

Ecological Perspectives of Earnest Hemingway with especial reference to *Cat in the Rain* and *A Canary for One*

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Abstract

Environmental concerns and issues associated with it affect people across the globe, the universe. Nature and literature have always worked in close affinity as found in writers down the ages. Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between nature and human nature. It explores the relationships between literature and the environment. Man is part of the Nature. Literature and art influence human life. Human life too influences the art and literature. Ecocriticism redefines our relationship with the environment and Nature. It identifies roots of the problem of ecological crisis in relationship of the society with nature and the structure of the society with in Eco-criticism is relatively a newly developed literary theory as well as criticism. This paper focuses on ecocritical analysis of the short stories of Hemingway through various perspectives. Ernest Hemingway is one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, widely known as novelist but he produced master pieces of short stories. However, he is well known short story writer but he is less studied as short story writer.

Keywords- Ecocriticism, Interdisciplinary, fertility, oikopoetics, Ecocide

Environmental concerns and issues associated with it affect people across the globe, the universe. Indiscriminate felling of trees at one place has far reaching effects on the environment at a far distant place, which can possibly stand jilted. Interrelationship between man and Nature thus becomes all the more accentuated and this is perceptible and in fact visible today because literature plays such an important role. This paper focuses on ecocritical analysis of the short stories of Hemingway.

Ecocriticism" is a word on the recently published anthology entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Ecocriticism aims to bring a transformation of literary studies by linking literary criticism and theory with the ecological issues at large. Ecocriticism is a new critical movement that attempts to link literary criticisms and theory with today's ecological issues. It

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studies the relationship between literature and the science of ecology by applying ecological concepts to literature. Its aim is to synthesize literary criticism and the Environmental matters by focusing on the literary analyses of the representations of nature in literary texts, and the literary constructions of the environmental crisis in eco-literary discourses.

Glotfelty defines in *The Ecocriticism Reader* is that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment ", and one of the implicit goals of the approach is to recoup professional dignity for what Glotfelty calls the "undervalued genre of nature writing". Lawrence Buell defines 'ecocriticism' ... as [a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis". Simon Estok noted in 2001 that "ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections". In response to the question of what ecocriticism is or should be, Camilo Gomides has offered an operational definition that is both broad and discriminating: "The field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations"

Now-a-days the literary critics pay attention on study and analysis of the strong bond between nature and society. Ecology and eco-criticism are the significant aspects for the literary study and research. Ecological or environmental study is the center of attraction for literary personalities as well as the need of time. People are becoming conscious about the environment. Environmental balance is very important in this globalized world. Therefore, so many plans/schemes are being launched for saving the environment and making the people environment-conscious. Many steps have been taken for stopping environmental pollutions.

People have been made to realize the importance and value of unpolluted environment. Through, the help of slogans, advertisements, documentaries and direct and indirect knowledge of the relations between man and nature. Industrialization and materialism are the main causes of environmental imbalance.

They are responsible for disturbing ecological balance. Literature is always the best medium for propagating any thought or value in the society. It always works as the best conveyor of ideas and messages. The issue of environment or nature or ecology and society can be found in the literature of the world. The Indian literature in English cannot be ignored in this connection. Though, the literary output in this aspect is not much, the intellectuals and the famous modern literary figures try to draw the attention of the society on these issues.

The present study attempts to provide a broader perspective of Hemingway's short stories by adding an ecological dimension to it. Ecocriticism has provided us with different insights into Hemingway's short stories. Nature exists as a background setting in most of the stories of Hemingway. Random studies of Hemingway's stories from an ecocritical stand

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point do exist. However, no comprehensive study such as the present one has not been carried out so far.

In the stories, human and biological environments are shown mutually interdependent. Irrespective of the ecological devastation, Hemingway's protagonists turn to nature to escape from the trauma of war and to seek solace.

Ernest Hemingway wrote a total of sixty three short stories. Forty-nine of these stories published with the title *The First Forty Nine Stories* (1939) have been considered for the present study. Out of the forty nine stories, twenty two stories have been found exhibiting ecological concerns in some form or the other. The ecocritical concerns of Hemingway can broadly be classified under the heads deep ecology, ecofeminism, ecosphere, oikopoetics and ecocide.

Cat in the Rain is the story of an American couple vacationing in an Italian hotel room. The main characters are George and his American wife who have checked into a hotel room that faces the sea. It is a vacation town on the Italian coast, having a public garden with big palms and a war monument. However it is either off-season or bad weather; it is raining, the square is empty, and the motor cars are gone (136). Like the previous stories where we analysed the old man's attachment to animals, Nick's association with nonhuman world here too the close kinship between the cat and the American wife becomes the main concern of the story.

The opening ambience of the story is dark, dank, and depressing. The couple in the room exhibits contrasting moods. While the woman looks out through the window, her husband George lies on the bed and is engrossed in reading a book. The woman seems to be lonely in spite of her husband's presence. She spots a cat crouching under a dining table outside and becomes obsessed with it. Her great need for love diverts her attention towards the cat. She immediately wants to rescue the kitty from the rain. As George is reading a book, he offers half-heartedly to go for her sake saying I'll do it, but continues to read.

George is reluctant to fulfill his wife's desires. The woman seems to feel like the cat out in the rain and wants to rescue it immediately. The wife's character is quite different from her husband's. She experiences an emotional bond with the cat and wishes to save it. George is different and sticks to reading, but the wife identifies herself with the cat and wishes to protect it. The very act of looking at the cat can be considered as a form of fulfillment. "I wanted it so much, she said. I don't know why wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain" (138).

Here we find the woman deriving pleasure from her thoughts about the cat. Probably, she understands the language of the cat and the bond between the human and the non-human world goes deeper.

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It is clear that the couple have marital problems as George does not pay any attention to his wife's wish. Subsequently, the wife's longing for the cat elevates the bond between the human and the non-human world. The non-human world comprises the trees, plants, rivers, mountains, animals and birds. Here, in this story it is the cat, trees and the rain. The story depicts two worlds: the first one is the Americans in the hotel room and the other is the physical environment. The language of the cat, trees, rain seems to inspire the wife. As a neglected wife she draws solace from the nonhuman world. She understands the language of the cat and wishes to protect.

The American wife watches the natural environment and the patter of rain. Here the natural environment and the rain can be seen as symbols of fertility. They reflect the feminine instincts of the American girl. She wants to go into the rain and save the cat. She admires nature through the window. The long description of the environment and the good weather creates an atmosphere that is sad, cold and unfriendly. Art is a sophisticated form of culture and curiously, here it depicts nature. The pastoral environment is narrated thus:

There were big palms and green benches in the garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artist liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea....It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths (136).

Above all, as the rain symbolizes fertility and rebirth, the lady is further protected by an umbrella when she makes attempts to protect the cat in the rain, emphasizing her inability to respond to fertility. The woman standing at the window is also a sign of solitude. The woman's strong child-wish and the man's insensitivity lead her to develop an emotional bond with the cat. Totally frustrated, she stands at the window and says in a whispering monologue, "I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel, I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her." (138).

Desperate and furious she insists on having a cat, "anyway I want a cat, 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". (138).

The manager responds to her needs and sends the cat to fulfill her dreams. Apart from weather, water and the cat are two symbols that are interrelated. We notice water from the beginning of the story, "It was raining. Water makes the land fruitful. So the image of water is found throughout the story. Water never touches her. The husband says- Don't get wet" (137).

Her husband however seems to be content with his life and also with their relationship. He does not really react to any of her basic needs. The opening lines of the story are very important-

There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room. Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. (136).

The sea as a symbol of the big wide world builds a contrast to the isolation and anonymity that has been stressed before by mentioning that the Americans did not know any of the people they passed. And so does the public garden with its big palms and green benches symbolizing fertility and vitality and hope through the artists who were in the garden if the weather was fine. The window seems to be the only connection between the outside world and the room. The window serves as a barrier symbolizing isolation, as well as loneliness and unhappiness of the woman, who is standing at the window looking at nature. Oddvar Holmesland comments as:

The story may be said to be equivalent with a quest myth which according to Northrop Frye, has as its final cause the resolution of the antithesis.... the realizing of a world in which the inner desires and the outward circumstances coincide. (1990: 67).

The story juxtaposes the bond between the human and the non-human worlds. The environment is rich with beautiful green gardens signifying fertility. In the room the American lady is without a child and experiences loneliness. The lady's desire to possess the cat reinforces her feminine instincts. Having been denied of good relationship with her husband she longs for an emotional bond with the cat. The title of the story strengthens its ecological dimensions.

The cat becomes a substitute for her desire to have a surrogate child. The American's attitude towards his wife is one of sheer negligence. He is selfish, to the extent that throughout the story, he is found reading a book unmindful of his wife's needs. There by the lady's attention diverts towards the cat. At last, when she gets the cat she is comforted. Thus the title of the story *Cat in the Rain* signifies the presence of the nonhuman element in the text and exhibits the bond between the cat and the lady. Similarly the following story portrays the human association with the birds.

A Canary for One brings out two tales of unhappiness in marital life. The first is the unhappiness of an American lady's daughter and the second is the unhappiness in the marriage of the narrator and his wife who propose to get separated. The theme of the story is similar to that of *Cat in the Rain* in that both deal with problems of love and marriage. But unlike the previous story whose setting is in the hotel room, here the setting is in a train.

Three passengers happen to share a lit saloon compartment during an overnight train journey on an express from Riviera to Paris. One passenger is referred to as the, "American lady who is an insensitive, overly cautious person who had succeeded in breaking off her daughter's engagement to a Swiss Engineer from a good family. The American lady's settled

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conviction is that, American men make the best husbands (276). Another is that no foreigner can make an American girl a good husband". (276).

Strongly believing in these axioms, she has destroyed her daughter's chance of happiness. The girl reacted badly out of frustration; she would not eat or sleep after her mother took her away from her fiancé. By way of consolation the American lady has brought her a canary, not because the girl likes canaries but because she herself has always loved birds. The American girl becomes a trap in her mother's clutches just like the canary. Her mother's hope is that she would develop an emotional attachment to the Canary and forget her engagement with a Swiss man. The Canary is a popular cage bird with a melodious song, and has been bred in a variety of colors. As Christopher Manes says that "In addition to human language, there is also the language of birds..... (*The Ecocriticism Reader* 1996: 15). The American girl listens to the song of Canary and is comforted.

The story focuses on the American lady and her daughter's frustrated romance. According to the American lady her daughter can have better company in the canary than in a Swiss Engineer. In the same compartment another couple also travels and they do not address each other. They silently observe nature through the window. They observe the dissoluteness of the urban wasteland, the burning farmhouse and the train wrecks the rapid passes by in the course of its journey to Paris. {101}

The impermanence of human relationship is exhibited in the story, through the description of nature, "the train passed very quickly a long red store house with a garden and four thick palm trees with tables under them in the shade. On the other side was the sea" (274).

Here, the human world is the train and the non-human world is the environment which is viewed by the travelers. They view from the compartment window the dusty roads and flat fields, and later the industrial detritus alongside the rail road tracks. The physical environment has not changed the attitude of the couple. They travel together without any sort of communication, except that they watch the environment. The journey seems to be slow to the American husband.

In the morning the American lady rises and goes to the restaurant car for breakfast whereas the American couple does not have any breakfast. It would be awkward for them to go separately and there is no question of their going together. The environment outside is also cheerful. The contrast between light and dark, external brightness and internal darkness is picked up and developed the next morning when the sun shines cheerfully and incongruously into the compartment. The sun shine prompts the canaries to chirp briefly.

The American lady fails to realize that in taking her daughter away from the Swiss she was simply madly in love with him. In contrast to her views, her fellow companions the American couple happen to walk together behind their luggage and pass through the gate towards separation. In fact the long journey together has not helped them towards any

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reconciliation. Ultimately, they are ready for separation. Their destination suggests an ironic or bitter conclusion to the journey. As the traveler protagonist approaches his geographical destination, Paris he is drawing away from his emotional center, for it is revealed that he will separate from his wife when the trip ends. The arrival thus betokens not culmination or fulfillment but dissolution. The last line of the story reads as, “we were returning to Paris to set up separate residences” (278).

The American couple’s separation contrasts with the beliefs of the American lady. To give good company to her daughter the American lady gets canaries. As the study focuses on the presentation of nature in the text, it is noticed that the passengers observe the natural environment in the story. It is through the role that nature plays that we can understand the meaning of the story. Throughout the journey the American couple does not exchange a single word; instead they stare at nature.

To sum up, firstly, Hemingway associates the image of Canaries to reveal that the mother is imprisoning the daughter’s affections. Ultimately, the daughter derives solace from the musical language of the canaries.

From the story it is evident that the American couple, in spite of their indifference, enjoys watching nature. But towards the end of their journey it is evident that they have not changed their opinion of separation, probably the urban landscape which they were watching through the window has not impressed them. Similarly, unlike the previous stories where the kinship between the human and animals is observed, here in this story the American lady forces her daughter to break the engagement and gets canaries for her as a token of love and comfort. The hope is that the musical song of canaries would make her daughter happy.

Cat in the Rain and *A Canary for One* run parallel as they refer to the lack of harmony between married couples. In both the stories the bond between the human world and the non-human world is vividly exhibited. Also it is noted that the window serves to connect both the worlds. In both the stories the woman characters experience loneliness in spite of the presence of their partners. To evade from loneliness and isolation they associate themselves with the non-human world. The characters are nonviolent in their language and relationships. As they do not seek harmony in their marital love they bind themselves to the nonhuman world. While the American wife wants the cat, a canary is forced upon the American girl. They try to derive solace and happiness from the non-human world.

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