}

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Whereas, for interpretation of dynamic social interplay Transactional Analysis (TA) from the book, "Games people play" by Eric Berne was used.⁵

DISCUSSION

The story is set in a hotel on the seashore of a town in Italy. An American couple has come to stay there. It is raining. The story was written after the First World War as there is a reference to a glistening War Monument made of bronze in the public garden. It seems that Hemingway might have visited that place as the setting is so authentic and brilliant. There was untold death and destruction in First World War but the hope of relief belies the mankind. Hemingway in a subtle manner tells us about that predicament through the setting of this story. The communication between husband and wife is emotional and makes the setting more realistic and tragic. The structure of the story 'Cat in the Rain' is highly social, interesting and magnificent. It combines social purpose, utility with beauty and is built around a single event of an American couple who had come to stay in a hotel on the seashore of a town in Italy. It has unity, simplicity, universal appeal, creativity and symbolic suggestiveness which spring from the fountain of mind and soul. The unity of thought, harmonious design and spirit are the hall marks of the structure of this story.

Hemingway highlights the plight of women struggling for their human rights through the symbol of cat. The rights of the women are visible like the cat under the green table but when the wife goes to find it, the cat is not there. The husband has a name 'George' whereas the wife is nameless. Herein lays the significance of the satire that a woman has no identity of her own and she is only a piece of entertainment in a male dominated world. The American woman struggles to find her own path, solace, freedom and independence through the search of a cat but fails as cat has already gone. She comes back from the garden and tells her husband, "Anyway, I want a cat, I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat." The husband remains unconcerned.

Hemingway wants his readers to think and find deeper meanings in the behavior of her husband. "George was not listening. He was reading his book." Suddenly, someone knocks at the door and the maid servant appears with a tortoiseshell cat and tells, 'Excuse me,' she said, 'the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora.' This ending of the story is highly symbolic as it highlights that the American wife is lonely and insecure and even the hotel owner after noticing it helps to provide her a soothing touch by sending big tortoiseshell cat which she so desperately required.

It is noteworthy to mention that the hotel keeper is more attuned to the feelings of American's wife as he sends a big tortoiseshell cat through his maid "for the Signora." He is helpful to her and renders service by sending a maid with an umbrella even without asking for it and that provides her deep delight.

This story can also be analyzed from the point of view of its syntax, theme and content which clearly brings out the plight of childless women who are deprived of motherhood on no fault of their own. They suffer at the hands of their heartless husbands because of male chauvinism and being selfish. All kinds of torments and tortures are inflicted on women and they become helpless and hapless victims of men's cruel and vindictive nature. The wife is smitten with the burning desire

of having a child and she is trying her best to convey this message to George in both direct and indirect manner. But her husband is not interested in her ideas and ideals. He does not respect and appreciate her feelings and desires. It surely hurts her and she tries to find solace in the cat 'crouched under one of the dripping green tables'. The beginning of the story, its setting, theme, exposition, dialogues, actions, middle, climax and ending are full of realism pregnant with suggestive symbolism.

The cat is a reality in the script of the author; it cannot be attributed as a figment of imagination to American wife. She had clear consciousness and interacts coherently and cogently with all the characters of the story. She said, 'I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.' In 19th century neurologists Jean-Martin Charcot worked on conversion disorder and Sigmund Freud and psychologist Pierre Janet refined it. The term "conversion" has its origins in Freud's doctrine that anxiety is "converted" into physical symptoms. Although she displays some of the neurotic symptoms yet lacked the vulnerability of being suggestible. Furthermore, there was no primary gain (unconscious psychological factors) or presentation of physical symptoms which presumably serves the purpose of resolving an emotional conflict. Hence, the diagnosis of conversion (Hysteria) disorder was also unlikely.³ In the story, "Cat in the rain"- American wife was also not suffering from histrionic personality disorder as well because she lacked flamboyance, seductive and gaudy appearance; her style of speech was also not vague or superfluous except that she went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass.⁶ She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck etc., can be taken as normal female behavior for dressing and caring rather than excessively demanding attention, rapidly shifting, dramatic and superficial expression of emotions. The possibility of dissociative disorders (DD)⁷ is unlikely, as dissociation is a disruption or breakdown of memory, awareness, identity, or perception that is primarily involuntarily in nature and caused by psychological trauma e.g., chronic physical, sexual or emotional childhood abuse. These experiences can range from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or acute stress disorder (ASD) to dissociative disorders.⁴

Her tortoiseshell cat is an inversion of her sexuality which conveys that she is fertile, perceptive and receptive. The lack of marital harmony as reason for seeking "fun" outside marriage has a prospective possibility of sexual dalliance in all human relations that tends to resolve the psychological dilemma of *Original Sin*. However, this tension in the story between opposite gender had the universal theme given by *Hermes Trismegistus* (Ancient Greek: Ἑρμῆς ὁ Τρισμέγιστος, "thrice-greatest Hermes" in the laws of polarity states, "Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites".⁸ Author's suggestion about interest and likes of American wife was narrated as "She liked hotel-keeper's personal attributes of being serious, dignified, willingness to serve others and his old, heavy face and big hands." In ancient culture, females believes and mores for selection of healthy mate is resolve by looking at the secondary sexual characteristics e.g., broad shoulders, hairy chest, deep voice, boxed chin and heavy face or big hands are a proxy for big penis. *Charles Darwin's* seminal work *origin*

of species also explored on female's mating choice. Male should have the potential of passing genes to the offspring with higher chances of survival and fittest to compete in the environment for limited resources.⁹

Hemingway, in a subtle manner hinted about sterility of George, the husband of nameless American wife. The male tortoiseshell cat is rare, its incidence approximately occurs 1 in 3,000 births and usually sterile because of extra X chromosome (XXY) in sex chromosomes. Similar condition in humans is known as Klinefelter syndrome.¹⁰

Hemingway described his male character favorable and female as unfavorable reveals his angst against female gender through nameless American wife personified as fallible under opportunistic circumstances. He made subtle use of the theory of omission, which works as a template to fill the gap by projecting inner conflicts on to the characters thus, revealing self. We are of the considered opinion that Hemingway's plays and short stories can be used as projective tests for assessment of personality.

CONCLUSION

Hemingway has made critical comments on American society and ironically tells us that family life is disintegrating and individuals are becoming self-centered. The cat in a way is endowed with sociological and cultural meanings, keen psychological observation into the motives and feelings of main characters such as American couple, hotel owner and the maid servant reveals variety of emotions ranging from boisterous fun to scathing satire, poignant pathos to deep horror and awe at the ironies of life that is what the story conveys with compassion. Vivid and powerful scenes describe various aspects and crises of domestic and social life where high hopes and dreams get shattered and the remarkable beauty is that the author has shown deep humanist concern for marital bliss and passionate zest for life. The author's mind is rooted in tradition, yet receptive to new ideas and experiences which supports our premise that his story creates a *picturesque creative form*.

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