Readings of Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" in its literary Context

قراءات لإرنست همنغواي "قطة تحت المطر" في سياقها الأدبي

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Abstract:

This paper puts into practice the idea of multiple interpretations of a literary text. It takes as an example Ernest Hemingway's short story "Cat in the Rain" by looking first at the text in and of itself, by looking at the text as a complete unit. Yet another interpretation transpires when the text is placed into its historical and cultural context, by reading it in relation to the collection of stories (*In Our Time*) it was published with, and by comparing it to some of the works published by Hemingway. Although many scholars have seen the marital relationship in "Cat in the Rain", perhaps symbolizing the disintegration of Hemingway's own marriage, as the main focus of the story, this paper argues that the resulted psychological trauma of the Great War, in its impact on human relationships, is the central idea "Cat in the Rain". This paper argues that this contextual interpretation proves in a sense that this short story is but a conduit through which the cultural disillusionment of the time speaks.

Keywords: WWI, Cultural Disillusionment, Multiple interpretations of text, Trauma, despair

قراءات لإرنست همنغواي "قطة تحت المطر" في سياقها الأدبي

تضع هذه الورقة موضع التنفيذ فكرة التفسيرات المتعددة للنص الأدبي. ويأخذ على سبيل المثال قصة إرنست همنغواي القصيرة "قطة تحت المطر" من خلال النظر أولا إلى النص في حد ذاته، من خلال النظر إلى النص كوحدة كاملة. ويتجلى تفسير آخر عند وضع النص في سياقه التاريخي والثقافي، من خلال قراءته في علاقته بالمجموعة القصصية (في زماننا) التي نشر معها، ومقارنتها ببعض الأعمال التي نشرها همنغواي. على الرغم من أن العديد من المفكرين قد رأوا أن العلاقة الزوجية في "قطة تحت المطر"، ربما ترمز إلى تفكك زواج همنغواي، هي المحور الرئيسي للقصة، فإن هذه الورقة تجادل بأن آثار وصدمة الحرب العالمية الأولى، في تأثيرها على العلاقات الإنسانية، هي الفكرة المركزية. وتجادل هذه الورقة بأن هذا التفسير السياقي يثبت إلى حد ما أن هذه القصة القصيرة ليست سوى قناة تعكس من خلالها خيبة الأمل الثقافية في ذلك الوقت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحرب العالمية الأولى، خيبة الأمل الثقافية، تفسيرات متعددة للنص، الصدمة، اليأس

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Quite a few readers of Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain," including Oddvar Holmesland, David Lodge, Peter Griffin, Carlos Baker, John V Hagopian, and Warren Bennett, look at the piece in terms of human relationships, more specifically a marital relationship, and perhaps rightly so! One clearly can read the frustration of the American wife throughout the pages of the story, and see George as an uncaring husband and the antagonist of the story. He ignores his wife and continues to read throughout the entire story. It is also clear that, even at the beginning of the story, George's offer of help seems passive-aggressive. When his wife says she wants to go out to rescue that poor kitty from the rain, he disingenuously says, "I'll do it" (*In Our Time* 64). This is clearly insincere because not only does he not get up, but also "The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed" (*In Our Time* 66). Some readers have also seen George as too controlling. For example, when his wife says that she wants her hair to grow long, he answers that he likes it the way it is. Comments such as this suggest to readers that, because George does not give his wife adequate freedom, she is unhappy and hence wants a cat. Furthermore, when she continues with a long list of irrational demands, such as that she wants it to be spring and that she wants to have a kitty, George harshly tells her to "shut up," and suggests that she find a book to read instead (*In Our Time* 64).

Alternatively, one can see the wife as the antagonist in the story, a nag who is not able to be self-contained like her husband who sits quietly indoors on rainy days and entertains himself. Instead of being thoughtful and quiet, she disturbs her husband, who at first appears to respond kindly to her: he offers to get the cat for her, and after she insists on going, he caringly tells her to be careful and not to get wet. Even the maid laughs at the childish behavior of the American wife when she goes out in the rain looking for a stray cat. Hemingway refers to her at that moment as "the American girl," which suggests her behavior is childish (*In Our Time* 64):

> *The maid looked up at her.* '*Ha perduto qualque 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.* '
> *When she talked English, the maid*'*s face tightened* (*In Our Time* 64).

At one point, George's wife looks at her short hair in the mirror and asks George: "Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?" George compliments his wife by saying that she is beautiful the way she is: '"You look pretty darn nice" (*In Our Time* 66). At that moment, in a childish way, she shifts into a series of demands: '"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" (67). George then asks her to stop that childish behavior and get a book to read (*In Our Time* 66). From this perspective, the American wife can be seen as vain and in pursuit of external happiness in the form of material possessions, which makes her the real antagonist of the story. What also makes her the antagonist is her mental, albeit not physical, unfaithfulness to her husband, shown in her fetishizing the patron of the hotel and finding tenderness in this man, who is merely doing his job and trying to make her stay comfortable:

> *The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints... She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands ...The padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important. She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance.* (*In Our Time* 65)

This shows that she is not as focused on and invested as she should be in her relationship with her husband. When Hemingway stresses that she is "the American girl," while the husband is just George, he suggests that America is materialistic, like the girl who finds happiness in material

things, unlike George, who strives to be internally happy. In a sense, this story could be Hemingway's criticism of America. So, from this perspective, the cat represents the wife's unhappiness, and her inability to get that particular cat means that she will no longer be happy.

This story exemplifies the theory that a text can invite multiple interpretations. A reader, as Wolfgang Iser suggested in his "death of the author idea"[1] in his 1978 book *The Act of Reading A Theory of Aesthetic Response,* can just read the story complete unto itself, or read the story against itself to find what the story might mean to him or her, but the meaning must always be supported by the details of the text. The two interpretations above demonstrate this interpretive approach. However, one might follow a broader approach to reading the text by placing it into its various contexts. One context of this story is the book collection in which it was published, and what meaning this story may contribute to the whole book in which it is included. In this case, the meaning of the story is also informed by the other stories it is published with in that same book. The context could also be the historical, political and cultural circumstances of the time during which the story was written, and the context could be the author himself and his worldview at the time he was writing this text, as well as the author's other literary works.

To illustrate, in both interpretations above, the couple (mainly the wife) is at the center of the story. They are the focal point and everything revolves around them. But these two interpretations fail to account for the significance of the first paragraph in the story as they do not account for "the war monument" that is mentioned in the story three times. The question is why? What is its significance?

> *Their room was on the second floor facing the sea. It also faced the public garden and the war monument. There were big palms and green benches in the public garden. In the good weather there was always an artist with his easel. Artists liked the way the palms grew and the bright colors of the hotels facing the gardens and the sea. Italians came from a long way off to look up at the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain. It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in*

> *pools on the gravel paths. The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain. The motor cars were gone from the square by the war monument. Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the empty square. The American wife stood at the window looking out.* (*In Our Time* 64)

In this expository paragraph, Hemingway draws a picture of the setting, and with three lines he points to the actual center of the story. George and his wife are in a room on the second floor, its window facing the sea and the public garden where there is the war monument surrounded by palm trees and benches. Italians come from "a long way off" to see the war monument. Now, we have one line of cars coming from all directions in Italy pointing at the war monument. We see another line of vision of the waiter looking at the square where the war monument is from "Across the square in the doorway of the café", and we see another line of vision coming from the American wife repeatedly throughout the story "looking out" at the square where the war monument is.

Just as this expository paragraph concludes the story, the beginning of the story converges with the last concluding paragraph in it. With everyone's line of vision being pointed towards the war monument, it suggests to the readers that herein lies the real story, the motive that moves the plot ahead: "His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees.. His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square" *(In Our Time* 67). Additionally, one may wonder, why has George chosen to come to this hotel in particular? What is the significance of this hotel? George and his wife came for the same reason that brought the Italians to the public garden, to "look up the war monument." The war is still fresh in the minds of the people at the time and in the mind of the author. The book was written during the course of the Great War, introducing war and violence to its readers. From this perspective, one can start to see how the war looms in the background of the story, and the details of the story are now informed by the Great War and its carnage; the story symbolically refers to the human cost of the war and cultural disillusionment. This is

clearly represented in the first paragraph of the story, and in a cyclical structure reinforced in the last part of the story. Although many critics of the story have ignored the symbolic part of the first paragraph and viewed it as a mere description of the setting, the war monument is at the center of the story; the war memories are still fresh in the minds of the people who are still suffering from its effects and the losses they have endured. The images in that expository paragraph are similar to the image of "permanent rain" (4) Hemingway used in his "*A Farewell to Arms*"; they are violent but seemingly benign. Hemingway wrote in "Cat in the Rain":

> *The war monument. . . was made of bronze and glistened in the rain. . .The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths. The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain. the war monument. It was made of bronze and glistened in the rain. It was raining. The rain dripped from the palm trees. Water stood in pools on the gravel paths. The sea broke in a long line in the rain and slipped back down the beach to come up and break again in a long line in the rain.* (*In Our Time* 64)

In a similar manner, in passages from *A Farewell to Arms*," Hemingway described a beautiful scene undermined by violence:

> *In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.*
>
> *The plain was rich with crops; there were many orchards of fruit trees and beyond the plain the mountains were brown and bare. There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the*

> *flashes from the artillery. In the dark it was like summer lightning, but the nights were cool and there was not the feeling of a storm coming…At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army (*Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 3*).*

In both passages, we can clearly see violence concealed by a beautiful and happy landscape. Rain here is clearly suggestive in a sense of an "elegiac evocation" of cultural and human cost in the aftermath of the war. In the introductory passage of ”Cat in the Rain”, the cat “crouch[ing] under one of the dripping green tables. . . trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on” (*In Our Time* 64), recalls to the mind the trapped soldiers under bombardment laying crouched in the trenches. In a similar image, Hemingway writes in one of the vignettes in *In Our Time*: “While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh Jesus Christ get me out of here. Dear Jesus, please get me out. Christ, please, please, please, Christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. . ” (7). These passages, with their serene beauty in “Cat in the Rain,” conceal an understated violence. Hemingway actually uses this style of imagery of a benign daily scene that at its heart is violent. For example, the rain glistening in the monument and dripping from the palm tree brings to mind violent images of those soldiers bleeding and their blood running in streams and forming puddles. (This violent image concealed by a beautiful landscape is also present in Hemingway's “Big Two Hearted River,” as we will come to see later). In these passages combined, there is a striking image of flux of fluids, and a combination of the fluids that is coming out of the human body and the fluids of the environment, implying that the soldiers are becoming one with the elements. Flux here becomes a condition of the body when it begins to die.

Flux is also the ongoing motif of “Cat in the Rain.” It presents itself when the body begins to fail. “Cat in the Rain” is drenched in rain, which signifies “an allegory of an eternal cry of human pain,” but it also demonstrates one of Hemingway's codes of being hard, taut, controlled,

and not giving in to the inner flux. Hemingway demonstrates this code in the ideology of "friend or enemy." In one story in *In Our Time* titled "A Very Short Story," he writes: "Luz stayed on night duty for three months. They were glad to let her. When they operated on him she prepared him for the operating table and they had a joke about friend or enema. He went under the anæsthetic holding tight on to himself so that he would not blab about anything during the silly, talky time" (31). This passage speaks to "Cat in the Rain" in two ways. On one hand, George demonstrates a taut, self-controlled character, not blabbing, but remaining stoic and keeping what's inside inside. From this perspective, one can clearly see in George the Hemingway code of being tight-lipped, not ever giving in to the inner muck of the body and to be hard; he does not give in to the inner flux, and he maintains his upright position and keeps quiet. Throughout the story, George does not say much; his responses are all close-ended so as not to engage in a lengthy conversation of expression of emotions. He is a minimalist in his conversation: '"I'll do it," "Don't get wet,'" "Did you get the cat,"'" Wonder where it went to," "You look pretty darn nice," "yea?,'" Oh, shut up and get something to read" (67). This is all that George says in the story and they are all responses to his wife's words and actions. On the other hand, his wife is one with the fluids and flux of the environment. Enema is letting it all out; she is all in the flux, all the debris in the body exit; unlike George. His wife gives in to the inner chaos; she blabs. She lacks George's self-control and gives in to her inner desires; she is fluid in the story. She goes out in the rain looking for the cat, interacting with the hotel keeper. Her mind wanders, fantasizing about the hotel keeper. The reader can actually see her through the mirror when she looks at herself and also through the eyes of other characters; we can imagine how she looks, but there is not any description about how George looks. She is transparent to the reader, and we can see her inner thoughts, feelings, and inner muck. In a tantrum she says:

> ' *I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,* '. . . '*I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.*'. . .*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.. . . '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. '*(*In Our Time* 67)

That is enema ("the silly talky time") and that is not graceful, so George tells his wife to "shut up." That is shameful. In a similar passage (one of the vignettes) in *In Our Time*, Hemingway writes:

> *WHILE the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell everyone in the world that you are the only thing that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody. (In Our Time,* 33*)*

For Hemingway, to give in to the inner flux, to give in to enema and reveal inner feelings and fear is shameful. That is why the soldier does not talk about it when the event has passed. Therefore, George is demonstrating the stoic code of Hemingway to stand up gracefully under pressure.

Yet, what is the pressure in this story? To illustrate, *In Our Time* is a book about trauma. Through several characters, Hemingway shows the psychological version of trauma, the damage done to those characters during the Great War (Kazin, Kenner and Weinstein). Despite the absence of physical injuries, the characters described are nevertheless profoundly emotionally damaged. They were exposed to experiences that made them dysfunctional, distant from and untrusting of others, and misfits among those who only heard of the war in which language fails to describe the reality of war to those who were witnessing it from a safe distance. As such, whatever these characters say is deemed a lie. "Cat in the Rain" is written according to the principle of trauma laid forth in *In*

Our Time. George is like Krebs in "Soldier's Home" and Nick Adams in "Big Two Hearted River."

In “Soldier’s Home,” Krebs comes home from the war unable to fit back into his old community. He realizes out that whatever he says, he cannot make people understand what he has gone through; language breaks down and does not measure up to the experience. A gap remains between the two worlds, the world of experience of the war itself and its human cost, and the world of bluff and illusion, in which people speak of the war. Krebs could not engage in those glorifying stories told (told only by the society that had never actually experienced the war) about the war heroes and the myths and glamour of the war; he refuses to lie, and he tries to remain authentic to his experience. He thus remains silent and distant, and cannot adapt to the prewar beliefs that his society still lives by. His mom asks him to get past the war. “Don’t you think it’s about time?" she asks” (In Our Time 37)

This is a kind of war syndrome; it is having an experience that one cannot articulate. Thus, one cannot go back to the routine and to the lies, cannot go back into society. In "Big Two Hearted River," Nick Adams goes away from all human contact, away from culture into nature on a fishing trip. The story suggests he is a returning war veteran, very tired, on a therapeutic trip into nature away from people and away from complexity. In a sort of Walden Pond project, he is trying for a hearty and limpid simplicity:

> *Nick slipped off his pack and lay down in the shade. He lay on his back and up into the pine trees. His neck and back and the small of his back rested as he stretched. The earth felt good against his back. He looked up at the sky, through the branches, and then shut his eyes. He opened them and looked up again. There was a wind high up in the branches. He shut his eyes again and went to sleep. (Hemingway, “Big Two Hearted River” 74)*

Nick in the woods is similar to Thoreau in Walden Pond, where the human subject rejects culture, exits society and withdraws into the wilderness. The setting of both stories (“Cat in the Rain” and “Big Two

Hearted River") has the war looming in the background. In "Cat in the Rain", we see the beautiful scenery of the hotel on the beach and the public garden and the palm trees that "in the good weather artists like to paint it"; but we also have the war monument that people come to look at in remembrance and reverence of those whom they lost in the war, and we have the cat crouching under the table, scared to be rained upon, connoting the helpless soldier in the trenches under bombardment; and in "Big Two Hearted River," we see a description of the beauty of nature with the stream, the trees, of going to sleep outside:

> *He put a handful of coffee in the pot and dipped a lump of grease out of a can and slid it sputtering across the hot skillet. On the smoking skillet he poured smoothly the buckwheat batter. It spread like lava, the grease spitting sharply. Around the edges the buckwheat cake began to firm, then brown, then crisp. The surface was bubbling slowly to porousness. Nick pushed under the browned undersurface with a fresh pine chip. He shook the skillet sideways and the cake was loose on the surface. I won't try and flop it, he thought. He slid the chip of clean wood all the way under the cake, and flopped It over onto Its face. It sputtered in the pan. (Hemingway, "Big Two Hearted River" 81)*

This setting and the experience seem simple, but it is bristling with violence, and is also a story about a devastated setting. There is a description of "the hills of burnt timber," and, "There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country." "Even the surface had been burned off the ground" (Hemingway, "Big Two Hearted River" 71). This devastated, wasted environment indicates that this is not far away from the war and from trauma. From that we can see George, Krebs, and Nick are all very damaged by the war. Furthermore, the same kind of damage seen in "Soldier's Home" and "Big Two Hearted River" is absolutely shimmering in "Cat in the Rain," since we see the same tendency of withdrawal that punctuates Hemingway's works. This is present in Jake Barne's going on a fishing trip in *The Sun Also Rises*, and George and his wife's retreat from the old society (that does not understand the reality of war) back to where the war was. George, like the

other Italians, came from America, seeking solace in retreat (this came to be a pattern displayed by Hemingway's protagonists). Certainly George is no different in that these retreats are therapeutic, places where he can simplify his life down to the point at which he can escape, get out of the noise of what Hemingway calls "lies" in "Soldier's Home." There is no home for them in the old society, they are home only in retreat. Therefore, for George, as well as for Krebs and Nick, silence seems authentic to their experiences. In the same manner, Hemingway writes in "Big Two Hearted River":

> He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs, It was all back of him. . . . Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. (73)

From this line of thought, one can see that the text of "Cat in the Rain" suggests that George was a war veteran; he is an echo of Krebs and of Nick Adams; all of them are characters in the stories of *In Our Time*, a title coming from the biblical prayer, "Give Peace in Our Time, O Lord." George is like Krebs and Nick, a man who is trying to find some sense of security and rest, a man who is seeking peace. George echoes the sense of exhaustion and fatigue of the war veteran, and thus it resonates in the mind of the reader that there is a subtext beneath the surface, a sense of despair and disillusionment in "Cat in the Rain," the kind of disillusionment and despair that Frederic Henry expresses in *A Farewell to Arms*:

> *I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates (149).*

For Hemingway, there is a strong disillusionment about the purpose and meaning of the war. He clearly demonstrates in his works that the war was a meaningless and unnecessary sacrifice that took lives in vain. The very realization of this is traumatic enough. There is a clear sense of disillusionment, of despair and loss of confidence in those who orchestrated the war, a loss of faith in human ideals and the progressive ideology that the future will always be better than the past. There is a sense that all that was a lie, that the "so-called" human progress led up to the war, to this wasteland, a world of sterility and despair. So, Krebs' problem could be also George's problem. Thus, there is the sense in this story that these experiences of war have led to the corrosion of all feelings.

George's wife understands that despair. She is the leading subjectivity of this text. If George's way is to deal with it by being hard, tight-lipped, keeping it all in, his wife lets it all out, letting all the flux out that gives utterance to this despair. It is raining throughout the story on that afternoon and it is dark. The setting is expressive of sadness and despair; the war has just ended, and its memory and human cost are still fresh in the people's minds and hearts. They, like George, find comfort in coming to this area and looking up at the war monument. And the rain is not going to stop and it gets even darker, suggesting suffocating despair that is indicative of a lack of resolution in the story: "It was getting dark. . . .It was quite dark now and still raining" (67). George's wife wants George to get past the war (just like Krebs' Mom); she is in a sense the only voice for hope, however faint it is. She is forward-looking and seeks new fruition, potency, and some form of rejuvenation. She wants in her way to get past the war:

> Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?. . .I get so tired of it," she said. "I get so tired of looking like a boy….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. . . .Anyway, I want a cat," she said, "I want a cat. I want a cat now. (67)

This is her way of telling George to move on, to get out of this despair. She wants to settle and have a life of stability; she wants to have her own house and things of her own: "I want to eat at a table with my own silver" (67). She wants to get the war behind her and she wants a new life, a new beginning, and that is what the "spring" comes to symbolize. She doesn't want to be a "girl" anymore; she doesn't want to look like a boy, since a boy is comparable to a girl, immature, at an age of fun and games. She does not want that anymore; she wants to be a woman, a mature woman. For her, long hair is a sign of maturity and of womanhood. She wants a cat, which can be a symbol of a baby, as many readers of this story have suggested. And babies are the future of the culture. They have no memories of the war, no psychological cost; like "spring," they represent a new beginning. In her words she is trying to tell George that. She wants to move on; and like Krebs' mom, she wants George to get past the war. Yet, in a sad notation, Hemingway writes, "George was not listening" (67). And at that point, the maid knocks at the door and brings her a cat, a different cat possibly from the cat that was actually in the rain, which signifies frustration and that no matter how much she tries, she remains misunderstood. That was not what she actually had wanted. The American wife's despair in this story culminates in her trying to express that pain, in trying to move on and find security in the future. The fact that she is misunderstood does not only suggest that there are some feelings that language does not measure up to and fails to communicate, but also suggests the prevailing atmosphere of despair and sterility. It is always raining in the story, and it is always getting darker; there is not a hope for sunshine. The end of the story brings the reader back to the beginning of the story in a structural way. The story is cyclical, it ends where it begins in the public garden and with the cat, and in the war monuments where the Italians in their cars are coming back to look at the war monument:

> *His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees. . . His wife looked out of the window where the light had come on in the square. (Hemingway, "Cat in the Rain" 67)*

It is in tying the story together structurally that we understand that the war monument is actually at the center of the story, and that George and his wife are characters who also echo other couples in Hemingway's work. They echo Frederick Henry and Catherine Parker in *A Farewell to Arms* in that they both left, escaped the war, and are making their "separate peace." *A Farewell to Arms* shows a sort of fusion between these couples, the highest form of love. Catherine tells Frederick, "I want what you want. There isn't any me anymore. Just what you want…. I want us to be all mixed up. ...Why, darling, I don't live at all when I'm not with you" (101). The American wife in "Cat in the Rain" shows an affinity with Catherine Parker, with Maria in *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* and also with Lady Brent in *The Sun Also Rises* in that they all serve the needs of a traumatized man. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, when Robert and Maria are talking to each other, Maria explains the fusion, the metamorphosis that comes with love, so that the two become one. She tells Jordan how they are so much alike now that they are "so close that neither one can tell that one of us is one and not the other. Can you not feel my heart be your heart?" (266). She continues, "Now, feel. I am thee and thou art me and all of one is the other" (266). This sense of fusion in love that annihilates the lines and contours between the couples informs "Cat in the Rain," and the American wife's agony is but the utterance of despair and sterility, the pain that George's silence represents. And so, the wife takes the lead and takes over the text. This story is also echoed in *The Sun Also Rises*. George could be a version of Jake Barnes, a man who is sexually wounded: Jake was wounded in the groin during the war and thus became impotent. Thus, in a sense, George meets the criteria for Hemingway's early fictional hero who is traumatized and emasculated by the war, but who is flippant about it and attempts to be hard-boiled. The cat in "Cat in the Rain" symbolizes the baby that the wife wants. She tells George, "I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap. . . ." (67). But George could not give her that, which is symbolic of George's impotence. George parallels Hemingway's early fictional heroes: Krebs in "Soldier's Home", Nick Adam in "Big Two Hearted River" and Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*. As we come to realize, these characters are shell-shocked, wounded victims of

the war. We also come to understand that the trips that Jake, Nick and George take are a form of spiritual healing, a form of therapy.

The American wife also parallels a parade of close-cropped haired women in Hemingway's fiction. Catherine Barn in "The Garden of Eden" has her hair cut short like a boy. She tells David that, because of her cropped hair, she is a girl, but she is also a boy: " I am a girl. But now I'm a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything" (15). Maria in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* has short hair; her head was shaved like a fascist. And, Robert Jordan constantly likes to touch her hair, and every time he does Hemingway writes, "thickness come[s] in his throat" (23). Clearly, for Hemingway, a girl with short hair is a maximally erotic figure. George in "Cat in the Rain" likes his wife's short hair. When she complains about it and says, "Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?" He replies, "you look pretty darn nice" (67). For Catherine Barn and Lady Bret, from *The Sun Also Rises*, cropped hair is a kind of freedom. In fact, Lady Bret refuses to let her hair grow out and she breaks up with Romero because he wanted her to grow out her hair and look like a woman. Womanhood is associated with long hair; in fact, George's wife is referred to as a girl when she is not in the room with her husband, probably due to her boyish appearance.[2]

The American wife wants to become a woman; she wants to grow out her hair: "I get so tired of looking like a boy," she says (67). She is a representation of the entire civilization in the aftermath of the war dealing with issues of cultural despair, sterility, and of yearning and renewal.[3] And she is looking for wholeness and restoration once again. She wants a baby, symbolized by the cat in the story for which she yearns, and also in her wanting it to be spring. Both spring and the baby are symbols of a new beginning, a new start and an escape from history and the cultural failure. But George cannot give her that baby and it is not spring. When she looks out the window, she sees neither hope nor sunshine. It is only getting darker and it is still raining and the Italians are still coming to look at the war monument; the wound is still fresh. The setting is one of the inner pain becoming external. Hemingway's hero in this story as well is wounded, passive, and unable to act. The wife is the only hope in the story. She looks forward when everyone looks backward; the look at the

war monument is a look at the past, the idea of the overwhelming present-ness and inescapability of the past. When she explains that to George in her own way, "George was not listening" (67). The story ends with a sense of further despair in that no matter what she says, she will remain misunderstood; hence, the maid brings her an actual cat saying, "the padrone asked me to bring this for the Signora," which is not what she really wants.

This story also deals with the theme of the American move from innocence to experience. Hemingway refers to the wife as the American girl and the American wife. American innocence is optimism challenged by the complexity and suffering of the human experience in the old world. The American girl represents that American innocence is being replaced by knowledge, experience, and despair. The American loss of innocence occurs by entry into culture, and thus the American girl's transformation into a wife. However, one may infer from Hemingway's early war fiction that American innocence has been corrupted by its encounter with the war in Europe. This is what transpires also in Krebs, as a case in point, who loses that old time religion when his mother asks him to go back into his pre-war life: "Don't you think it's about time? She suggests, "God has some work for everyone to do," and "there can be no idle hands in His Kingdom," she further explains. " I'm not in His Kingdom," Krebs replies (37). This knowledge and understanding come as a result of having an experience that he cannot get past, implying that he was corrupted by the war in Europe and that he cannot go back to his old self.

"Cat in the Rain" was written at the time of the war and can be understood in light of Hemingway's early fiction that deals with the themes of war, trauma, love death, pain and sterility. And, Hemingway's characters in this story seek peace, as suggested in the title "Give us peace in our time O' Lord." Indeed, the early work of Hemingway affirms the claim that great writers never write about themselves, but rather they are the conduit through which the age speaks.

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[1] Carlos Baker's interpretation relied on Hemingway's own intended meaning of the story. Baker saw that this story "is derived from a rainy day (Hemingway) spent with Hadley (in) February at the Hotel Splendide in Rapallo," and the characters in the story are derived from "Hemingway and Hadley and the manager and chambermaid." Baker

further argues that the story is "based on the disintegration of Hemingway's marriage to Hadley" (Bennett 23).

2 There is a sense of sexual uneasiness in the story where the narrator shows a hint of unfaithfulness when the American girl admires the hotel keeper: "The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and bug hands. . . .the padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important." This notation was not uttered by the wife; rather, it was said to us by the narrator to expose her secret and hidden thoughts and feelings. Therefore, one might argue this spells out Hemingway's concerns about the female desires which perhaps he thinks cannot be coerced. However, one might also argue that this is just an admiration in the professional sense that he is doing a good job in maintaining his business and taking care of his clients.

3 in a sense, the American wife represents every woman in the life of a traumatized war veteran at the time. Perhaps that could be one way to account for the fact that she has no name, unlike George.