

DISCOVERING EDEN: RAIN, CATS AND WOMEN IN HEMINGWAY'S GARDEN

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Abstract: *The publication of The Garden of Eden in 1986 opened the gates of Hemingway's exegesis to gender criticism, the result being a re-evaluation of the female presence in a traditional literary work devoted to the literary traditions of the personality and adventurous life of the writer that challenged the previous four decades of critical appraisal that insisted on what Broer and Holland called "superficial or misguided interpretations of Hemingway's treatment of women and gender". Our essay demonstrates this new approach to Hemingway's work, with examples from "Cat in the Rain" and The Garden of Eden.*

Keywords: *femininity, gender relations, Hemingway, identity, women.*

1. Introduction: Hemingway's Women

Each of them was a part of him and he was a part of each of them. Hemingway had four wives to converse with: Hadley Richardson (married from 1921 to 1927), then Pauline Pfeiffer (married from 1927 to 1940), then Martha Gellhorn (married from 1940 to 1945), then Mary Welsh (married from 1946 to 1961). They are not alike. They correspond to periods, heartbeats, and faults of a man of exceptional valour. In *Mrs. Hemingway*, the American novelist Naomi Wood (2014) mixes fiction and reality to capture a literary myth that married his mistresses and deceived his women throughout his life. The author of *A Farewell to Arms* has constantly wanted to sculpt his own statue. He did not like his parents. His mother dressed him as a girl, and his father took him on a hunt. He wanted to be the most macho, the most talented, and the most courageous. In a way, that's what he was. He fought the world and he won; he fought against himself and he lost. Ernest Hemingway committed suicide on July 2, 1961 in Idaho with a gunshot.

He was born in 1899 in Illinois. After the First World War, during which he was a Red Cross paramedic on the Italian front, Ernest Hemingway married Hadley Richardson. They had a son together. The couple lived in a bohemian Paris in an apartment at 74, rue du Cardinal-Lemoine, in the Latin Quarter, when Hemingway worked as a foreign correspondent. Hemingway divorced Hadley Richardson in 1927 to marry Pauline Pfeiffer. The two women were friends and would remain friends. The new couple would have two sons. He was an absent father, who was away, covering the Spanish Civil War in 1937, alongside the Republicans. He divorced Pauline Pfeiffer and married, thirteen days after his divorce, in 1940, the war correspondent Martha Gellhorn. They settled in the suburbs of Havana, Cuba. Hemingway witnessed, during the Second World War, the Normandy landing and the Liberation of Paris. The future Nobel Prize for Literature (1954) divorced Martha Gellhorn, after the war, to marry, one last time, reporter Mary Welsh.

The locations in Naomi Wood's book are diverse: bohemian Paris, the Côte d'Azur, Florida in the 1930s, and Cuba in the post-war period. The personalities succeed one another, including Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Hemingway has become a legend: he is well-known for his economical style, his past as an adventurer, and his sense of reality. His work will be crowned with the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize. The novelist Naomi Wood draws, through the eyes of the four wives, a more intimate Ernest Hemingway. The different wives see in him what is not seen of him. His first wife, Hadley Richardson, knows he needs to work because otherwise depression takes over his clear strengths: "His imagination is not well kept when it is not focused; it tends to wander, tends to look for excitement where it should not" (Wood 2014:17). Hadley Richardson suffers from the liaison of Ernest Hemingway and Pauline Pfeiffer. Pauline Pfeiffer: the friend, the mistress, the future woman. Hadley Richardson invites the mistress in 1926 to Antibes because she hopes that living in a threesome, the husband and wife will become two again. The ploy does not work.

The sophisticated and wealthy Pauline Pfeiffer has everything that Hadley Richardson does not have: family, relationships, money. The new wife does not get rid of a heavy sense of guilt by marrying the man of her life. When she learns that her husband has fallen under the spell of Martha Gellhorn, she will think the time has come for her to be accountable. "It seems to her that these are, now, the irreducible components of marriage: theft, possession, recompense" (Wood 2014:140). Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn form an eruptive couple. Their disputes are Homeric. They are on an equal footing. She is the one who best understands his talent as a writer: "There was no trickery: only the plain words put there as if they had

always been there – like pebbles cooled in a river” (Wood 2014:173). One of the definitions of love: as if they had always been together...

No wonder that such a complex personal life, combined with the writer’s equally adventurous public life would find its way into his works, and one of the questions that preoccupied Hemingway throughout his life, and which we will hopefully answer in our essay, is the matter of identity. Writing about the matter of identity in Hemingway’s “Cat in the Rain”, Daniel Thomières asserts that,

To summarize the diagnosis Hemingway offers in ‘Cat in the Rain,’ it could be said that the problem is: what is identity? The answer is: it is inseparable from desire, and the tool needed to reach the answer is an understanding of our position as social animals. Unquestionably, the couple is undergoing a crisis, at least from the point of view of the wife. George, the husband, as far as he is concerned, has taken possession of the two pillows and the bed... It could then be said that identity is a question” (Thomières 2013:1).

Regarding *The Garden of Eden*, mention should be made of Mark Spilka’s view in his 1995 volume *Hemingway’s Quarrel with Androgyny*. Spilka comments on what he calls the “wound of androgyny” that David might have experienced and which made him feel vulnerable, emasculated, deprived of male identity, and self-betrayed (1995:122). Spilka views *The Garden of Eden* as the writer’s contribution to “the theory of androgynous creativity” (*Ibid*:333).

2. “Cat in the Rain” – the hidden side of the matrimonial iceberg

Approaching analytically what, according to García Márquez, is the “the story in which his powers are most compressed” (Marques 1981) becomes, by all accounts, a very complex and risky task. Complex, first, because it takes some skill to unravel all the dramatic intensity that remains condensed in each of the phrases of the always laconic narrative of Ernest Hemingway. And risky because, in that enterprise consisting of disputing the permanent ellipsis of a narrative meaning, one runs the risk of erring gravely or of ending up offering an oversimplified image of the fictionality that was decided to deal with, and which, in the end, is the same. These dangers associated with the practical application of the iceberg theory are those that the American writer consciously confronted in order to give life to stories that are built on the veiled and never explicitly told.

It has long been speculated, not without reason, on the direct influence that the profession of journalist – with which he began in the world of writing – could have exercised in his subsequent performance as a novelist: that direct, concise, clear style, that we can so well

recognize in the field of the press, would accompany him until the end of his days and would end up becoming one of his aesthetic stamps. The brevity and concentration of the action of the story make this the most favourable genre for the development of the iceberg theory in the strict sense as defined by its author:

The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. A writer who appreciates the seriousness of writing so little that he is anxious to make people see he is formally educated, cultured or well-bred is merely a popinjay. And this too remember; a serious writer is not to be confounded with a solemn writer. A serious writer may be a hawk or a buzzard or even a popinjay, but a solemn writer is always a bloody owl. (Hemingway 1932:164)

Undoubtedly, the creation that best embodies this spirit of iceberg is “Cat in the Rain”, because it manages to condense the aspirations of the modern story: of the two stories that every narrative contains, the second, the secret one is announced to us through the cavities of an allusive framework whose end we will never fully know. However, this narrative hermeticism is precisely responsible for creating stories where the interpretative capacity of the reader is capable of being deployed practically without limits.

Essentially, the plot is relatively simple: a couple of Americans on vacation on the Italian coast are confined to their hotel room by the rainy weather, and they are deprived of socializing possibilities, as they are the only customers in the hotel. They react to the circumstances differently, according to their own inner structure: the husband prefers a passive acceptance, and spends his time reading in bed, while his wife’s response is almost violent, surfacing an inner struggle and debate on her own identity. The cat that she sees on the hotel terrace – and which she wants for herself but cannot find when she goes out to get it – triggers an inner turmoil which reaches the dimensions of an identity crisis. The symbols abound: the rain, the window, the garden, the war memorial, all build up the antithetical context of the short story. The window gives a glimpse into the protagonist’s frame of mind: the fertility symbolized by the garden is contrasted with the infertility suggested by the war memorial, while the rain encompasses all, contributing to the feelings of indifference and distress the couple experience. Having not found the cat, the woman gives way to the discomfort latent in her relationship with her husband, suggesting her unspoken wish to become a mother. The husband does not react in any way to her wish to have the cat, and he totally ignores her comments in front of the mirror.

In the introduction to *Le Deuxième Sexe*, the French writer and existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir questions the “human reality” of women by an approach which is equally Heideggerian and Sartrean:

But first we must ask: what is a woman ‘*Tota mulier in utero*’, says one, ‘woman is a womb’. But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity (Beauvoir 1956:13).

The enigma of femininity for Hemingway’s protagonist acquires a caretaking role (habitual, on the other hand, in patriarchal societies): to feel, perform or, ultimately, be a woman without threats, the character needs to be recognized by others as such through the performance of a protective role (and protected by a stronger figure). She is faced with a boring matrimonial existence, in which she does not feel cared for and has no one to care for. Under the circumstances, the cat appears as an object capable of triggering an affective movement that impels the protagonist to transcend that closed and oppressive world in which she finds herself – but she pretends there is no escape: even outside she is guarded by a servant-girl. The cat can also function as an element associated with independence, which may have been lost through marriage. If it is assumed that, in part, identity is defined as identification, by specifying affection, the woman understands that the kitten is helpless and that, like her, it must be protected. Psychoanalytically, it is a projective identification by which the woman attributes her infantile deficiencies of care and protection to the object that is the cat. It also represents an alternative of cathexis, that is, of libidinal investment or of affective charge in a couple relationship that seems already completely de-stabilized.

The scene in front of the mirror is central to our understanding of the story. It reveals a three-dimensional concern of the protagonist – her imperious need for attention from her husband, her own femininity, and the possibility of becoming a mother. However, she does not have the ability to identify her real needs, which she expresses in her wish to have a kitten, new tableware, new clothes, a change of season (spring), and even a new haircut – the short hair, similar to that of her husband’s, symbolic of the masculine indifference she is taking a stance against.

This brief account of just three and a half pages, which encloses and immerses the characters in an overwhelming world without leaving them the slightest loophole, nor the slightest hope of escape and adjustment, was included by Hemingway in his collection of short stories *In Our Time* (1925), and has the merit of being a literary outpost, a symbolic-narrative prelude of forced analysis at the time of unravelling and better understand the couple's relationships in all the writer's later work, particularly his idea about the consequences of marriage. His idea of marriage amounted to a loss of present freedom, a break with the past and a loss of the future, hence the doubts and vacillations that assailed him during his entire life, despite his four marriages. This matrimonial philosophy is reflected in the male characters of his novels, single men who maintain a certain distrust of any commitment, despite the attraction they feel towards women. Thus, neither Jake Barnes, nor Frederick Henry, nor Robert Jordan, nor Santiago are married men; Richard Cantwell and Thomas Hudson used to be, but they are not. David Bourne breaks his recent union with Catherine Hill in *The Garden of Eden*, and Harry Morgan, the hero of *To Have and Have Not*, is the only one that will endure in a peculiar cohabitation until its dramatic end. All these reflect the author's particular conception of male-female relationships, which was forged during the writer's youth. These brief stories are something like a field of experimentation, where the protagonists meet a number of couples on which there hovers the shadow of incomprehension and monotony.

In "Cat in the Rain" we find that the relationship between the spouses conveys a certain boredom and monotony; no passion or sensuality; in most cases it is a claustrophobic and oppressive environment in which a frustrated woman, represents the most active and materialistic element, while the husband plays a passive role that reminds us among others of the male protagonist in *The Garden of Eden* (1986). We have before us a story full of clues, reinforced by austere prose, very elaborate and fully descriptive. The start has been well understood by Scott Donaldson in *By Force of Will* (1977):

It proceeds as if in response to a series of consecutive questions from an inquisitive child: Were there any other Americans at your hotel? Did you know anyone there? Where was your room? Did you have a nice view? What did the place look like? Did you have good weather? (Donaldson 1977:169)

Perhaps these are some of the answers that a mother will give to her son's questions years later. Be that as it may, these lines of the beginning mark the pattern of what is and what is about to happen. Let us consider the first paragraph.

“There were only two Americans at the hotel,” indicates the situation of isolation and solitude in which the protagonists are immersed, an empty hotel, surely the tourist season is over, it is winter and the sensation of coldness takes over the text. “They did not know any of the people....” means they did not know anyone there, which implies a lack of friendship and therefore of a social environment. The aim is to use isolation, as a channel to highlight and activate the underlying feelings that come together in the individual and, in the particular case that concerns us, in the couple. A room with a view of the sea in winter is something that conveys sadness and produces a contrast between the gray immensity of the water and the individual who contemplates it, causing in many cases introspection and a certain feeling of helplessness. Under the window of the room, “the public garden” and “the war monument” symbolize a public space without flowers, without life. It is the inhospitable, presided by the symbol of destruction and death, which in the story anticipates the banner of an interior war, which begins to break loose. A contrast narrative parenthesis places us in that physical space in another time, “in the good weather,” with a supposedly flowered garden, with “the palms” and “the bright colours of the hotels” shaped by an artist, which symbolizes the colorful of spring. This is an image of past and future, which contrasts with the crude reality of the present moment. Rain is synonymous with “empty,” “unoccupied” and “vacant,” (Hemingway 2017:75) as the life of this American couple. It rains on the sea, and the fresh rainwater will merge with the salt water of the sea in an attempt to fuse two vital but different circumstances. The falling water constitutes the active element and the sea a mere passive receiver – two elements of the same species, although of a different gender, that complement each other naturally, such as women and men.

All these convey a nihilistic idea of loneliness and restlessness when confronting the protagonists with a disagreeable environment that impels them to take refuge in their interior and to recreate their own frustrations. Hemingway takes advantage of the frame to make us vibrate with the relationship of a couple that gives the sensation of capsizing in a sea of monotony.

From this moment two worlds open before the reader, one male and the other one female that, located in a closed space – the room of a hotel – will show signs of passivity (man) and of interior and exterior activity (women). The choice of a hotel room, in “Cat in the Rain” a claustrophobically closed world, will be the first literary step towards the description of relationships, as we will see years later in *A Farewell to Arms* (1977), of which I have selected two representative fragments that, using the window as an objective, present landscapes that

remind us of those of the story. The first takes place in a hotel in Milan and the second in one in Lausanne:

‘This was the best hotel we could get in,’ I said. I looked out of the window. Across the square were the lights of the station. There were carriages going by on the street and I saw the trees in the park. The lights from the hotel shone on the wet pavement (Hemingway 1977:112).

The windows of the room looked out on a wet garden with a wall topped by an iron fence. Across the street, which sloped steeply, was another hotel with a similar wall and garden. I looked out at the rain falling in the fountain of the garden (*Ibid.* 218).

In the case of “Cat in the Rain,” also written from the same point of view as *A Farewell to Arms*, the feminine one, we find ourselves again with a closed environment, the room of a hotel, and its opening to the outside, “the window,” used also as a point of view and focus of the hidden desires of the protagonist, who in the present situation point to a cat.

According to Baker (1973:136), the cat will act as a link between the real and the desired world. The sudden inclination of the protagonist towards a stray cat is something that surprises her: “I do not know why I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty” (Hemingway 1987:130). But the reasons must be sought in the depths of her subconscious. In this way, the feline appears as the trigger of an internal crisis in an unconscious process of identification and possession. Based on these assumptions, the interpretation could be as follows. First, the woman identifies the cat with bourgeois comfort. Baker asserts that “the animal stands in her mind for comfortable bourgeois domesticity” (Baker 1973:135). Everyone knows the domestic tendency of this animal that allows it to develop its almost regal sense of comfort. The characters do not seem to have a comfortable home of their own, hence the desire to own it. Second, the woman associates the cat with independence, perhaps missing her lost identity. The sense of individuality is something inherent in the personality of a cat. On the other hand, George’s wife lives chained to the wishes of her husband and is not even willing to decide on how to wear her hair. Third, the woman develops before the cat a total sense of possession. Since it appears on stage, the expressions “I wanted” and “I want” are repeated thirteen times, which gives an idea of the uneasiness that takes root in the inner core of the protagonist. That frenzy to possess, in this case, a living being, a cat, symbolizes the woman’s loneliness and insecurity in which the character is sunk.

Another point to submit to analysis is whether that supposed cat that she thinks she sees from the window exists, or is actually the fruit of her own subconscious; I am personally inclined to think the latter, and I believe that the woman almost immediately goes down to look

for it and, when she looks out the door, and puts her foot in the world of reality, the cat is no longer there: “The table was there, washed bright green in the rain, but the cat was gone. She was suddenly disappointed” (Hemingway 1987:130). Only the green boards of the bank are still shining in the rain, of hope nothing else is left of her symbol, but that imaginary cat that haunted her mind had disappeared and the maid with her words doubts that it has ever existed:

“*Ha perduto qualche cosa, Signora*”

“There was a cat,” said the American girl.

“A cat?”

“*Si, il gatto.*”

“A cat ? the maid laughed. A cat in the rain?”

“Yes,” she said. “Under the table.” Then, “Oh, I wanted it so much. I wanted a kitty.” (Hemingway 1987:130)

From another point of view it is interesting and curious to value the deliberate confusion that Hemingway makes use of in “Cat and the Rain”: the protagonist, whose name we do not know, might be Catherine (in *A Farewell to Arms* or, later, in *The Garden of Eden*), while “cat” is the more active element, perhaps driven by her anxiety, coming from an internal restlessness- the fruit of marital frustration. Her failure arises from the impossibility of combining two dichotomies, two worlds: the real and the desired. The real world represents a marriage that does not work: there is no understanding, no communication, no affection, no sensuality, no stable home, and no children. In these circumstances, we have seen that the cat is the trigger, and the mirror will be the trigger symbol of the real crisis, by putting the woman in contact with her most intimate self, with her reflected self:

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. (*Ibid.* 130)

Restlessness arises before the mirror, and, in “Cat in the Rain,” the woman, studying her double profile, is studying her two faces, her two personalities, and that is when the deepest subconscious emerges in her words. We find ourselves in a universe of repressed desires that are reflected in the following five points:

(1) The recovery of femininity and attractiveness are symbolized in the women’s desire to let their hair grow. The hair will become from now on an obsession for Hemingway,

appearing symbolically in almost all his works. Short hair will be a sign of castration of one's own personality, of weakness and in women of false masculinity: "'Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?' She asked. . . 'I get so tired of it [...] I get so tired of looking like a boy'" (*Ibid.* 131).

(2) Having a child who will make her complete and enable her to perform as a woman, while serving to conjugate her loneliness, is another of her hidden desires: "I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap..." (*Ibid.* 131). The cat in this case implies the illusion of having a son in her lap. The use of the pronoun "it" is very iterative throughout the story, "I wanted it so much," represents the hidden desire to have a baby ("baby", a noun that in English carries no gender connotation and can easily be substituted with the pronoun "it"). Other speculations point to the use of a female referential pronoun for the cat, "I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her," (*Ibid.* 131) as a possible interpretation of the desire for a daughter, but that does not seem very likely, if we take into account that in English the cat is often referred to as "she" because of a colloquial inertia, although, on the other hand, it is inspired by the fact that it is an animal that ancestrally has been identified with the woman.

(3) Achieve a family stability and a fixed home where to live surrounded by their things: "I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles" (*Ibid.* 131)

(4) A rebirth in their feelings and in their affective relationships: "... and I want it to be in spring" (*Ibid.* 131). Spring symbolizes rebirth, it is the time of year when everything comes back to life and regains its colour and joy. It is the season of love par excellence.

(5) Renew its appearance and strengthen its social position: "... and I want some new clothes" (*Ibid.* 131). The impossibility of melting those two worlds into one and the incomprehension on the part of George, her husband, who cuts and aborts her desires in an almost brutal way: "'Oh, shut up and get something to read,' George said," (*Ibid.* 131) cause a vacuum and enormous loneliness in the woman.

George assumes at all times a passive and indifferent role, reflecting an intellectual and selfish world, taking refuge in the solitude of a book, underestimating the worries and desires of his spouse. His recumbent position is repeated again and again throughout the story: "George went on reading, lying on the pillows at the foot of the bed" or "George was on the bed reading," "George shifted his position in bed" (*Ibid.* 131).

Another character worth mentioning is "the hotel manager" (the "padrone"), capable of captivating the woman's attention. It represents the typical figure of the foreigner – usually European – an archetype widely used by Hemingway in his works, mainly when there is a couple not very well matched, such as Peduzzi, in "Out of Season", Robert Wilson in "The

Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” or Pedro Romero in *The Sun Also Rises*, among others. The owner of the hotel will be the figure that establishes the counterpoint, the centre of reference between a husband who does not pay much attention to his wife, who is not affectionate, as compared to a man, most of the time kind, thoughtful and above all a good connoisseur of the feminine soul: “The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way I received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way I wanted to serve her. She liked the way I felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his eyes, heavy face and big hands” (*Ibid.* 130).

The hands (“big hands”) are another symbol worthy of mention and analysis for its successive appearances. These, curiously, are going to be the centre of the description when detailing the most outstanding features of the male characters. His appearance in the text will provoke an air of insinuation that in Hemingway’s narrative will represent that obscure object of desire, that unspeakable feeling of premonition. The big hands will be the symbol of male sexuality. Thus, Luz Coates, describes Jim Gilmore in “Up in Michigan,” as follows: “Jim was short and dark with big moustaches and big hands” (Hemingway 1987:59). Margot Macomber does the same with the guide, Robert Wilson, in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”: “She looked away from his face at the way his shoulders sloped into the loose tunic [...] at his big brown hands, his old slacks, his very dirty boots, and back to his red face again” (Hemingway 1987:6).

In both stories women will surrender to men, but, in the case of “Cat in the Rain,” the fact that the protagonist has almost developed an obsession with the hands of the hotel director does not mean that she wants to keep with him some type of relationship, but it indicates the need for something that is lacking in the relationship with her husband. Hemingway, at the end of the story, returns to put the repetition in the mouth of his character with the purpose of vindicating his nonconformity and the discrepancy with the husband, for it repeats three consecutive times the phrase “I want a cat,” concluding by way of summary with a premise, in the form of probable or real conditional sentence, which is very revealing: “If I cannot have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat” (Hemingway 1987:131).

3. A *ménage à trois* – the less-known Hemingway in an even less-known novel

The publication of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986 opened the gates of Hemingway’s exegesis to gender criticism, the result being a re-evaluation of the female presence in a traditional literary work devoted to the literary traditions of the personality and adventurous life of the writer that challenged the previous four decades of critical appraisal that insisted on what Broer and Holland called “superficial or misguided interpretations of Hemingway’s treatment

of women and gender” (Broer and Holland 2002:ix). The novel signals a farewell to machismo, and a departure from the cult of masculinity. Hemingway had begun the work in 1946, then set it aside, finally resuming it three years before his death, and finishing without the final style polish. According to the information provided by the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, it was not until the summer of 1972 that poet-widow Mary Welsh Hemingway handed over the 1214-page manuscript, along with other unpublished texts, in two large shopping bags at the same library where the writings of the murdered US president and of the literature Nobel Prize winner are kept.

We are dealing with an incomplete novel. In the preface, the editor Charles Scribner Jr. indicates how the two volumes and drafts of *The Garden of Eden* were published (Scribner 1986: vii-viii). There is also a controversy in this regard, since Hemingway’s biographer, Carlos Baker, indicates that there were more than 800 pages of material that were reduced to one third. Apparently, even a secondary story was excluded because it was not sufficiently linked to the central argument. *The Garden of Eden* is the skeleton of an unfinished work, and although its publication can be criticized since the author never authorized it, it is a gift for the readers of Hemingway, since it reveals a facet of the author that was in full development. The original writer from Illinois worked intermittently on that novel from 1946 to 1961, the year of his suicide.

Above all, this posthumous novel shows that Hemingway did not want to wallow in the glory of his early works, full of virile grandiloquence, but wanted to grow as an artist and develop a darker, different and fascinating vein, perhaps his more feminine side, in a castling that turns the battlefields for nude beaches, rifles for martinis, oyster bulls, inevitable death for inevitable love, and the mountains of Africa for the silhouette of two women at sunset.

The novel’s publication allowed for fresh connections between Hemingway’s personal life and his works. Mention should be made of significant details in his biography often overlooked by criticism: “his mother’s twinning of Ernest and his sister Marcelline, her domineering feminist inclinations; his father’s repetitive depression bouts and eventual suicide; his wives’ alleged lesbianism, hair-dyeing/hair-cropping, their manipulative ways” (Žeželj 2013: 215). *The Garden of Eden* may be considered as answering all these.

The Garden of Eden has been the most enigmatic work of Ernest Hemingway. The topic is very far from what we know of the American writer: bullfighting, fishing, hunting of great prey, heroic combats, and of course, death. In this inconclusive novel, Hemingway explores sexuality, gender roles, couple relationships and hidden desires with the subtlety and mysticism

that could be more representative (from a traditional point of view) of a female hand, rather than the strong male who wrote his previous works.

David and Catherine Bourne are a young couple of newlyweds who live in a kind of earthly paradise. He is a writer who has recently gained fame and money thanks to the publication of his successful second novel. His wife is extremely intelligent and comes from a wealthy family. On their honeymoon, the couple travels the blue coast of France during the 1920s and has a long and happy stay in Grau du Roi, which resembles Hemingway's experiences with his second wife. There is some fishing, visits to museums, and much alcohol and food, which is a frequent theme in the works of this author, faithfully describing each of his culinary and ethical anecdotes, as a lover of good food.

However, that idyllic bubble is gradually breaking as the wife convinces her husband to perform a change of roles in their privacy, which is then deepened when Catherine begins to tan exaggeratedly and has her hair cut like a male. The transformation process is exacerbated when David is persuaded to dye his hair a Scandinavian blond to reflect the same tone as that of his wife. Finally, the presence of a third person, a beautiful girl named Marita, who claims to love both Catherine and David, provokes a new scenario, unknown and unpredictable.

In his novel, Hemingway explores the mental states of his characters with that simplicity and effectiveness that characterize him, based on details, without explicitly mentioning the motivations or moods, but accurately describing the environment so that the reader understands on his own what floats in the air. The dialogues are finely carved and reflect the best of the author's talent. Without the need to delve into the details of intimacy, Hemingway manages to describe it perfectly. In her essay, "Hemingway: the Economics of Survival" (1979), Nancy R. Comley contends that,

Hemingway's last and unpublished work reveals the desire to remove the barrier between the sexes. [...] In this late work, androgyny is foregrounded. Androgyny would remove the bargaining and complexity Hemingway associated with male-female relationships. Here, finally, would be the simple exchange system he so greatly desired. (Comley 1979:253)

On many occasions, the quality of the characters also indicates the quality of a literary work. In this case, Catherine Bourne is the best female character that Hemingway has created, far surpassing Brett Ashley of *Fiesta* (another transliteration that omits the religious character of the original title in English) or Pilar in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Catherine is a constant question with an unexplored depth in Hemingway's other works, which combines androgynous

elements and a pernicious envy against her husband's literary work. According to Amy Lovell Strong, "Catherine, first and foremost, is a divided self. Because she finds the female role an oppressive, predictable, and inexpressive form, she wants to escape. She has a heightened awareness of female stereotypes and tries to make David more conscious of the moments when he himself invokes these stereotypes" (Strong 2002:193).

In the *Garden of Eden*, Hemingway describes a kind of sexual utopia: the attempt of a young couple to swap gender roles. Catherine, the heroine, wants to be a man and wishes that her partner David becomes a woman. She calls him Catherine, he calls her Pete. The two love each other in a "new, unusual way," which they describe as "shameless," but which the narrator "never quite explains". David believes that his lover enjoys "spoiling" him, and he feels guilty about being "spoiled" by her so easily. She explains that she was stimulated to her sexual experiment by the sight of an androgynous Rodin sculpture – a half-male, half-female figure. An important role in the reversal is played by the hairstyle: Catherine has her hair dyed and cut short to exactly match David's hairstyle. And this motive is doubled in the novel: Catherine and David meet another, similarly practicing couple, Nick and Barbara – in this case, however, the man lets his hair grow and trims it until it is as long and curly as that of the woman.

In real life, biographers believe that something similar happened between Hemingway and Walsh. Hemingway also had a difficult relationship with his younger son, Gregory, a transgender who would eventually adopt the name of Gloria (and, just as his father did in the midst of disorders such as alcoholism and depression, would end up taking his own life). According to John Hemingway, the writer's grandson,

I think that my dad was around 11 or 12, and he had put on a pair of his mother's nylons. Ernest walked into the room, stared at him for a moment, shocked, then walked out again without saying a word. But a few days later, he looked at Gregory and said: "Gigi, [pronounced with a hard G] you and I come from a strange tribe." (Romano 2010:np)

These passages do not prove anything about a possible homosexual trait or fluid gender on the part of the author; yet it says much about the need to revise the aura of virility that men charge each other with. Like some of his characters, Hemingway tried to live up to an irreplaceable masculinity model that, in practice, is impossible to attain.

Unfortunately, the other female character, Marita, despite an accurate introduction to history, lacks an optimal development that matches the quality of the argument. While the novel progresses, her character languishes despite playing a central role in the swing of events. David

Bourne is not a character that stands out compared to other works of the author. It is clearly based on a young Hemingway, eager to improve his quality as a writer. David worries about the press clippings that speak of his second book and tries to use the mornings to work on his new stories in a hotel room specially reserved for that. The narration of one of his experiences as a child accompanying his father on an elephant hunt in Africa is interspersed with the main story. However, David seems unable to understand his wife very well or, put another way, Hemingway does not create in David a man with the depth necessary to fathom the woman by his side, or else face the prospect of loving two women at the same time. Catherine's obsession with her identity as a woman, her desire to perform a gender change, and the *ménage à trois* raises the serious "problem of morality", which is

one of the unresolved conflicts in *The Garden of Eden*. It underlies the issue of who one might consider, if one cared to do so, the "good girl" in the text, Catherine or Marita. Following the biblical line, the women are the temptresses in Hemingway's garden, and David is the willing-to-be-led Adam. (Comley 2002:212)

What is interesting to note about this posthumously-published novel is that the ending Hemingway had in mind was different from that of the Scribner's official version, as it can be seen from the writer's words: "Written when thought something might happen before book could be finished. EH" (qtd in Comley: 2002:217). It is an ending in which Catherine Bourne "introduces the woman reader to a more complex, more interesting Hemingway, one who plays with and questions the masculine role" (*ibid.*).

4. Conclusions

In a letter to Mary Welsh Hemingway, the writer confessed having dyed his hair "red as French polished copper pot or a very new minted penny—not brassy—true bright coppery" (qtd in Eby 1999:203). It contradicts the generally accepted image of the macho man, and leads to the conclusion that drawing a separation line between Hemingway's personal life and the fictional life of his characters is not an easy task. "Cat in the Rain" and *The Garden of Eden* are only two examples of works of fiction in which the genre distinctions are blurred. We may add *Green Hills of Africa*, *Death in the Afternoon*, or *A Moveable Feast*, in which we may find biographical details about the author's family life, and his travels. Hemingway's treatment of women and gender in his novels and short stories adds to the portrait of the writer as highlighted

by the current critical approaches – gender studies and feminist criticism – that shed new light on Hemingway’s whole work.

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