

Analysis of Hemingway's Ecofeminism in *Cat in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants*

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Abstract: Ernest Hemingway is regarded as one of the greatest American writers in the 20th century. This paper aims to interpret Hemingway's ecofeminism by analyzing his short stories *Cat in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants*. In these two short stories, Hemingway's ecofeminism is reflected mainly in three aspects: the relationship between man and nature, the relationship between man and woman, and the resonance between woman and nature. It is clear that Hemingway's Ecofeminism is interwoven closely with the social and economic condition of America, the awakening of female consciousness, Hemingway's family education as well as his own experiences. The interpretation of Hemingway's ecofeminism inspires us today to deconstruct the patriarchal worldview.

Keywords: *Cat in the Rain*, Ecofeminism, Ernest Hemingway, *Hills Like White Elephants*.

1. The General Introduction of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism emerged in the late 1970s, which was first proposed by the French feminist Francoise d' Eaubonne in 1974. The rapid development of western modern science and technology in the 16th to 18th centuries made human beings believe that by employing science and technology, they can surpass nature and become the master of everything. Especially since the Industrial Revolution, the rapid development of science and technology has increased human productivity and their control over nature, which made people lose their sense of awe and protection of nature. As a result, nature has been greatly destroyed. In modern society, women, like nature, are also under the all kinds of visible or invisible oppression of the binary hierarchy: Women spend more time doing housework than men. In fields such as politics and business, women are generally more likely to encounter more career obstacles and the influence of women on society is much weaker than men. Ecofeminism analyses the connection between anthropocentrism and the environmental disruption, putting great emphasis on the close relation between men's domination of nature and men's oppression of women, and appealing for the establishment of a harmonious coexistence between men, women and nature, which has great enlightenment for the establishment of a harmonious and sustainable society. "Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism" [1], which contains a lot of appeals such as the calling for peace, asking rights for labors, paying more attention to women's and kids' health care, being opposed to nuclear, propagandizing the necessity of protecting environment and wide animals. Ecofeminism is neither environmentalism nor feminism, nor the addition of the two, for the former two theories both failed to get a comprehensive understanding of the crisis of modernity in a historical, political, and philosophical perspective. [2] Ecofeminism is an ontology, a new way of thinking. It focuses on the relationship between the dominance of women and the dominance of nature. And this relationship is the patriarchal worldview, which owns three important characteristics: binary systems, hierarchy of values and the logic of domination. "Binaries are social

constructs composed of two parts that are framed as absolute and unchanging opposites. Binary systems reflect the integration of these oppositional ideas into our culture. This results in an exaggeration of differences between social groups until they seem to have nothing in common. An example of this is the phrase 'men are from Mars, women are from Venus.' Ideas of men and women being complete opposites invite simplistic comparisons that rely on stereotypes: men are practical, women are emotional; men are strong, women are weak; men lead, women support." [3] The concept of value hierarchy believes one specie is superior to the other, such as men are more ascendant than women, human-beings are predominant comparing to nature, White is superior to Black, and so on. The ruling logic is the patriarchal attitude towards nature, women and colored people, which believes conquering and plundering are the ways to develop. In the eyes of eco-feminists, gender oppression and ecological crisis both originate from the patriarchal worldview. The connection between woman and nature is not only manifested in their oppressed status under the patriarchal culture, but also in the cultural metaphorical relations between them. Ecofeminism opposes to the binary hierarchical system, which means that it is not limited to nature and women. Race, class, and the third world are also within the scope of its focus. Understanding and uniting all others that are in a subordinate position is an important task of ecofeminists. Racial discrimination, class oppression, homosexual prejudice, colonialism, etc., are all social issues that they are concerned about. Therefore, to build a society with good ecology, equal gender, and peaceful coexistence of all ethnic groups, it is necessary to fundamentally change the dualistic hierarchical thinking, which is just what ecofeminists have always been striving for.

2. Ernest Hemingway and His *Cat in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants*

Ernest Miller Hemingway (July 21, 1899 - July 2, 1961) is an American novelist, short story writer and journalist, who was born in Oak Park, Illinois and took his own life in his late years at his home in Ketchum, Idaho. "He graduated in 1917.

After graduation he was for a short time a reporter on the Kansas City Star, but the war was on and he went to Italy as a volunteer ambulance driver. He was wounded and decorated, and after his recovery served in the Italian army as a soldier. In the years after the war Hemingway set about learning, quite consciously and with rigorous self-discipline, the craft and art of writing.”^[4] Hemingway’s representative works include *The Old Man and the Sea*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway is regarded as the spiritual monument of the American nation. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. As a representative of the “Lost Generation”, Hemingway married four times and he has showed great confusion and hesitation to our life, society and world through his works, which is known for his economic and understated writing style and has exerted a profound influence on the development of American literature and the literature of the 20th century.

As a brilliant writer who speaks for the “Lost Generation” of American, the “code hero” created in his works, such as soldier, fisherman, hunter, etc., have been discussed and studied by people for a long time. The female images he has depicted, however, are also worth studying. *Cat in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants* are two short stories published by Hemingway both in the 1920s. *Cat in the Rain* is about an American couple staying in a hotel somewhere in Italy. The wife saw a cat in the rain and wanted to take it, but returned empty-handed and the husband were reading in bed all the time, caring nothing about what the woman wanted. In the end, the hotel owner sent a maid to bring a big tortoiseshell cat to the wife. *Hills Like White Elephants* tells that in a small remote train station in Spain, the male protagonist does everything possible to ask his girlfriend Jig to have an abortion, but Jig is extremely reluctant.

In the past, scholars mostly interpreted *Cat in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants* in terms of iceberg theory (writing style), symbolism, conversational meaning, narrative techniques, and female images. This thesis, in another way, aims to explore Hemingway’s ecofeminism in the two short stories. And through the interpretation of his ecofeminism, hoping that it offers us a new way to deconstruct the patriarchal worldview.

3. The Background and Causes of Hemingway’s Ecofeminism

3.1. The Background and Causes of Hemingway’s Ecological Consciousness

3.1.1. The Economic and Social Condition of America

In the 20th century, America has entered an era of rapid development of new technologies. The second Industrial Revolution originated in America and led it into a brand-new age of urbanization and industrialization, which brought enormous wealth to the Americans, as well as more and more serious environmental destruction, which even threatens the survival of human beings. When Hemingway was a little boy, he lived in Michigan, where dense forests, clear rivers and lakes were everywhere at that time. Due to overexploitation, however, the good ecological environment has gone. Hemingway was very sorry for the destruction. In 1947, Hemingway wrote to Faulkner: “My own village has disappeared and the trees have been cut down. Only the gas station and the residential area where we used to hunt for storks on the grassland are left.”^[5] Also, Hemingway

expressed his mourning for the overexploitation and destruction of his hometown in the following passage:

“They cut down the forests, the streams lost their water, the lakes had their levels lowered and raised by the taking or not taking of

water to float sewerage from Chicago down the drainage canal”^[6]

In addition to the environmental crises, during this period, Western society has undergone other tremendous changes as well. Massive wars and slaughters and aggravated economic crises have left indelible trauma to nature as well as to people’s hearts, which all have left a far-reaching impact on the works of Hemingway, which reflect the thought of human beings living in peace with nature, and he pursues the return to nature to obtain spiritual comfort from it. The destruction of nature by industrial civilization and wars inspired Hemingway to pay attention to and protect nature and the insightful appeal of environmental protection is also reflected in his creation of literary works.

3.1.2. Hemingway’s Personal Experience and His Father’s Influence

When Hemingway was at a very young age, his father Clarence Hemingway opened the door to nature for him. Old Hemingway loved nature very much and he took every opportunity to expose Hemingway to nature. “Old Hemingway was a physician, fond of hunting and fishing, who took young Hemingway with him on his trips. As young Hemingway was a boy his father taught him to hunt and fish along the shores and in the forests surrounding Lake Michigan. At the age of three, his father gave him a fishing pole as his birthday present. At the age of ten, his father gave him a hunting gun.”^[7] He not only taught Hemingway about camping, hunting, fishing skills and knowledge of nature, but also instilled in him the notion of not “killing for the sake of killing”.^[8]

Secondly, Hemingway has traveled a lot in his life and always has close contact with nature. He has explored the prairies of Illinois, the Hemlock Forest in Michigan, the Rocky Mountains in the west, and Key West in the south. He has been to Spain, East Africa, Bimini, Cuba and other places. These tours and experiences have not only gathered a lot of writing materials for his works, but increased his ability of interpreting the innate value of all creatures in nature, which strengthened his ecological consciousness. Mary Hemingway, his fourth wife, who came to Africa with him for safari, said: “A great deal of the hunting was the pleasure of walking through African bush or Idaho sagebrush... It was certainly not killing that engaged him... we passed up a great many animals who were just too sweet to shoot”^[9].

3.2. The Background and Causes of Hemingway’s Feminine Consciousness

3.2.1. Awakening of Women’s Consciousness in America Society

Due to the lack of labor in the United States during the First World War, many American women walked out of their families and entered factories to fill the vacancies left by men. After the war, men came back from the battlefield and forced women to return to the positions of housewives. Certainly most of the women were unwilling to return. These women who had experienced the baptism of the war began to participate in the vigorous feminist movements, fighting for equal rights and status with men both economically and politically. After a long and arduous struggle, politically, in

1920, the US Congress passed the bill, marking that American women won their voting rights eventually. Economically, the labor market in the United States after the First World War began to open to women, giving them a lot of working opportunities. As for ethics and values, some pioneers put a challenge to the old, traditional moral values by wearing short skirts, having short hair, participating in sport events, and so on, which shows varying degrees of freedom. Although some women still regarded marriage and family as their most important things in their lives, there has been an increase in the number of women going to college, living and traveling alone, and striving for an independent life for themselves. These brave, wise, and independent women are called “New Women.” The fierce struggle between the sexes directly affected Hemingway’s view of women, and the trend of the era also left a clear mark on Hemingway’s creation.

3.2.2. His Mother’s Influence

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, American parents were used to dressing their kids in the clothing characteristic of the opposite sex.^[10] The biographer Baker once said that Hemingway’s mother Grace was an outgoing and tough woman, who embraced professional women’s pursuits but could only succumb to the position of a housewife. Grace often showed the toughness of a feminist. When Hemingway was a child, his mother deliberately dressed him as a girl. The experience of gender misalignment made Hemingway very painful, but the childhood of gender confusion also gave Hemingway a bisexual perspective, allowing him to transcend his gender identity, observe things from the perspective of women, feel their inner world and empathize their sufferings and pain under the patriarchal system.

4. An Analysis of Ecofeminism in *Cat in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants*

4.1. Man vs Nature

4.1.1. Waging Wars

“Like many Eco-feminists, Hemingway showed his concern for war’s destruction of the nature because of his experiences in these devastating wars such as World War I, Spanish Civil War”.^[11] At the beginning of *Cat in the Rain*, Hemingway, who has always been known for his economic and understated writing style, gives a lot of detail description on the exotic environment: “Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. 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. Italians came from a long way off to look up at the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain.”^[12] The feeling given by the sea and the park is beautiful and romantic, however, destroyed by the ensuing image of death, the war monument. The texture of the monument is bronze, which is hard and cold, as well as the luster shimmering in the rain, suggesting that war is ruthless and unprepossessing. The openness of the sea and the emotionally suppressed monument form a stark contrast, which reflects the deep political contradiction between the United States and Italy after the World War I. It exposes the tremendous harm that war and violence have brought to human society. In the

process of social development, driven by their own insatiable ambitions, desires and interests, man take the advantages of nature as means and tools at all costs, launching wars, grabbing resources, plundering land, and so on. In this short story, people come all the way to Italy not to watch the seascape, but to look at the monument which symbolizes the destruction of mankind to nature and himself, reflecting the admiration of men for war. Men lack a deep involvement in the process of fertility and nurturing, so they pay more attention to war rather than life. At the beginning of the 20th century, this generation committed to the battlefield with illusions, but only rewarded with deep physical and psychological trauma left by the war. Hemingway, who participated in the First World War and witnessed the disasters that war brought to nature and mankind, showed his implied accusation in his language.

4.1.2. Alienated from Nature

In the two short stories, in addition to embodying his accusations against mankind for launching wars, Hemingway also described and criticized men’s alienation from nature. In *Cat in the Rain*, the wife found the cat had disappeared after she went downstairs. Why did the cat disappear? There is a small detail in the story: “A man in a rubber cape was crossing the empty square to the cafe.”^[12] Hemingway is a writer who has always been known for his economic and understated writing style, so giving a depiction of a character who passes by in a flash is by no means revealing nothing. Based on the chronological order of the development of this short story, we can basically deduce that the cat might have already fled away due to the reason that someone walked by and the cat was frightened. This man wore a cape which was made of rubber, which, to some extent, protected him well. From another prospective, we can see that it as well as symbolized his isolation from nature. In a contrast, the woman went straight into the rain without considering any protection measures. Besides, the woman was walking to a cat, a life, which the man was walking away from and he was to the cafe, which is a place full of social activities. So, as we can see, the civilized activities of men in this civilized world drove away a wild cat from nature, reflecting the alienation of men from nature.

“The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun.”^[13] The description of the nature at the beginning is also reproduced the changes in natural ecology after the World War I. The natural ecology has experienced irreversible destruction after the war, and people who have experienced the war have difficulty adapting to the post-war life. They cannot find their place in society and feel confused and painful, which intensifies the neglect of the homeland of mankind—Nature. In Hemingway’s writings, the young couple stopped at the transfer station for just two minutes. They had their own thoughts, but it is not difficult to see the close relationship between Jig and nature, while men showed diametrically opposite attitudes. Throughout the short story, the focus of the American man is on the issue of abortion, without paying any attention to nature. Nature has always been ignored by the man. Even when Jig mentioned it, the man also interrupted the topic. When Jig compared the hills in the distance to white elephants, the man only responded in an absent way, repeatedly emphasizing, “It’s really an awfully simple operation”^[14] It can be seen that the man’s neglect and indifference to life is not only reflected in his attitude toward the abortion, but also the mother of the earth—nature. The man refused to be close to nature and show

an indifferent attitude towards life.

4.2. Man vs Woman

4.2.1. Reason vs Emotion

In the short story *Cat in the Rain*, albeit the husband had said that he would offer some assistance to help his wife find the cat, the words was said on the bed and he did not move at all, showing his indifference and carelessness toward the cat and his wife's concerns. His proposal did not turn into action in the end, and he didn't even try to change his posture. His bed and his book are two typical representatives of human civilization: the bed is the creation of human beings' material progress, and the book is one of the creations which carries the substantial achievement of human beings' spiritual enlightenment. In this short story with extremely refined language, the word "reading" is constantly used to describe the man, while the expression using to depict wife repeats as "I want a cat" ^[15], which gives us a hint that it may have symbolic meanings. The husband had been putting himself in the little corner of human civilization, and never stopped keeping himself from the alienation of the external natural world. On the other hand, the wife was standing by the window, which implies that she was at the junction of the civilized world and the natural world and showed her strong and earnest desire for the natural world. When she came back, "George was on the bed, reading." ^[15] She expressed her strong desire to communicate with her husband, but when she said to him that she really wanted the little cat, "George was reading again." ^[15] This simple depiction gives a clear fact to the readers that the man couldn't care less for the kitten and his wife's emotions and appeals. All he cares about is his book, his rational world. The wife then talked about her own hair, longing for a long hair which symbolizes femininity, showing her dissatisfaction with boys' hair styles. But her husband shows his affection for the present style of the haircut and believes it "looks pretty darn nice". ^[15] When her emotions continued to pour out and she hoped that "I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes" ^[15], the husband only said without any patience "Oh, shut up and get something to read." ^[15] To put it differently, he is asking his wife to use reason to control her emotions. This is a typical value of men, supporting reason and suppressing emotions. At the end of this short story, George even paid no attention at all to what his wife said. "He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square." ^[15] At last, the book was still there, while the cat was gone. The husband and the wife came to the opposite state as initial, but it culminated in the victory of rationality and civilization.

White elephants usually represent undesirable gifts, just like the fetus in Jig's belly. The American man tried to persuade jig to have an abortion. "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig." "It's not really an operation at all." "They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural." ^[14] Through these sentences, the selfishness and lack of responsibility of the man were exposed. Faced with the pushing of the man, the girl was silent at first, but was finally forced to become hysterical: "Would you please, please, please, please, please, please stop talking?" ^[16], which revealed the hypocritical nature of the man and the inner conflict, pain and helplessness of the girl, exposing the indifference and ruthlessness of men towards women.

4.2.2. Monopolization of the Discourse Power

In *Cat in the Rain*, faced with a series of wishes raised by his wife, George lay indifferently on the bed and continued reading, immersed in his own world. In the end, he couldn't bear it, and he only responded with a "shut up", which fully reflected the hegemony and supremacy of the husband. What we need to pay attention to is that the description of the wife's actions and words take up most of the text of this short story, while only a few words are about the husband. However, the husband is only marginalized superficially, if we look into the essential aspect, however, he is always and definitely the center of dominance. Just like the war monument standing in the garden, the husband, who is lying in bed and reading, is also a voiceless but absolutely authority, a central strength that rules everything in his beyond. In this short story, Hemingway also gave the man a name—George, which is not only a symbol in social use, but also a symbol of his, or in another way, men's identity and status. The man has a name, showing to the readers that the husband's identity is admitted while the wife even can't own a name. The centrality of George and his books is obvious and unquestionable. At the end of the short story, the cat disappeared while the book was still in the husband's hand. The opposite relation between the cat and the book reveals men's nonchalance, apathy and oppression towards women and nature.

The content of *Hills Like White Elephants* is mainly based on the dialogue between the girl and the man. When Hemingway described the girl jig, he seemed to give her the same discourse power to communicate with the man, but unfortunately, women in a patriarchal society are affected by the logic of domination and cannot directly express their thoughts and wishes at all. The girl was dominated by the man's consciousness, and she even had to use language to cater to him, until the girl was forced to collapse at the end. Jig started the conversation "They look like white elephants" ^[13] and then the man expressed that he has never seen it before. When Jig replied with "No, you wouldn't have" ^[13], it aroused the dissatisfaction of the man due to Jig's denial of him. Then the man used "I might have, just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything." ^[13] as a reply to suppress the girl's words and this gave the man the upper hand.

4.3. Woman & Nature

4.3.1. Metaphorical Relations between Woman and Nature

There is a metaphorical relation between the woman and the cat in *Cat in the Rain*. The coldness and loneliness of the cat not only implies the feelings of the wife who is excluded from her husband's life, but also symbolizes the depression of the wife caused by being trapped in the hotel room. The lonely and helpless young American woman has seen herself in the stray cat hiding under the table, which arouses her sympathy. She is as lonely and helpless as it is, thirsting for warmth and love. At the same time, the wife also wants to use the opportunity of finding a cat to express her needs and attract her husband's attention.

In *Hills Like White Elephants*, there is also a metaphorical relation between the girl and the hills which look like white elephants. The hills here are used as a metaphor for the girl's shape after her pregnancy. And the natural scene described in the short story "The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry." ^[13] "Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river,

were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.”^[17] alludes the two choices that the girl is facing—miscarriage or childbirth.

4.3.2. Women’s Closeness to Nature

In *Cat in the Rain*, the cat was “crouched under one of the dripping green tables”, “trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.”^[12] Contrasting with the wife who is aware of the cat’s loneliness and helplessness, the husband in the story is always lying in bed and reading, only immersed himself in his own world. “It isn’t any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.”^[15] So the wife went to get the cat regardless of wind and rain. She hoped that “to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.”^[15] The husband however, just ignored his wife’s grumble and told her to shut up. These detailed plots all reflect that men are indifferent and alienated to nature, while women have an innate closeness to nature.

In *Hills Like White Elephants*, Jig looked at the outlines of the hills and felt that “they look like white elephants”,^[33] while the man said, “I’ve never seen one.”^[13] The man’s sight has never gone beyond the narrow range of the station, only moving from the beaded curtains to the girl, tables, travel bags and guests in the bar. The girl is different. She observed all things in nature. When drinking, she could feel “It tastes like licorice”, but the man could not feel the fragrance from nature, and for him, “That’s the way with everything.”^[13] Some seemingly plain descriptions also show a close relationship between nature and women. For example, “They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.”^[13] describes the ecological environment, which is also a true portrayal of women’s life.

All of these are in line with the concern of ecofeminism on the connection between women and nature.

5. Conclusion

“With the rise of the women’s movement in the 1960s and of feminist criticism in departments of literature, Hemingway became Enemy Number One for many critics, who accused him of perpetuating sexist stereotypes in his writing. The early feminist attacks unquestionably diminished his literary reputation in some academic circles and reduced the study of his work in high school and university classrooms. These same attacks, however, led to a broader reevaluation of his work. The resulting rereadings have given new visibility to Hemingway’s female characters (and their strengths) and have revealed his own sensitivity to gender issues.”^[18]

In *Cats in the Rain* and *Hills Like White Elephants*, Hemingway uses simple symbols to outline women’s subordinate status in marriage and relationship. “Hemingway achieves agitation through indifference, explains through unexplained, and cares through nonchalance.”^[19] Through the analysis of the background and causes of the formation of Hemingway’s ecofeminism and its embodiment in the two short stories, we can see that Hemingway has a sympathy for women who are neglected, discriminated against or abused by men.

In conclusion, we can say that Hemingway is a writer with ecofeminism thoughts and his thoughts inspire us today to deconstruct the patriarchal worldview by correctly dealing

with the relationship between man, woman and nature, through which we human beings may finally gain strength, wit and love to defeat prejudice between different genders, oppression between different classes, discrimination between different races, and wars and hegemony among different nations.

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