

Symbolism in Sherwood Anderson's *Hands*, James Joyce's *Clay*, and Ernest Hemingway's *Cat in the Rain*

Anik Cahyaning Rahayu

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

E-mail: anikcahyaning@untag-sby.ac.id

Susie Chrismalia Garnida

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

E-mail: susigarnida@untag-sby.ac.id

Sudarwati Sudarwati

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

E-mail: sudarwati@untag-sby.ac.id

Article History

Received:
29 April 2025

Revised:
03 June 2025

Accepted:
21 July 2025

Abstract. Symbolism, as a key literary device, allows authors to convey deeper meanings through objects, characters, and events, enriching the narrative and engaging readers on an emotional and intellectual level. This article explores the use of symbolism in three modernist short stories: Sherwood Anderson's "Hands", James Joyce's "Clay", and Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain". The research employs a qualitative descriptive design with a focus on textual analysis. The analysis is guided by theories of symbolism, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial criticism, supported by scholarly sources. Through close reading and thematic categorization, the study identifies symbols found in three short stories. *Hands'* symbolisms are emotional expression, social misunderstanding and condemnation, and connection and isolation. *Clay* has the symbolisms of death and stagnation, disappointment and invisibility, and forgotten dreams. *Cat in the Rain*, on the other hand, contains symbolisms such as unfulfilled desire and emotional need, confinement and disconnection, and femininity and identity. The findings of this study show that symbolism in the three short stories not only functions as an aesthetic element, but also as a means to reveal the characters' inner conflicts and subtle social criticism. The symbols enrich the reader's understanding of the themes of loneliness, identity search, and social injustice at the core of modernist narratives. In conclusion, the use of symbolism in these works is effective in conveying complex messages that transcend the boundaries of the text, and demonstrates how modernist literature responds to social change and individual psychological conditions in a profound and meaningful way.

Keywords: literary device, short stories, symbolism

INTRODUCTION

Reading symbolism in literary texts requires sensitivity and a deep understanding of the narrative context and cultural setting surrounding the work. Pramesti (in Jihan & Grace, 2023) explain that symbols not only function as aesthetic elements, but also as a bridge that connects the characters' inner experiences with the wider social reality. Therefore, readers are required to interpret symbolic meanings by considering the various dimensions, that lie behind the concrete objects or actions presented. This approach allows the reader to explore the hidden layers of meaning, while appreciating

how symbolism enriches the understanding of the themes and messages that the author wants to convey. Thus, reading symbolism is not simply recognising signs, but an active and reflective interpretive process, which is in line with this study's aim of uncovering symbolic strategies in the modernist works analysed (Poursanati & Taheri, 2022).

One of fiction's most powerful literary techniques is symbolism, which enables authors to communicate complex emotional, psychological, and social realities through concrete images, gestures, and objects (Loane & Jyldyz, 2023). This study examines the symbolic strategies employed in three modernist short stories: Sherwood Anderson's "Hands," James Joyce's "Clay," and Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain." Although these stories differ in narrative style and tone, they share a common thematic concern: the portrayal of individuals who are emotionally isolated, socially misunderstood, and quietly yearning for connection and identity. Every novel shows what the protagonist goes through and represents both privately and in the society around them. In the text, Wing Biddlebaum's hands check off actions as much as they stand for his pain from being ignored and misunderstood by others. The way he twitches his fingers reflects both his inner need for companionship and his uneasiness about judgment. In this section, Joyce uses clay, a cake and a song to show how Maria is feeling stuck emotionally, doesn't fit in with others and had dreams that didn't come true. When the clay was chosen in the Halloween game, that omen helped illustrate that June remains spiritually numb and is losing a part of her role in life. Hemingway attaches the symbol of the cat to the sad reality of the American wife's marriage in the story "Cat in the Rain". Like her wife, the cat is left exposed to her cold emotions. The "cat" she keeps asking for is actually shorthand for affection, being feminine, independence and recognition which her relationship lacks.

Although there have been various studies that discuss symbolism in literary works, there is still room for more in-depth and comprehensive research. The following is an analysis of the research gap based on existing studies, as well as a comparison of the results and opinions of each study. Most of the existing studies, such as the one conducted by Ağır (2023) in comparing symbolism in "The Great Gatsby" and "Norwegian Wood", only focus on two literary works which may not represent the diversity of symbolism in a wider context. The research by Salim Hameed (2023) also analyses symbolism in general, without delving deeper into the specific meaning of the symbols. For example, about symbolism in "The Old Man and the Sea" which may not explore each symbol in detail. Research by Umamy et al. (2025) used a psychoanalytic perspective to analyse symbolism in Madurese fiction. While this approach provides deep insights, there is a need to integrate other theoretical approaches, such as postcolonial or feminist criticism, to gain a more holistic understanding of symbolism. Research by Prasanty et al. (2024) highlights the relationship between symbolism, culture, and moral impact in magical realism. However, there is a lack of research that specifically explores how symbolism in modernist literature can reflect specific social and cultural contexts.

Existing research tends to focus on analysing the text without considering how symbolism can influence readers' emotional responses. Research that focuses on the interaction between symbolism and the reader's experience can pave the way for a deeper understanding of the emotional impact of symbolism in literature. This could be an important gap that needs to be explored further.

This research is intended to understand the role of symbolism in "Hands," "Clay," and "Cat in the Rain," to discover how the stories use imagery to express repressed feelings, criticize society and explain the desire we all have for connection. The study also aims

to prove that by using symbolism we can better understand how modernist fiction responds to big social changes and the inner worlds of people. Essentially, what makes this research valuable is its careful study and interpretation of creative images, revealing the storytelling tactics of modernists and helping to explain thematically rich works that may seem straightforward. This article will examine about the symbols and their meaning found in three different short stories, namely Sherwood Anderson's "Hands", James Joyce's "Clay", and Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain".

METHOD

The research adopts a qualitative descriptive design, with a focus on textual analysis. This design is suitable for exploring literary symbolism as it allows the researchers to interpret and describe the meaning of selected texts using existing theories and perspectives. The population in this research includes English-language short stories that use symbolism to express themes of identity, isolation, and human experience. The samples are three selected modernist short stories from early 20th-century literature: "Hands" by Sherwood Anderson, "Clay" by James Joyce, and "Cat in the Rain" by Ernest Hemingway.

This study, while aiming for a comprehensive analysis of symbolism in Sherwood Anderson's "Hands", James Joyce's "Clay", and Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain", acknowledges several limitations: The analysis is restricted to three short stories, each representing a fragment of their respective author's broader body of work. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to other stories by the same authors. Symbolism in literature often relies on interpretation, which may vary depending on the reader's cultural background, academic training, and personal experiences. Although this study is grounded in established theoretical frameworks, the interpretations may still reflect subjective bias.

The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, where stories are selected deliberately because they include prominent use of symbolism and are written by authors recognized for their literary contributions to modernism. Secondary sources such as academic journal articles, literary criticisms, and essays are also used to support the interpretation and validate findings. The data are examined qualitatively by performing close readings in a systematic fashion to help with repeatability. First, the stories are read many times to truly understand its text and observe the patterns, repeated motifs and often symbolic words. Symbols are then chosen from the narrative based on their frequency, role in the story and what they stand for figuratively and are all recorded. Next, every symbol found in the work is studied at its specific place in the story (setting, spoken words or visuals) as well as how it relates to the characters, challenges or central ideas.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

The author would like to tabulate the results of this research, which are taken from *How to Analyze Fiction* by Schirova (2006) by reading and identifying the utterances containing the elements of symbolism. After reading the short stories, the author has decided to pick these samples from the three short stories. Here are the data from Sherwood Anderson's 'Hands':

"Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery

of expression. The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name. Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it.” (Schirova, 2006:61)

“Although he did not understand what had happened he felt that the hands must be to blame. Again and again the fathers of the boys had talked of the hands. ‘Keep your hands to yourself,’ the saloon keeper had roared, dancing with fury in the schoolhouse yard. Adolph Myers was driven from the Pennsylvania town in the night. With lanterns in their hands a dozen men came to the door of the house where he lived alone and commanded that he dress and come forth.” (Schirova, 2006:65)

“The story of Wing Biddlebaum’s hands is worth a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men. It is a job for a poet. In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity... Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality.” (Schirova, 2006:61)

Here are the data from James Joyce’s *Clay*:

“She put her hand out in the air as she was told to do. She moved her hand about here and there in the air and descended on one of the saucers. She felt a soft wet substance with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden, and at last Mrs. Donnelly said something very cross to one of the next-door girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it over again: and this time she got the prayer-book.” (Schirova, 2006:76)

“They led her up to the table amid laughing and joking, and she put her hand out in the air as she was told to do... There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering.” (Schirova, 2006:76)

“Maria said she had brought something special for papa and mamma, something they would be sure to like, and she began to look for her plum cake. She tried in Downes’s bag and then in the pockets of her waterproof and then on the hallstand, but nowhere could she find it... Maria, remembering how confused the gentleman with the greyish moustache had made her, coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment. At the thought of the failure of her little surprise and of the two and fourpence she had thrown away for nothing she nearly cried outright.” (Schirova, 2006:74)

"Then she thought what else would she buy: she wanted to buy something really nice. They would be sure to have plenty of apples and nuts. It was hard to know what to buy and all she could think of was cake. She decided to buy some plum cake, but Downes's plum cake had not enough almond icing on top of it, so she went over to a shop in Henry Street." (Schirova, 2006:73)

"Then she played the prelude and said 'Now, Maria!' and Maria, blushing very much, began to sing in a tiny quavering voice. She sang I Dreamt that I Dwelt, and when she came to the second verse she sang again:

'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls

With vassals and serfs at my side...'

But no one tried to show her mistake; and when she had ended her song Joe was very much moved." (Schirova, 2006:76)

"Then she took off her working skirt and her house boots and laid her best skirt out on the bed and her tiny dress boots beside the foot of the bed... she thought of how she used to dress for mass on Sunday morning when she was a young girl; and she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned." (Schirova, 2006:73)

Here are the data from Ernest Hemingway's *Cat in the Rain*:

"Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty."

"When she talked English the maid's face tightened.

'Come, Signora,' she said. 'We must get back inside. You will be wet.'

'I suppose so,' said the American girl." (Schirova, 2006:127)

"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."

George was not listening. He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square. Someone knocked at the door.

'Avanti,' George said. He looked up from his book.

In the doorway stood the maid. She held a big tortoise-shell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body.

'Excuse me,' she said, 'the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora.'" (Schirova, 2006:128)

"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... It was raining... Water stood in pools on the gravel paths." (Schirova, 2006:125)

"She sat down on the bed.

'I wanted it so much,' she said. 'I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.'

George was reading again."

She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck." (Schirova, 2006:127)

"I get so tired of it," she said. "I get so tired of looking like a boy."

George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn't looked away from her since she started to speak.

"You look pretty darn nice," he said.

She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

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." (Schirova, 2006:128)

"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.' (Schirova, 2006:128)

B. Discussion

B.1 Symbolism in Sherwood Anderson's "Hands"

Sherwood Anderson's "Hands" is a quietly devastating story that opens his seminal short story cycle, *Winesburg, Ohio*. Through the character of Wing Biddlebaum, a recluse haunted by his past, Anderson explores the complexities of human emotion, isolation, and misunderstood affection. At the heart of this narrative lies a singular, recurring symbol: hands. These hands are not merely physical traits—they are rich, multilayered emblems of expression, fear, guilt, and yearning. Through them, Anderson examines how society misunderstands intimacy, how trauma lingers in the body, and how human beings struggle to connect in a world that fears what it does not understand.

B.1.1 Hands as Vehicles of Emotional Expression

According to Odeh (2014), Wing Biddlebaum uses his hands to physically display his emotional sentiments that lie deep within his core. During his teaching sessions his hands demonstrate his passion and tenderness and care towards students. The hands serve as instruments for generating inspiration as well as delivering love along with human compassion corresponding with his sincere behavioural intentions (Odeh, 2014). Throughout his days of Adolph Myers, he teaches as a teacher and his hands extend his essence to support and guide students without inflicting any harm. According to symbolism, his hands represent both the warmth humans possess and their caring attitudes and pure expressions (Zhao, 2017). Wing Biddlebaum uses his hands to outwardly show his deeply touching emotional and sensitive nature. Through symbolic meaning they express how people require emotional interactions and the power to communicate their inner selves particularly during times of linguistic disconnect ((Kramsch, 2020).

"Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression. The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like

unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name.

Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it.” (Schirova, 2006:61)

This quotation shows how Wing’s hands serve as the physical manifestation of his inner emotional life. His hands are his means of expression, particularly in moments of inspiration or deep feeling. The trapped bird serves as a literal representation of Wing’s restless internal instability while his hands demonstrate both his emotional nature and his trapped state under social stigma and personal disgrace. The mobile hands function as both the essence of his existence and the heavy weight he carries. The trapped bird serves as a literal representation of Wing’s restless internal instability while his hands demonstrate both his emotional nature and his trapped state under social stigma and personal disgrace. The mobile hands function as both the essence of his existence and the heavy weight he carries.

B.1.2 Hands as Emblems of Social Misunderstanding and Condemnation

According to Odeh (2014), symbolism centres on Wing Biddlebaum’s hands, which represent both love and misunderstood affection. His expressive hands once embodied emotional openness but became a source of shame after being misinterpreted. His hands previously used to unite with others now stand as the foundation for damaging his relationships. Wing faces shame after the incorrect understanding of his behaviour so he hides his hands. His constant restless movements signify that his nervousness stems from his wanting to connect with people but his fear of how societal perception may judge him (Odeh, 2014). Until the moment of their wrongful interpretation, the hands maintain their ability to build meaningful human bonds but end up being viewed as objects for shaming and banishment. The devices that people utilize for connecting develop into instruments which cause them to separate from others. Wing’s nervous movements show his suppressed need for engagement with others along with his intense anxiety regarding potential punishment (Zhao, 2017). *Hands* serve for love but modern industrialization causes them to become stiff. Wing uses his hands to create loving connections with others until he has a wrong interpretation which turns them into a source of social estrangement. Through fear, he conceals his hands because he fears betrayal once again thus representing tragic human ambiguity in communication. Wing's hands face blame from the community which lead to the misinterpretation of his innocent moves as unacceptable acts. Through this moment of transition, his hands shift from being instruments of care to becoming instruments of criticized guilt. Through his work, Anderson demonstrates how psychological mental illness develops from collective community fear which transforms good intentions into permanent emotional pain. Wing takes upon himself the responsibility for their mistake by thinking his hands should be blamed instead of anyone else's thinking, as seen in the quotation below.

“Although he did not understand what had happened he felt that the hands must be to blame. Again and again the fathers of the boys had talked of the hands. ‘Keep your hands to yourself,’ the saloon keeper had roared, dancing with fury in the schoolhouse yard. Adolph Myers was driven from the Pennsylvania town in the night. With lanterns in their hands a dozen men came to the door of the house where he lived alone and commanded that he dress and come forth.” (Schirova, 2006:65)

This line illustrates how Wing internalizes society’s judgment, blaming his hands for the tragic misunderstanding that leads to his exile and shame. His hands, once used to guide and nurture, are now seen as a threat. Society has imposed extensive punishment

which prohibits both physical and symbolic freedom on him. Society uses his hands as principal evidence in their persecution of him until he disappears from all social interaction. Society has imposed extensive punishment which prohibits both physical and symbolic freedom on him. Society uses his hands as principal evidence in their persecution of him until he disappears from all social interaction.

B.1.3 Hands as a Dual Symbol of Connection and Isolation

Wing starts his downfall when people misunderstand his loving actions as inappropriate sexual advances. The members of society take advantage of his prominent hands to name him grotesque. Societal interpretation in the face of public attention breaks down truth into two opposing forces which transform positive beauty into negative stigma (Odeh, 2014). The false accusation of inappropriate actions leads to Wing receiving social stigma that manifests through his hands. The public rushes to condemn a pure sign merely based on its appearance without any proof. According to Anderson the grotesque individual maintains an excessive attachment to what they believe is true (expressive touch) which leads to others using this knowledge as a weapon against them. Through his hands he illustrates society's prejudiced reaction to emotional honesty (Zhao, 2017). Hands which display affection and care now reflect self-disgrace to the world. The population of Wing-Bay points their finger at him because an unfounded report of his transgression. Anderson presents his story in a gentle manner to keep readers empathizing while demonstrating that social prejudices often transform innocence into villainy.

Through expressiveness Wing can connect with others and his teaching self yet his hands also represent shame that needs to stay concealed. The opposing forces of social contact with the world and staying separate symbolize the troubled state of mind that Wing experiences. His desire for contact remains blocked because he instinctively tries to conceal his hands when he actually wants to communicate with others.

“The story of Wing Biddlebaum’s hands is worth a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men. It is a job for a poet. In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity... Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality.” (Schirova, 2006:61)

This above quotation acknowledges that Wing’s hands represent both his potential for deep, meaningful connection and the source of his social alienation. They are the key to his inner self, both misunderstood and beautiful. People recognize only poets can view the beautiful quality possessed by hands but societal norms cannot. Despite representing the profound part of his emotional nature and communicative skills, his hands lead people to view him as bizarre and monstrosity before leaving him totally alone.

B.2 Symbolism in James Joyce’s “Clay”

Within his 1914 collection *Dubliners*, James Joyce presents "Clay" as a touching story which narrates the experiences of Maria who tends to disturb women at her laundry facility as a middle-aged woman without children. The external narrative of a woman's night visit moves unremarkably through her former foster son's residence but Joyce embeds profound emotional significance into the story through his effective symbolism. Joyce uses ordinary items and small moments in his story to develop intricate significance about isolation and societal neglect and unmet aspirations and death. The narrative's

hidden meaning develops through three major symbols: Symbol of Death and Stagnation, Disappointment and Invisibility, and Illusions of Grandeur and Forgotten Dreams.

B.2.1 The Clay: Symbol of Death and Stagnation

The clay experience holds strong allegorical value and cultural restrictions for Maria. The patriarchal structure of Catholic Ireland defines her failure as a woman because she remains unmarried and without any children or religious vocation. She remains outside the wife or nun dichotomy while being stuck in a motionless state that clay material symbolizes. The clay in the story could represent "Number Two" as both numerological and slang terminology according to Watts because Maria's handling of it then quickly returning to the game indicates her social awkwardness and refusal to accept her marginalized social position (Watts, 2015). The clay object in the narrative represents multiple symbolic aspects of Maria's inner state as she becomes dead to life and emotionally stuck while resigning her spirit. The interdisciplinary article demonstrates how most critics have excluded the important significance of the clay dish that Maria chooses during the Halloween game from their analyses (Beck, 2014). Another level of symbolic meaning is added by the fact that she was blindfolded during the game. It implies that Maria is oblivious to the course of her own life. Ironically, picking the clay is her only act of free will, and she is unaware that she is reaching the end of her life (Sujeetha, 2020).

“She put her hand out in the air as she was told to do. She moved her hand about here and there in the air and descended on one of the saucers. She felt a soft wet substance with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden, and at last Mrs. Donnelly said something very cross to one of the next-door girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it over again: and this time she got the prayer-book.” (Schirova, 2006:76)

The saucer with clay marks death and Maria selects it during this scene of a traditional Halloween game. The group stays silent before quickly throwing away the object because they understand its threatening significance. Maria does not recognize the underlying meaning in the saucer with clay that she picked. The state of emotional stagnation combined with existential detachment causes her to be unaware of the truth. Among all her decisions in the narrative this spontaneous choice of clay stands out as her single free action which represents acceptance of her unchanging life without purpose. *“They led her up to the table amid laughing and joking, and she put her hand out in the air as she was told to do... There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering.”* (Schirova, 2006:76)

At this point Maria's symbolic process of stagnation achieves its most important stage. After Maria blindly makes her selection, the scene becomes abruptly tense as people become aware that she chose clay which in Irish traditions symbolizes death. The participants fastidiously conceal Maria's choice despite realizing her blindness because this action underscores both her estrangement from reality and the sooner death that is coming her way. The absence of comprehension about the significance of her selection combined with others' shame to disclose it indicates that even Maria accepts isolation from her symbolic storytelling. The clay mirrors the state of her life which exists as a

motionless and silent and shapeless presence. The section displays social anxiety about her social death together with her unconscious acceptance of this fate.

B.2.2 The Lost Plum cake: Disappointment and Invisibility

The lost plum cake symbolizes emotional invisibility as well as disappointment and quiet failure in a delicate manner throughout the plot. She uses her scant budget to buy a thoughtful present that she chooses personally for Joe and his spouse. Upon her arrival at the destination the plum cake has disappeared because it was lost during the tram ride or potentially someone stole it. The missing cake serves as more than an accidental loss because it symbolizes all the unappreciated work and emotional investment that Maria put into her duties (Watts, 2015). The incident illustrates small misfortunes as well as social neglect that Maria encounters quietly but constantly throughout her life. The piece demonstrates alertness about this scene because it confirms how Maria experiences being sidelined: she tries to help but her efforts eventually become neglected or unimportant (Beck, 2014). Therefore, the missing plum cake is more than just a plot detail; it is a subdued, heartbreaking representation of how Maria's sacrifices, devotion, and hard work go unappreciated. Her brittle social presence and emotional erasure in her environment are reflected in it (Sujeetha, 2020).

“Maria said she had brought something special for papa and mamma, something they would be sure to like, and she began to look for her plum cake. She tried in Downes’s bag and then in the pockets of her waterproof and then on the hallstand, but nowhere could she find it... Maria, remembering how confused the gentleman with the greyish moustache had made her, coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment. At the thought of the failure of her little surprise and of the two and fourpence she had thrown away for nothing she nearly cried outright.” (Schirova, 2006:74)

Through the plum cake’s disappearance Maria recognizes her lack of perceived emotional presence together with the repetitive letdowns in her life. Her extensive budget and deliberate preparations to give something valuable for the party reached a point when everyone ignored her contribution. The homemade cake which she planned to give personally transforms into a symbolic display of her lifelong struggle to have her loving deeds understood. The way she reacts strongly shows how the meaningful aspect gets ignored since neither the plum cake nor she matter to the indifferent people who surround her.

"Then she thought what else would she buy: she wanted to buy something really nice. They would be sure to have plenty of apples and nuts. It was hard to know what to buy and all she could think of was cake. She decided to buy some plum cake, but Downes's plum cake had not enough almond icing on top of it, so she went over to a shop in Henry Street." (Schirova, 2006:73)

The first display of Maria's wish to be recognized through benevolence happens prior to the plum cake going missing. She took time to find the best plum cake by first disliking one and then picking another revealing her extensive desire to provide a meaningful gift. All the time and attention Maria priorities in cake selection goes to waste because a short time later it disappears from sight. The loss represents both a physical item and the disappearance of her ultimate act of care that received no recognition from anyone. Through this metaphor Maria symbolizes her own state of social invisibility because she

constantly plans things and gives valuable things away but remains unnoticed. The story demonstrates how others fail to perceive the emotional value she puts into things through her plant plum cake representation. Through this early image the reader understands that a moment of dismissal will happen while recognizing the persistent pattern of unappreciation that exists in her whole life.

B.2.3 Illusions of Grandeur and Forgotten Dreams

As the movie ends Maria finally gives into singing 'I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls'. This romantic song reveals nostalgic images about wealth and honour together with love in its lyrics. Two times Maria attempts to perform the beginning part of the song before she switches off or stops performing the potentially emotional second section. Throughout the repetition of the song it functions as a powerful representation of unchanged psychological and emotional reflect (Watts, 2015). During her song Maria performs the opening stanza twice indicating symbolically that repetitive behaviour keeps her in place emotionally and psychologically. The family fails to notice the incorrect performance even though it signifies both their compassion or indifference that underlines Maria's lack of recognition or visibility. Her grandiose fantasy dreams about being loved and admired never align with her actual existence of private and servile life (Beck, 2014). In addition, the song's implied hush over her error mirrors the quiet about her choice of clay and her misplaced cake. People don't correct her, maybe out of disinterest, sympathy, or discomfort rather than out of harshness. Although not really celebrated, her presence is accepted. The modest, unnoticed existence she leads in the laundry and on the periphery of family get-togethers is the total opposite of the fantasy of "marble halls" and amorous attention (Sujeetha, 2020).

“Then she played the prelude and said ‘Now, Maria!’ and Maria, blushing very much, began to sing in a tiny quavering voice. She sang I Dreamt that I Dwelt, and when she came to the second verse she sang again:

‘I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls
With vassals and serfs at my side...’

But no one tried to show her mistake; and when she had ended her song Joe was very much moved.” (Schirova, 2006:76)

During this scene, Maria performs a song about fictional romantic thoughts and wealth together with admiration while rejecting her actual secluded life of simple means. The repetitious playing of the first verse instead of the second demonstrates that her life currently repeats itself in meaningful ways. She remains emotionally frozen along with being mentally stuck because she cannot escape the illusions of better life opportunities. The others remained silent after her song mistake which might be interpreted either as non-reactivity or simple propriety emphasizing her invisible status.

“Then she took off her working skirt and her house boots and laid her best skirt out on the bed and her tiny dress boots beside the foot of the bed... she thought of how she used to dress for mass on Sunday morning when she was a young girl; and she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned.” (Schirova, 2006:73)

Through the process of getting ready for her outing Maria exposes her hidden desire to remember how once she possessed hope alongside dignity as well as fantasies about romance and another possible lifestyle. Through her actions of preparing her clothes while thinking about youth she creates a powerful contrast that shapes her present drab situation

against the hopeful past. Through terms like "quaint affection" and "tidy little body" the speaker demonstrates both love and unrealism toward a self-image that has vanished from social standards. At this peaceful time she maintains her feminine customs and social formality while living silently between forgotten aspirations.

B.3 Symbolism in Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain"

The precise analysis of Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" reveals numerous symbolic elements which illuminate the main character's hidden emotions and identity conflicts while she searches for closeness and command as well as acknowledgment. The narrative's hidden meaning develops through four major symbols: Symbol of Unfulfilled Desire and Emotional Need, Symbol of Isolation and Suppressed Emotion, Symbol of Confinement and Disconnection, and Symbols of Femininity and Identity. The writer used these elements with purpose to reveal the American wife's emotional state and marital unfulfillment along with her feminine desires which she hides away. The collected symbols construct a general plot about unspoken torment alongside the quest for understanding in limited emotional conditions.

B.3.1 Symbol of Unfulfilled Desire and Emotional Need

The cat represents the essential metaphor for unfulfilled emotional and physical needs within the wife's marriage. Throughout the story the wife shows her constant wish for "a kitty" because she seeks love alongside softness and nurturing and friendship which she cannot find in her emotionally dry partnership. This feline object might simultaneously stand for a replacement for a child because it reflects her wish for parental care and homemaker duties that her husband has not delivered (Alhmdni, 2024). The American wife expresses her profound emotional cravings through the symbolism of the cat as well as her unsatisfied needs. She continues asking for the cat as an expression of her intense need for love and pleasantness together with emotional support which she lacks in her marriage. The wife expresses desire most strongly not for a cat but for better emotional engagement along with caregiver love which her marriage lacks. Her request for a cat serves as her way to convey her wish for emotional affection which includes both giving and receiving care to experience fulfilment. The wife substitutes her unfulfilled desire for tenderness and affection by using the cat as a placeholder for both maternal needs and a companion (Fonseka, 2024). Throughout the article the cat functions as the vital symbol that signifies both the American wife's strong emotional yearnings and subconscious inner needs. Through her persistent requests for a "kitty" the article demonstrates that her demand extends far beyond animal preference because it represents her desperate need for love and caretaking while also expressing her maternal desires. The wife manifests her wish for a cat as a symbolic expression for her concealed desire to bear children because her husband denies her emotional connection. (Sandamali, 2021).

"Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty."

"When she talked English the maid's face tightened.

'Come, Signora,' she said. 'We must get back inside. You will be wet.'

'I suppose so,' said the American girl." (Schirova, 2006:127)

The quotation above shows that during this moment, the wife displays her intense sentimental desire. Throughout the monologue she continually expresses longing for a kitty because she seeks love and affection which she does not receive in her marriage.

The maid delivers a cold response and the wife responds quietly because none of her emotional needs receive proper attention from the people around her.

“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.”

George was not listening. He was reading his book. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square. Someone knocked at the door.

‘Avanti,’ George said. He looked up from his book.

In the doorway stood the maid. She held a big tortoise-shell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body.

‘Excuse me,’ she said, ‘the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora.’”

(Schirova, 2006:128)

The wife shows her profound inner emotional need because she yearns for any kind of comfort that could relieve her pain. Through repeated "I want" statements, the wife shows her intense longing for love along with freedom and caring attention. The cat manifests her meaningful desire for nurturing love and emotional connection even though it appears to request an ordinary object. When her husband keeps silent and shows indifference she feels more deeply abandoned. This act of sending a cat represents the padrone’s unusual display of emotional understanding toward her. The padrone understands her unspoken needs better than her indifferent husband does because he provides what she desires without asking explanations or justifying her behaviour. This demonstration reveals her marital emotional void and how someone unfamiliar seems more attuned to her needs than her husband.

Throughout the article the cat functions as the vital symbol that signifies both the American wife's strong emotional yearnings and subconscious inner needs. Through her persistent requests for a “kitty” the article demonstrates that her demand extends far beyond animal preference because it represents her desperate need for love and caretaking while also expressing her maternal desires. The wife manifests her wish for a cat as a symbolic expression for her concealed desire to bear children because her husband denies her emotional connection. (Sandamali, 2021).

B.3.2 Symbol of Confinement and Disconnection

Emotional and marital confinement find their representation in the hotel room. The room stays cut off from the outside world with its position overlooking empty surroundings which symbolizes how the couple remains distant from themselves and the rest of the world. The wife physically suffers from confinement because of rain but also suffers emotionally from her husband's distant manner (Alhmdni, 2024). Through her wish to get the cat the American wife attempts to escape from this mood-strangling situation. Her failure to find the cat signifies both a waste of her attempt to discover purpose or transform her circumstances. The wife and her husband fail to communicate their emotions effectively because both of them remain distant from each other. The setting confines not just the characters, but also their communication and emotional growth (Fonseka, 2024). According to Sandamali (2021), the wife suffers feelings of insignificance because her husband both reads books and remains distant which leads him to disregard her presence. Through his order "Oh, shut up and get something to read" the protagonist displays an inability to reach his wife emotionally. The character experiences multiple forms of isolation which include being physically bound to the wet hotel building

along with psychological entrapment stemming from her distant marital relationship (Sandamali, 2021).

"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... It was raining... Water stood in pools on the gravel paths." (Schirova, 2006:125)

The couple stays inside the room because the continual rain prevents them from seeing the outside life while symbolizing their emotional restraint in their relationship. Emotional captivity manifests through the room itself as the war monument suggests both psychological and emotional separation. The house layout symbolizes the lack of connection between the husband and wife in their marriage.

"She sat down on the bed.

'I wanted it so much,' she said. 'I don't know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain.' George was reading again."

She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck." (Schirova, 2006:127)

Through these lines, the author shows how the wife endures emotional limitations within herself. Through her sadness about the cat, she demonstrates both empathy and she express personal feelings of being left behind and powerless. She expresses her true self through this statement by revealing her helpless condition as she stands exposed to the rain. Through his mere activity of reading George demonstrates the profound lack of connection he maintains with his wife. The wife looks into the mirror as she attempts to find clarity about herself and get reassurance about her life. She stays by herself inside the silent hotel space together with her unsatisfied psychological needs.

B.3.3 Symbols of Femininity and Identity

Throughout her appearance and longing, the wife expresses symbolic needs for both female identity and individual selfhood. Her short haircut coupled with thoughts of growing her hair symbolize an identity crisis in gender ownership. Throughout the story the unnamed female character represents the suppressed identities patriarchal structures enforced upon women. George retains his name but she lacks one which symbolizes both her complete social neglect and emotional worthlessness (Alhmdni, 2024). Throughout the story, the author reveals how the American wife battles to keep her feminine character while preserving her personal identity. Her desire to have longer hair and to own silver and candles indicates how she wants to recover both her womanhood and personal identity which she has been keeping suppressed. Cultural associations reveal that the symbol of the cat links with feminine characteristics which encompass affection together with personal independence. Through its symbolism the cat represents the hidden feminine aspects together with intimate sensuality and domestic warmth that she has suppressed (Fonseka, 2024). Through cosmetic desires she expresses the suppressed aspects of her character a horizontal aspect of her suppressed selfhood and the femininity she feels denied. The hotel keeper presents a respectful manner which makes her wife

feel she matters and receives respect while her husband remains detached. She “likes” everything he does because he respects her as a valuable person although she is not romantically interested in him. Her desire for personhood surpasses the passive position forced upon her by her marital partner since he gives her no attention (Sandamali, 2021).

“I get so tired of it,” she said. “I get so tired of looking like a boy.”

George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn't looked away from her since she started to speak.

"You look pretty darn nice," he said.

She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

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." (Schirova, 2006:128)

Within this scene, the protagonist reveals her struggle between different definitions of her womanhood and marriage position. In choosing short hairstyles she displays signs that she has given up or hidden her feminine nature. The wife expresses her wish for hair growth and possession of personal items like silver ornaments and candles together with the wish for a kitty to reveal her desire for womanhood as well as affection and individuality. The husband displays no sympathy for his wife's emotional state although she expresses her sadness because he fails to acknowledge or support her feelings in their marriage dynamic.

“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.’ (Schirova, 2006:128)

Within this paragraph, the American woman finally reveals her secret desires about femininity together with both domestic spaces and individual identity recognition. The rhythmic pattern in the list delivers a helpless tone which indicates profound unhappiness. The waiting lady yearns for basic womanly pleasures that include combing through her hair before pursuing possession of silverware and sparking household fire with lights. Her requests represent basic feminine symbols since they represent the possession of personal space along with her independence. When he tells her to "shut up," George demonstrates that he does not value or acknowledge her at all. Through this explosive symbol she shows that she feels like a non-entity in her functions as a woman and a wife. The final demand for a cat serves as her final attempt to exercise some control even over a tiny part of her domain.

CONCLUSION

The detailed analysis of symbolism in Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," James Joyce's "Clay," and Sherwood Anderson's "Hands" demonstrates how seemingly straightforward stories are filled with deep emotional and psychological complexity. Hands, clay, and cat in the rain are recurrent symbolic motifs used in all three short stories

to delve into the inner lives of persons who are marginalized or silenced by society, misinterpreted by others, and frequently estranged from themselves. When taken as a whole, these short stories demonstrate how symbolism may be a potent literary tool for expressing unsaid feelings, psychological conflict, and social criticism. Through their metaphorical encounters with the world around them, the authors reveal the silent desperation, need for connection, and quest for selfhood that lay beyond the surface of daily existence. Each protagonist is stuck, whether by memory, society, gender norms, or internalized fears. In the end, Anderson, Joyce, and Hemingway demonstrate to us that even the most basic objects and actions conceal whole inner worlds that are just waiting to be discovered.

As revealed in the study, “Hands,” “Clay,” and “Cat in the Rain” use symbolism to paint complex psychological feelings, repressed emotions and social isolation. The analysis of these stories found that they all refer to a common collection of motifs: hands, clay and a cat in the rain which each stand in for what the characters struggle and suffer through. In the text, seeking escape, Wing’s full emotions and the marks of false accusations are hidden in his stiff and ashamed hands. In “Clay”, the clay that Maria selects at the start really represents death and stagnation, while the missing plum cake and her repeated singing are her way of staying unseen and without fulfillment. In addition, “Cat in the Rain” portrays the American wife craving a pet cat as well as the missing tenderness, her identity and feminine feelings in her empty relationship.

The results prove that symbolism is a central approach in modernist literature for showing what is going on inside characters, their emotional separation and their difficulties with accepted ways of life. By using a simple approach to telling their stories, the authors bring across the idea of estrangement—feeling out of place in society, emotionally and existentially—given to people who are either unacknowledged or misinterpreted by others. Using symbols, works of modernist literature focus on bringing up subtleties that people do not usually share and on discovering unconscious activities in our daily life. This research has consequences for literary studies more widely. It points out that symbolic language should be studied once more to understand how modernist writers focus on identity, loneliness and feelings. Also, this study encourages other scholars to include even more short stories in their research, whether from modernism or from different times, to find out if there are more similar structural symbols. A new approach can be applied to literary symbols by using trauma theory, ecocriticism or queer theory.

REFERENCES

- Ağır, B. (2023). A COMPARISON OF SYMBOLISM IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S THE GREAT GATSBY AND HARUKI MURAKAMI’S NORWEGIAN WOOD. *Uluslararası Toplumsal Bilimler Dergisi*, 7(3), 60-74.
- Alhmdni, T. A. S. (2024). Dissatisfaction desires and deterioration loneliness in Ernest Hemingway’s Cat in the Rain. *Randwick International of Social Sciences Journal*, 5(2), 313–317.
- Beck, J. E. (2014). An interdisciplinary analysis of James Joyce’s “Clay.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(5), 134–138.

- Fonseka, D. (2023). Who is in the rain? A metaphorical probe into the cat-woman identity dilemma in Ernest Hemingway's short story 'Cat in the Rain'. *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, 9(1), 128–132.
- Jihan, R. S., & Litaay, A. G. M. (2023). A Study of Symbolism in Josh Malerman's Bird Box. *Proceeding of Undergraduate Conference on Literature, Linguistic, and Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 32-40. <https://doi.org/10.30996/uncollcs.v2i1.2529>
- Kramsch, C. (2020). *Language as Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108869386>
- Lakhadive, R. M. (2018). *Symbolism – A key concept in literature*. Mahatma Basweshwar College, Latur.
- Loane, I., & Jyldyz, T. (2023). Unveiling the influence of cultural symbols on character relationships and emotions in literature. *Studies in Art and Architecture*, 2(4), 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.56397/saa.2023.12.02>
- Poursanati, S., & Taheri, Y. (2022). TO THE SELFHOUSE: THE CENTRIPETAL MOVEMENT OF SYMBOLS IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S TO THE LIGHTHOUSE. *Folia Linguistica Et Litteraria*, XIII(39), 47–70. <https://doi.org/10.31902/fl.39.2022.3>
- Prasanty, A. B., Yuwono, S. W., Mayasuci, T., Setyawati, T. P., & Pamungkas, O. Y. (2024). Reflections on Symbolism, culture, and Moral Impact: A study of magical realism in the novel Wuni. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 4(6). <https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v4i6.189>
- Sandamali, H. M. S. (2021). PORTRAYAL OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH REPRESENTATIVE LANGUAGE IN EARNEST HEMINGWAY'S 'CAT IN THE RAIN'. *International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering, Technology and Science*, 3(12), 141–143.
- Schirova, I. A. (2006). *How to Analyze Fiction*. Санкт-Петербург: Борея Арт. ISBN 5-7187-0742-1
- Sujeetha, P. (2020). Themes and techniques in James Joyce's Clay. *SMART MOVES Journal IJELLH*, 8(1), 64–68.
- Odeh, A. (2014). Symbolism in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 2(12), 54–61.
- Umamy, E., Supratno, H., & Indarti, T. (2025). Paradoxical symbolism in Madurese fiction: A psychoanalytic perspective. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(4), 1614–1625. <https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v9i4.6348>
- Watts, J. (2015). Failed Mary, stuck in place: Number symbolism and the occult in James Joyce's "Clay." *Hypermedia Joyce Studies*, 13(1).
- Zhao, Y. (2017). Symbolism in Winesburg, Ohio. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Economy, Management and Education Technology (ICEMET 2017)* (pp. 43–45).