

Character Analysis of the wife in *Cat in the Rain*

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As the protagonist of the short story, the wife is the central character that Hemingway carefully portrayed throughout the story. The loneliness, vacancy that accompanied her as well as her contradicted feelings about her own feminine identity are reflective of social problems at the time and shed light on the theme of the story.

There are multiple signs from the story showing that the wife was lonely and unhappy. When she spotted the cat crouching in the rain, she felt pitiful for it and decided to come out and get it. The cat "trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on" shows its vulnerability in the face of the rain. As a result, the wife's insisting on getting the cat indicates that she identifies with the cat's loneliness and helplessness. On top of that, when she found out the cat had disappeared, she came back in with disappointment and complained to her husband about her desires that were not satisfied. She said apart from having a cat, she also wanted to grow long hair, eat with her own silver, the weather be spring and have new clothes. However, those wishes are confronted by her husband's cold response "shut up and get something to read". These outpouring wishes buried in her mind reveals the unhappiness of her life.

The wife's unhappiness was resulted from her estranged relationship with her husband George. From the wife's point of view, George was unable to recognize and satisfy her emotional needs. When she said she was to get the cat in the rain, although George offered to do it for her, after being turned down he went on reading in bed and hardly paid any attention to her. Also, when the wife expressed her long list of wishes that weren't satisfied, George was barely able to speak any word of comfort to her. Perhaps it is this distance and alienation from her husband that made the wife want to seek connections with other people around her, such as the hotel keeper. The wife liked the way the hotel keeper "wanted to serve her", indicating that she lacks such attention from her husband. Despite the strong affection the wife holds toward the hotel keeper, their relationship remained remote and formal. The wife's emotional needs of care and attention cannot be fulfilled, and we could feel the gloom and vacancy in her heart.

The wife's dynamics with male characters in the story is also reflective of people's concepts of sexuality and women's predicaments in society. The husband's indifference toward his wife's needs embodies the prevalent machismo idea in society. Upon hearing that his wife wanted to grow her hair out, George replied that he "like it the way it is", implying that to him the only thing that matters is what he thinks of his wife's appearance, instead of how she would like her appearance to be. This traditional idea of femininity is also embodied in the wife's lack of naming throughout the story, while her husband was given the name "George". Also, the narrative voice is mostly masculine. By referring to the protagonist as either the "wife" or the "girl", it seems to judge women mainly by their subordinate role in marriage or their mental immaturity.

Apart from the unfair judgments society made on women, the wife herself tends to be ambivalent about her own feminine identity. Her short hairstyle seemingly symbolizes the progressive trend in society that rebels against the traditional standard of being a woman, but she is now attempting to embrace a more traditional view of femininity by

growing her hair out. This implies that although social transformations have changes things on the surface, those deeply-rooted conventional concepts of femininity are still making far-reaching influences.

Another characteristic of the wife is her obliviousness toward symbols of WWI around her. Being an American traveling in Italy, she had never gone through the destruction and deprivation of the war herself and was totally ignorant of the war monument which attracted Italians traveling a long way to see it. Her desires of the cat and of new clothes seems mundane in contrast of the cataclysmic destruction brought by the freshly ended war. Through this specific design of setting, Hemingway leads us to think about the influence of war on people's lives and the gulf between people of different cultural experiences.