

# Hemingway's Views on Marriage in *IN OUR TIME*

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## I. Introduction

Marriage is one of the happiest events in a person's life. Many people think so, but Hemingway does not. Marriages in Hemingway's works actually end unhappily because his own pessimistic ideas on love are the basis of his works. He thinks it is impossible for two persons who are in love with each other to be happy. The reasons why he thinks so are based on his background and his four marriages. He consciously describes various rifts between couples and investigates the cause of their unhappiness, especially in his short stories. Autobiographical factors are playing more important roles in his short stories than in his long novels. *In Our Time* is the second of Hemingway's early works, and I have chosen short stories from *In Our Time* to explain his ideas on marriage.

*In Our Time* has five short stories about married couples, "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," "Cat in the Rain," "Out of Season," and "Cross-Country Snow." "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" describes Hemingway's parents. The story is overly personal because it is easy to understand that he hates his mother. "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" and "Cat in the Rain" deal mainly with married couples who are going to be or have already become unhappy. But two other stories are different from the former stories. "Out of Season" describes going fishing, and "Cross-Country Snow" describes skiing. In these stories the married couples are not the only aspects, for the main theme concerns fishing and skiing. I think "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" and "Cat in the Rain" are the most suitable stories to learn clearly about Hemingway's views on marriage.

"Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" was originally entitled "Mr. and Mrs. Smith." When Hemingway lived in Paris, he had an acquaintance, Mr. Chard Powers Smith, so it was suspected that Hemingway ironically described Mr. and Mrs. Smith's private life. That was why the title was changed into the present title.

Chard Powers Smith was very rich; he had a chateau and held two degrees, one from Yale and one from Harvard. Once he confessed to Hemingway that he had been a coward sexually, for he had been a virgin until he was married to an older woman. Hemingway lived a poor life in those days, so he must have envied Mr. Smith, who lived so extravagantly. I suppose Hemingway had an impulse to slander Mr. Smith after hearing this confession.

In February 1923, Hemingway traveled to various places in Italy with his first wife Hadley. They visited Ezra Pound the poet in Rapallo, where the scene of "Cat in the Rain" takes place, but Pound was unfortunately out of town. It was raining, so Hemingway and Hadley spent much of the day in a room of a hotel that faced the sea in Rapallo. A trivial happening between them at that time seems to have made material for a story. Although Hemingway denied that this story was autobiographical, judging from the situation of the couple in those days, I feel it is quite probable that this story happened to Hemingway. In December 1922, Hadley had lost his suitcase containing his works, and they also found she was pregnant. Her pregnancy was unexpected, so Hemingway was probably not happy about it at first. In "Cat in the Rain," a small rift occurs between a couple in just this kind of situation.

## II. The married life of "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot"

In "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," Hemingway describes Mr. and Mrs. Elliot from an objective viewpoint. Unusual for Hemingway, he uses little conversation. By omitting conversations, Hemingway suggests, and easily convinces the reader, that Mr. and Mrs. Elliot are unhappy by revealing various trifling situations.

The story starts with the sentence "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby."<sup>1</sup> This expression is used five times at the beginning of the story because Hemingway, by repetition of the same expressions, emphasizes ironically that the couple have little experience sexually:

Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby. They tried as often as Mrs. Elliot could stand it. They tried in Boston after they were married and they tried coming over on the boat. They did not try very often on the boat because Mrs. Elliot was quite sick. She was sick and when she was sick she was sick as Southern women are sick. That is women from the Southern part of the United States. Like all Southern women Mrs. Elliot disintegrated very quickly under sea sickness, travelling at night, and getting up too early in the morning.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately, Hemingway gives reasons why their sexual life has not gone well on the ship bound for Europe. The cause is Mrs. Elliot's seasickness. The word "sick"

is also used five times as is "they tried." After all, they tried hard to have a baby on the ship, but every time they tried, their life did not go smoothly because of Mrs. Elliot's sickness. In the first paragraph the future of their married life is briefly suggested; the short sentences seem to indicate the couple is fated to be unhappy.

When they married, Hubert Elliot was twenty-five years old, a post-graduate in law at Harvard University and "a poet with an income of nearly ten thousand dollars a year."<sup>3</sup> He believed that the right way of living was to keep one's purity until marriage. His thought is perhaps classical and reflects a form of platonic love, but he knows that he is lacking in masculine charm, a quality in himself he will not admit. When he married Cornelia, he gained confidence, but he began to lose confidence again as their married life got worse. Instead, he concentrated on writing poems.

Cornelia, who had worked in a tea shop in Boston, was forty years old. As soon as Hubert confessed his purity, the girls he had been in love with lost interest in him and left him. In contrast to these girls, Mrs. Elliot was glad and said, "'You dear sweet boy'"<sup>4</sup> because she was also pure even at forty. Their unusual thoughts on love were in agreement with each other, so they married in spite of their age difference of fifteen years.

All they had done was kiss, and then they got married after several weeks. Although it is common to become conscious of a friend as an object of love, in the case of Hubert and Cornelia, I do not think so. They decided to get married as soon as they knew that they were each pure. Their purity became the direct cause of their marriage. But they were mistaken in thinking that they had finally met their ideal companion. The fact is that neither of them accepted their unusual love. They only agreed with each other about the way of love. Character and humanity were not necessary for them.

On their honeymoon they tried hard to have a baby on the ship from America to Europe. They wanted to have a baby, but they could not try that often because of Mrs. Elliot's seasickness. Why did they want to have a baby? Was it because of her being forty years old? Or was it a reaction against their past love experiences that they had not been satisfied? Probably it was caused by the happiness that they had each finally found the best companion. However, their happiness was only the joy of a marriage ceremony. There was nothing else. They were satisfied just to get married and were not aware that it was not true happiness. These details clearly show that the couple was unhappy.

After they docked in Europe, they came to Paris and "tried to have a baby" there. Then they went to summer school in Dijon and "tried several times" there. But the number of times of trying to have a baby began decreasing in comparison to those times immediately after their marriage. The repetition of "they tried to

have a baby" is no longer used, but "several times" is added intentionally. Hemingway shows the process by which their married life gets worse physically and mentally.

The couple came back to Paris again and rented a chateau in Touraine for the summer. Mrs. Elliot persuaded Hubert to let her invite her girl friend who had worked in the tea shop in Boston. This friend was a little older than Cornelia, and she was also from an old Southern family. When she called Mrs. Elliot, she used the nickname "Honey," a word often used between a married couple or a pair of lovers. The married life of Mr. and Mrs. Elliot became more and more unusual since Mrs. Elliot's friend joined their life. The friend established her own position in the Elliots as a typist instead of Mrs. Elliot doing the work, and the woman now slept with Mrs. Elliot in the big bed that Mr. and Mrs. Elliot had tried to have a baby in. Thus the girl friend became a necessary person for them and earned a position as a member of the Elliot family. On the one hand, two middle-aged women, Mrs. Elliot and her friend, felt pity for their unfavorable circumstances and wept all night. On the other hand, Mr. Elliot was absorbed in writing poems, and he started to drink white wine. All were quite satisfied with their present condition.

The poet, wife, and competent typist seemed to get along well in a businesslike way, but obviously it was not the ordinary type of human relationship. They are all satisfied by these strange relationships and do not notice the strangeness, so it can be said that they are all the more unusual. The story ends cheerfully at dinner:

...Elliot drank white wine and Mrs. Elliot and the girl friend made conversations and they were all quite happy.<sup>5</sup>

Hemingway ironically describes unhappy people who believe that life is a happy fact. Mr. and Mrs. Elliot's unhappy married life is bound by sexual incompetence. Furthermore, the girl friend joins their life, and all fall into mental incompetence. This story shows the unhappy process by which a married couple undergoes deterioration.

### III. The view of married life in "Cat in the Rain"

The story is described from a woman's viewpoint. The wife is the central character of this story. It is unusual for Hemingway to focus on a delicate woman.

The first paragraph starts with a description of nature seen from an American couple's hotel room. On a fine day there are artists and tourists who come to look at the war monument, so probably this is a tourist resort. John V. Hagopian comments on the first paragraph:

After an introductory paragraph that sets the scene and mood, "Cat in the

Rain" is as formally and as economically structured as a classic ballet. It is probably Hemingway's best made short story. Every detail of speech and gesture carries a full weight of meaning.<sup>6</sup>

It was rainy that day, and nobody was visiting the square. While rain is used as a symbol of unhappiness in *A Farewell to Arms*, it is not a decisive symbol in this story that hints at some unhappy fate, but rain is one of the symbolic parts that create a gloomy atmosphere.

On this rainy day the husband read a book on his bed, and the wife looked out the window since they had nothing particular to do at the hotel. Besides, there were no Americans there. The wife noticed from a window that a cat was trying to curl up under a green table under the window in order not to get wet. The woman said, "I'm going down and get that kitty.'"<sup>7</sup> The husband said to her from the bed, "I'll do it,"<sup>8</sup> but he didn't intend to. Then she said, "No, I'll get it.'"<sup>9</sup> She could not be satisfied until she got the cat herself because she sympathized with the cat in the rain and regarded the cat in unhappy circumstances, the way hers were. She also thought that she would be helped out of her present circumstances by getting the cat.

When she left the room and went downstairs, she met the hotel owner. Hemingway emphasizes that the wife liked him:

"Il piove," the wife said. She liked the hotel-keeper.

"Si, si, Signora, brutto tempo. It's very bad weather."

He stood behind his desk in the far end of the dim room. The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands.

Liking him she opened the door and looked out.<sup>10</sup>

The word "like" is repeatedly used eight times. It is emphasized that the wife liked the hotel-keeper, but this is a contrast to the repulsion she unconsciously felt for her husband. The husband was indifferent to her, but the hotel-keeper went out of his way to stand up and bow to her, although he was at his desk in the back in the office. The husband, who was the only person to talk with her, was cold in manner, and she felt lonely in a foreign country where she had no friends, so she could not help but like the hotel-keeper's gentleness.

She felt so glad about his gentleness that she went out to seek the cat, but the cat had already gone. She felt disappointed. The cat was not a mere cat for her. Momentarily she regarded the cat as herself in her miserable circumstances, so getting the cat meant saving herself from her unhappy married life. But now the

cat was gone; there was nothing to save her. The American woman was disappointed and went back to the room; the husband put the book down and asked if she had gotten the cat. As soon as she answered the cat had gone, she began to tell him how she wanted the cat, but he returned to reading his book again. For an instant she had felt glad that the husband was concerned about her when she began to tell him about her feelings, but immediately she realized his cold manner and stopped talking to him.

Next, she told him about her practical hope: "Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?"<sup>11</sup> He answered flatly, "I like it the way it is."<sup>12</sup> Again her hope was not realized. Then she became hysterical and talked quickly about her hope that her husband would show mutual understanding:

"I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel," she said. "I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her."

"Yeah?" George said from the bed.

"And 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."

"Oh, shut up and get something to read," George said. He was reading again.

His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees.

"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."<sup>13</sup>

After the wife said all that she wanted to say, the maid knocked at the door. She stood in the doorway holding a big tortoise-shell cat, and she said, "[T]he padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora."<sup>14</sup> The cat was completely different from the one that she imagined, the pitiful cat in the rain. Besides, she thought that only the hotel-keeper had understood her, but he was just a gentle and realistic old man after all. It was very hard for her to accept all of these facts. She could not help but feel all the more helpless and lonely.

In the story the absurdity between the couple in their monotonous married life is a main subject, and Hemingway thinks the absurdity is the hidden cause to threaten the married couple's life. For this American woman, marriage was a very important event, for it had been her aim ever since she was a little girl that she would be happy. But after her marriage she realized that her husband was cold and indifferent, and nobody would understand her in her lonely circumstances. Marriage and her girlhood dream were nothing but ideals, and the dream was shattered. The

author describes a scene in the daily life of a couple whose married life has already declined. I believe many of Hemingway's love experiences and views on marriage are included in this story.

#### IV. Conclusion

In these short stories Hemingway describes the process by which the couples become unhappy in marriage. In "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," he focuses on a man's sexual impulse and shows the loneliness of a man in strange human relationships. In "Cat in the Rain," he describes an absurdity in a couple's married life and implies that it is the cause of the wife's loneliness. For Hemingway, marriage is only a part of a person's life, a temporary event, a process of unhappiness and even hopelessness. I think that Hemingway would like to show that man is ultimately always lonely. Even if we marry, we must die lonely, the condition in which we are born. These negative ideas are the basis of Hemingway's views on marriage.

## Notes

1. Ernest Hemingway, "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" in *In Our Time* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1958), p.85, 1.1.
2. "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," p.85, 11.1-10.
3. "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," p.85, 11.20-21.
4. "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," p.86, 11.1.
5. "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," p.88, 11.25-27.
6. John V. Hagopian, "Symmetry in 'Cat in the Rain'" in *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays*, ed. by Jackson J. Benson. (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1975), p.230.
7. Ernest Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain," in *In Our Time* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1958), p.91, 1.22.
8. "Cat in the Rain," p.91, 1.24.
9. "Cat in the Rain," p.91, 1.25.
10. "Cat in the Rain," p.92, 11.5-13.
11. "Cat in the Rain," p.93, 11.22-23.
12. "Cat in the Rain," p.93, 1.26.
13. "Cat in the Rain," p.93, 1.34-p.94, 1.11.
14. "Cat in the Rain," p.94, 11.20-21.

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(卒論指導教員 北嶋藤郷)