

A Study on *Cat in the Rain* from the Perspective of Spatial Criticism

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Abstract: Hemingway's short story *Cat in the Rain* highlights the themes of the novel with a large number of spatial images and depicts the connotation of gender conflict. As an extension of the study of space criticism, this paper analyzes the abstract meaning of landscape space, social space and individual space in *Cat in the Rain*, interprets the characters' thoughts and feelings, as well as explains the complex mentality of the female character's desire, courage, failure and return exposed in the process of her pursuit of self and freedom. Hemingway's skillful grasp of women's psychological reality can be proved through detail analysis.

Keywords: Spatial Criticism; Landscape Space; Social Space; Individual Space; Female Mentality

1. Introduction

Cat in the Rain, one of the outstanding works written by Ernest Hemingway, reflects the conflict between male and female through symbolization. Narrated in the third person, this short story has a simple plot and language. With a great number of descriptions for scenery and space, the atmosphere of this story is set off, and the heroine's inner thought is presented. The multi-dimensional landscape of the story constantly changes with different activities of the heroine.

Spatial criticism is a "spatial turn" approach in the literature. And this new form of criticism pays attention to the landscape and space in the works and the social, cultural and identity attributes of space. All of these provide a stable theoretical foundation for the interpretation of space in *Cat in the Rain*.

Therefore, we can reveal the importance that elements interact in multi-dimensional space through the analysis of landscape space, social space and individual space. In this way, can we expound the thoughts and feelings of the characters more aptly, and comprehend the complex mentality of desire, courage, failure and return revealed in the process of women's pursuit of self and free in the work.

2. Landscape Space in *Cat in the Rain*

Landscape space in literary works is the material form that people can intuitively feel or see, such as weather, architecture, traffic, etc. As part of the spatial structure in literary works and with strong symbolic significance, these landscapes have a close relationship with people's production and life. "As a form of literature, the story has inherent geographical properties. The world of the story is made up of position and background, site and boundary, as well as view and horizon." [1] At the same time, the geographical landscape is not simply described by literary works, but endowed with a certain literary connotation to demonstrate people's different attitudes toward the world. Therefore, the analysis of landscape space in literary works can gain insight into the deep ideological connotation of the article and understand the author's real intention of writing.

2.1 *The Exterior Space of the Hotel*

Although *Cat in the Rain* is a short story, its beginning has present a rich sense of pictures and the change in weather is particularly pronounced. The sharp contrast between a sunny day and a rainy day has deep implications. "In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea." [2][3] The beautiful and clear scenery implies the heroine's yearning for happiness, complete love and marriage. While the rainy days, dripping trees, a road filled with puddles, rolling ocean waters, and the empty square below all depict a gloomy and empty scene, which symbolizes the husband's gloomy and cold

attitude towards his wife and his wife's inner disappointment emptiness. These also symbolize the marriage of the wife and husband changes from being romantic and harmonious to indifferent and gloomy and illustrate the heroine's expectations changes from the original romantic and beautiful to nothing, replaced by a substantial void and desolation.

As a cultural symbol and with strong coverage and coercion, "rain" runs through the whole text, which symbolizes the male-centered patriarchal society and strong male discourse hegemony and symbolizes the change of the heroine's inner world. "Rain" is described three times in the story. The first time is the scene the heroine sees from the window. "It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees." [2][3] She finds a poor cat in the rain, and it is the first time she reveals her inner desire. The second time is when the heroine goes downstairs to catch the cat. "It was raining harder." [2][3] This implies her fierce emotional struggle. The third time happens when her husband does not want to hear her wishes, and tells her to shut up, she looks out of the window, "It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees." [2][3] This sentence symbolizes the wife's anxiety after she comes back disappointed. Rain always accompanies the occurrence and development of the story and the change of the American wife's mood. It conceals the rich ideological connotation and emotional significance of the work. It exposes the complex mentality of desire, courage, failure and return of women in the pursuit of self and freedom.

The changes in the weather before and after the war are evident and profound. The author deliberately expresses his feelings in the context. According to the background of World War I and the social situation in the United States at that time, we can see that these changes may reveal the relationship between the husband and wife and imply the changes that happened in the United States. Firstly, in terms of the environment, these changes are symbolic of the United States before and after World War I. And the attractive landscape described at the beginning stands for the prosperous society and economy that existed in the United States. Although the United States benefited from the war industry in World War I, its material production capacity was greatly enhanced, and the people's living standards and quality were greatly improved, the expansion of comprehensive national strength didn't bring light and hope to the young generation. Secondly, according to the author, these changes also represent the spiritual changes that happened in Hemingway's generation. They originally believed in democracy and freedom and threw themselves into the great war with lofty ideals until they, through the experience in the cruel war, caught on that the human being is infinitesimal, life is minimal, and death is just around the corner. Hence, after losing their spiritual paradise, they became confused, disappointed, and pessimistic, and became the "lost generation".

The climate change in the story renders the atmosphere of the whole story. And the author endows the weather with multiple symbolic meanings, echoing the story itself and the author's proposition, which makes full use of the weather.

In addition to the rendering of the weather, the story of the story also presents specific representative scenes. "The war monument was made of bronze and glistened in the rain." [2][3] A monument is erected in memory of a deceased person or a major event. This scene is directly related to the war, bloodshed and death, symbolizing the crisis of the protagonist's marriage. The "glistened" is ironic. The government pretended that war is for justice and human rights, but it was an invasion and expansion of capitalism essentially. The bronze-made monument is much more rigid and cold with the rain, which is not only a symbol of the husband's indifference or implacability, but also a reminder of the cruelty of the war and the sorrow brought by it. In addition, if "park" as a symbol is the real world faced by the heroine, then the war memorial is also a functional symbol with realistic meaning. As a historical memory, it is one of the symbols for interpreting the text. The bronze monument is hard and cold, the symbolic meaning is ancient, and the luster shining in the rain is chilly. This functional symbol expresses the universal emotion of human beings from experience and feeling, which can produce more far-reaching and subtle signified meaning, therefore the work gains infinite meaning space.

"The motor cars were gone from the square by the war monument." [2][3] "Car" is a symbol of the heroine's good vision, and the passion and ideal of Hemingway's generation before the war. Nevertheless, the leave of the car takes everything away. Accordingly, all the beautiful vision for the future disappears, leaving only an empty square, only the emptiness and confusion, loneliness and despair of people. The scene reflects the war-weariness and spiritual desolation of the lost generation. In addition, the sea in the story also has a profound meaning. The sea is vast and boundless, giving people infinite expectations and hopes for the future. Naturally, facing the sea people always have a lot of yearning, and the American wife yearns for romance and freedom. But the "sea" is not always peaceful, it also contains all sorts of dangers. On the rainy day, "The sea broke in a long line in the rain

and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain.”[2][3] It also suggests that hope is not always realized, and it symbolizes that the heroine’s pursuit of freedom and harmonious marriage is facing many crises and tests, which is full of uncertainty.

The cat shelters from the rain under the green table, which is the cat’s only refuge. It reflects that the wife’s room is her umbrella, but also it is a cage that restrained her footsteps. The young lady is like a bird in a cage, feeling barren, but yearning for freedom, wants to break away from the traditional constraints and pursue a new life of her own. When the heroine stands in the doorway and looks out, she sees “A man in a rubber cape was crossing the empty square to the cafe.”[2][3] This scene emphasizes her desire for such protection and her desire to transcend limitations. At that moment, just like the waiter standing in the doorway in the first paragraph, the wife is standing in the doorway, between the outside and the inside, with freedom for the former and protection for the latter. An umbrella opens behind her as she prepares to walk along the eaves to find the cat and her true self. The umbrella protects her so that she could walk out into the rain. However, the umbrella also prevents her from having complete contact with the natural world and the freedom it brings. As she reaches the table where the cat has been, the cat is no longer there. The window of the room she lives in is just above her head, and she is free from the restrictions of her past. As a result, she is able to see from the outside, instead of feeling trapped inside, she has escaped from limitation and protection. In fact, however, she is still under the protection of the maid’s umbrella. When the maid urges her to return to the hotel to avoid getting wet, she reiterates the restrictions of the hotel. As the wife tries to get rid of the limitations and find a mate, the maid’s well-meaning reminder only underscores the wife’s inability to transcend the barriers herself and society for women. Her adventures outside the hotel offered her neither a new-found sense of freedom nor a companion to share her loneliness.

2.2 The Interior Space of the Hotel

The hotel itself is a small space that simply reflects the components of society. The display of this space mainly depends on the route that the heroine walks in and out of the hotel to find the cat: the second floor where the two live, the stairs, the hotel owner’s desk, the door of the hotel, and the doorway that the maid stands on while sending the cat at the end of the article.

The wife notices a crouched kitten taking shelter from the rain under a table in the room upstairs. She feels sorry for the cat and wants to go out to save it. This necessitates going down the stairs and out of the hotel. Obviously, this arrangement is not unfounded. The stairs and the door of the hotel are also quite symbolic. The second floor is located high on the staircase, symbolizing the high-level of society or the wealthy class. The top of the stairs also symbolizes initiative and dominance, meaning the status of men at that time, while the bottom of the stairs symbolizes passivity and oppression, just like the social status of women at that time. The staircase is the only way to the garden and the only way for the wife to break through the tradition. The wife’s behavior downstairs defines her relationship with the innkeeper and the maid, as well as her movement from one restricted area to another. The door is a breakthrough from the hotel to the outside world, symbolizing that the young lady wants to break through herself and tradition through the door. However, the flight of stairs and the door do not work out for her. When she steps out in the rain, she finds that the cat has disappeared without a trace. The heroine goes out to rescue the kitten until the disappearance of the kitten indicating that her hope to change the status quo will finally come to nothing and she will still exist as passive and subordinate as before. The clever use of the staircase highlights the theme of the story, that is the inner desire of women to break out of traditional gender roles and the cruel social reality

“The wife went downstairs and the hotel owner stood up and bowed to her as she passed the office. His desk was at the far end of the office.”[2][3] These sentences emphasize the distance between the two characters. The desk acts as a barrier between the innkeeper and the wife, holding the space between them. The desk emphasizes the existence of boundaries and distances, revealing that the space between objects is an undeniable and inevitable rigid constraint for all characters in the story. The spatial relationship between the wife and the innkeeper also illustrates the nature and extent of their limitations. Although she has a good feeling for the boss, it is only due to his decent service rather than interpersonal interaction, the wife has not cross the space between her and the housekeeper and goes straight to the door. “As the American girl passed the office, the padrone bowed from his desk.”[2][3] Although the owner’s ordinary behavior makes the heroine feel a little uncomfortable and nervous, and she feels that she has received unusual attention, she still does not stay and goes straight upstairs. This shows that the spatial relationship and class relationship between the two are still maintained, no one takes the initiative to cross the gap, and people’s ideas are very rigid.

Although the wife in the article fails to find the cat, the maid climbs the stairs to the door of the American couple's room at the end of the article. She stands in the doorway holding a big tortoise-shell cat sent by the shopkeeper. To show respect, the maid has not cross the threshold and keeps the distance and space between herself and the American couple. There is still an insurmountable gap between the two classes.

2.3 *The Interior Space of the Room*

The American couple's room is on the second floor, facing the sea and the garden. Although the room facing the sea is visually infinite for the American couple, it also shows the room's insulation. Since it is raining, their activities can only be in their room, thus the room is both a shelter and a restricted area. The space of the garden is relatively vast, while the room of the heroine is relatively small and closed. The heroine cannot help herself rushing out of the room to pick up the poor cat in the rain. This is a metaphor for the wife who wants to break out of the cage and the traditional restriction and seeks a new life of freedom and self. And the door of the room is just the first breakthrough from the enclosed space to the outside world. Stepping out of this door symbolizes the young lady's first step in the pursuit of self and freedom. Here, the cat is a symbolization of the American wife. It is the cat in the rain that makes her examine the meaning of her existence. They all need to be protected and cared for and they are in the same situation. The desire to protect the cat in the rain reflects the willingness of American wives for love, which also reflects the status of women and their yearning for freedom.

The window in the room is the first landscape to show the spatial relationship between the American wife and the outside world. "The American wife stood at the window looking out." [2][3] From the window, you can observe the outside world and broaden your vision. The wife stands behind the window and sees the cat hiding from the rain below. For the wife, the window is a shield from the rain. At this time, "the cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on." [2][3] Unlike the cat, the wife wants to go beyond the barrier where she is now and enter the rain, break free from all the restraints on her body, and seek freedom and self. At the same time, compared with the bed, the window is located at the edge of the room, and the bed is particularly prominent in the narrow room. It can be said that the bed is the central part of the room. In the room, the American wife stands by the window most of the time, and she sees the kitten hiding from the rain through the window. Looking for no results, she returns to the room and complains about her childish short hair, then she goes to the window and looks out. The young lady expresses her desire to have long hair, eat with her favorite silver tableware, and wear new clothes. After the husband tells her to shut up, the wife chooses to look out the window. In the end, the husband stopped listening to her talking, she still looks out of the window. Freedom is so close but hard to reach. From the structure of the room, the window is on edge, while the bed is the center of the room. The heroine leans against the window or looks out of the window most of the time, while her husband lies in bed all the time.

On the one hand, it symbolizes the marginal position of women and the dominant position of men. Women always occupy the marginal and neglected position in the society and family at that time while the husband occupy the most central position and emotional dominance, the bed in the hotel. On the other hand, we can also see from these details the American wife's longing for the outside world, her inner desire to break through the shackles of tradition and pursue a new life of her own.

When the heroine goes in and out of the room and tries to talk to her husband, her husband always holds a book in his hand. The book becomes the symbol of the emotional barrier between them. When the wife goes downstairs to save the cat, "the husband went on reading." [2][3] After failing to protect the cat, his wife goes upstairs to push the door open. "George was on the bed, reading." [2][3] When she enters the room, her husband puts down the book he is reading, and the barrier between them temporarily disappeared. The wife sits by the bed and tries to express her desire for the cat to her husband. It is the only time and the first time in the story that the couple shares the same space. In fact, the wife tries to break the barriers in marriage by sharing the same area with her husband. However, "George was reading again." [2][3] Despite the wife's attempts, the distance between the two and the marital problems still exist due to the husband's unwilling to acknowledge her needs and desires. In the last few paragraphs of the article, as if George is lost in a book, his wife talks to the image in the mirror. The mirror reflects her appearance and her loneliness.

In *Cat in the Rain*, Hemingway constructs the plot framework with the help of spatial scenes such as garden, sea, square, room, stairs, door and window, etc. and fully displays the symbolic images and deep discourse connotations contained in different scenes, highlighting the theme of gender conflict in the novel. The author skillfully uses the symbols of these spatial scenes and the reproduction of their

archetypal images to expand the meaning space of the story, thus expressing the indescribable, complex and subtle inner changes of the heroine vividly. From this, readers can deeply understand the inner hesitation, confusion, and struggle of American women in the patriarchal society and their desire and unremitting pursuit for freedom and independence.

3. Social Space in *Cat in the Rain*

3.1 *Impact of the WW I*

The First World War destroyed the naivety and pride of the young men in that era. They devoted themselves to war with lofty goals at that time but lost their lives in the sound of cold guns or returned to their native land with wounds. However, reality has left them confused, and they were angry because they have been cheated and used by the government. The old moral concepts have collapsed. Although they were in their hometown, they can no longer or were unwilling to return to a harmonious and peaceful life. Thus, under the appearance of material prosperity, the crisis in the spiritual field of society has almost collapsed. The lost generation chose to indulge themselves all day, using alcohol, smoking, drag racing, gambling, drug-using, indulgence, etc to dispel their despair. They were morally lost, their dreams disillusioned, and they had no faith or purpose for life.

Cat in the rain also reflects the mental barrenness and confused thinking of young people in that era. This American couple is on the road. They should have more fun and fully enjoy the joy of being alone. But on such a rainy day, they curl up at the hotel and go nowhere. The husband is reading and the wife is dreaming, which fully illustrates their emptiness. To kill time and have some fun, the lady insists on catching the cat in the rain. Unfortunately, the cat has gone. She keeps saying she wants a kitten back in the room, though she doesn't know why she is so eager to have one. It is not difficult to understand the wife's motivation. She is in urgent need of spiritual sustenance.

After the war, people became disillusioned and lived aimlessly, enjoying themselves rather than taking responsibility. The couple may not be particularly typical, but their spiritual emptiness and lack of perspective are visible. When the wife meets the innkeeper, she uses seven "liked" to express her like for the innkeeper. It was only in the innkeeper that she sees the long-lost gentlemanly politeness of the traditional man. In this society, there were no responsibilities and obligations. Traditional values and creeds have been overturned. The presence of the housekeeper has led her to try to revive those traditions. That "the back of her neck clipped close like a boy's"[2][3] shows that the American wife is fashionable and rebellious. However, the innkeeper makes her feel that she was valued. She feels the charm of tradition and begins to doubt the value and significance of rebellious tradition. So she tries to make some changes: she wants to grow long hair to look more like a girl, eat with her silver cutlery and so on, reflecting the expectations of women from traditional values. She wants a kitten, she wants changes, she wants responsibility, and she wants expectations and dreams. The fact that she has no name indicates the universality of her situation, she is rebellious and hoping for changes.

As the story progresses, there are traces of war between the lines, implying the damage brought by war. With hatred and resentment hiding beneath the surface, the war has led to hatred and division between different peoples. When the wife goes downstairs to look for the cat, the maid's face tightens when she speaks English. This has something to do with war. Although Italy was nominally a victor in the First World War, in fact, what it gained did not compensate for what it lost. The effects and injuries of war go far beyond the mere name of a "victorious nation". A maid in a hotel, who had never experienced war, could hardly conceal her hatred and fear of war. It can be seen that the destructiveness of war brings people incurable psychological trauma.

3.2 *The Conflict between Female and Male*

In the story, the author does not describe the marital status of the couple directly. But through the matter of finding a cat, readers can interpret the long-estranged relationship between the couple conveyed in the story. Obviously, the wife was depressed and bored. She longs for comfort and consideration from her husband, but he was indifferent. Therefore, the sight of the poor cat in the rain made her feel sorry, which also indicates her awakening of female consciousness, trying to find her position, power and words in the current social environment. The cat can comfort her loneliness, but unfortunately, the cat can't be found. The glimmer of hope vanishes, the wife's loneliness grows stronger, and the husband remains indifferent and repressed. The lack of understanding and support for the American wife indicates that their marriage is in bad shape.

When the wife wants to get the cat in the rain, the husband continues to lie on the bed and read a book. As to why his wife wants to catch the kitten, he does not care, nor does he want to. When his wife fails, he only says “Wonder where it went to.” He wants to send her away. This space for dialogue exposes the husband’s reluctance to talk too much, and he ruthlessly pushes back his wife’s need and desire to talk. The cat in the rain awakens the wife’s consciousness. She wants to change. She wants to save herself and others. What she says and does is to cater to her husband. For example, when she has short hair, the husband says “I like it the way it is.” while the wife says “I get so tired of it. I get so tired of looking like a boy.”[2][3] The heroine has a strong gender requirement. She is defending her right to be a woman, but her husband cannot understand her. In fact, this is a microcosm of society at that time: men hold the power of speech, and it is impossible to have equal communication between the sexes. This kind of inequality leads to the barrier of their communication and the estrangement of their hearts. Their inability to truly understand and communicate dooms their unhappy marriage. This article buried a lot of foreshadowing. At first, the dull and gloomy atmosphere has paved the way for the discord between the couple. Their room faces the park and the war monument and the garden opposite the war memorial. The garden is for relaxation, while the memorial is for blood, tears and death. The room faces these two extreme views, suggesting a turning point in the couple’s marriage. The husband tries to escape the disappointing reality by reading, but it is counterproductive. The more he immersed himself in books, the more confused he became. Without communication, he could not even know his wife’s most basic emotional needs and inner feelings, let alone see through the confusing world. This also implies that George is a person who lacks vitality, and lacks care for his wife.

The owner of the hotel sends a big tortoise-shell cat at the end of the text, but it is not the cat in the rain, nor the cat the heroine wanted. Although this kind of care and consideration is also a kind of comfort, it cannot replace the warmth of the family and her husband’s understanding.

4. Individual Space in Cat in the Rain

4.1 The Desire and Courage of the Heroine

As a female image in a patriarchal society, cat is characterized by wandering and lack of support, and it is difficult to grasp its fortune. The American wife feels lonely and bored in her marriage. Her husband is indifferent to her body and mind, and even suppresses her desires and appeals, making her feel like the cat in the rain. The cat in the rain makes her realize that she wants to change her boring life, change the state under the control and fight for a line of rights and life. Her tone changes from the original inquiring tone “Don’t you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?”[2][3] to a strong statement of subjective consciousness. Eleven consecutive “I want to...” shows the American wife’s self-awareness and desire to break the status quo. The American wife puts her feelings on this cat, her body and mind begins to liberate, she begins to look forward to a new life, longing for silver, candles, beautiful clothes, tying a big knot hair in the back of the head and so on. The desires of the American wife reflect the fact that women are redefining themselves and no longer content to be locked in.

“I am going down and get that kitty.”[2][3] This is the first step in the American wife’s quest to find herself. The wife summons courage. In the process of going downstairs and going out, she feels the respect and love from the innkeeper twice, which strengthens her courage to escape. She realizes that she deserves better treatment. The last eleven “I want to...” is the heroine’s tense resistance to the unequal status of men and women in marriage and a powerful rendering of her spiritual independence

4.2 The Failure and Return of the Heroine

The failure of the American wife is inevitable. When she steps out of the hotel and chooses to escape, she stops paying attention to the cat, and her attention shifts to the owner of the hotel and people in cloaks outside. From the time she looks for the cat to the time she returns to the hotel, the story only mentions that she “suddenly disappointed” when the wife did not see the cat. The American wife is not disappointed that she hasn’t found the cat, but for the short-term and incompleteness of her escape, after all, she will return to her original life. During the cat hunting, the American wife steps out of the hotel, but she is still under the protection of the maid’s umbrella. The maid’s urging her to return to the hotel to avoid getting wet not only reaffirms the hotel’s limitations but also reminds her of her inability to transcend the current barriers of life, hinting at the heroine’s failure and return.

The American wife searches for the cat fruitlessly. After returning to the room, the husband

expresses neglect to his wife. The wife's heart is desolate, and she looks out of the window three times. The first time she sees the sky getting darker. The second time she sees the sky is darker and still raining. Accordingly, the conversation between the couple is more difficult to go through. On the third occasion, a light appears on the square, symbolizing a faint hope, which relieves the tension and depression in the whole room and calms the wife's mood from escape. The constant rain is actually the embodiment of the wife's lack of security, a fierce struggle in her heart, and a contradiction between escape and return.

This short story ends with the words "the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora." [2][3] At this point, although the main characters in the story gather in the same space, they keep their distance from each other. The maid, sent by the boss, stands in the doorway, between the relatively free space and the enclosed space. The wife and the husband are in the same space as at the beginning of the story: the wife is standing by the window, while the husband is lying on the bed, and they are confined by the window and the book respectively. The scene seems untouched, but the heroine has experienced an escape in the pursuit of self and freedom.

5. Conclusion

Cat in the rain is short, simple plot and straightforward in dialogue, but profound in meaning. A large number of landscapes foil the atmosphere, outline the inner activities of the characters, and effectively reveal the theme of the story. The multi-dimensional landscape of the story constantly changes with the activities of the heroine, thus the analysis of the multi-dimensional space in the story is helpful to understand the author's writing intention further.

As an extension of the spatial criticism of this work, this article interprets the work from spatial criticism. We can reveal the importance that elements interact in multi-dimensional space through the analysis of landscape space, social space and personal space. In this way, can we describe the thoughts and feelings of the characters more aptly, and comprehend the complex mentality of desire, courage, failure and return revealed in the process of women's pursuit of self and free in the work.

Therefore, it can be seen that any scene and landscape in the story is taken from nothing, but endowed with extremely rich symbolic meanings. An analysis of the spatial structure of the story can fully reveal the rich theme of it.

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