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READING HEMINGWAY'S GENDERS THROUGH JACQUES LACAN

Summary

The aim of this paper is to provide a somewhat new insight into the gender issue in a selection of Ernest Hemingway's texts from a Lacanian point of view. Hemingway's male characters, both consciously and subconsciously, assign to their women the stereotypical role of a faithful supporter, usually with no life of their own, in order to sustain an ideal image of themselves. These men use the institution of marriage or a relationship as a means of supporting their male supremacy, which leads to the female's subordination. Consequently, women are reduced to the role of a nurse or even an apprentice, while their subordinate position creates in men the feeling of power. The use of stereotypes in any type of discourse is an exercise of power or superiority over others.

Key words: Hemingway, gender, Lacanian mirror, woman-nurse, psycho-analytical criticism.

*“Wives are young men’s mistresses, companions
for middle age, and old men’s nurses” (Bacon, 2006, 1554).*

For centuries, marriage and family life tend to be viewed through a prism of gender stereotypes. The man should traditionally be the breadwinner, the strong “macho” type, the hunter, the reason, the originator and the basis of a well-structured home. Women are mothers, caretakers, and the weaker party; as such they represent what is not essential but dispensable, such as emotions and beauty, having thus stereotypically a decorative and supportive role in the family.

This traditional and narrowing definition of a person’s role in life has caused much academic discussion leading to the conclusion that gender “intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler, 2006, 6). Reducing people to stereotypes by emphasizing only one of their features means denying their uniqueness, erasing their individuality and turning them into concepts rather than accepting them for the complex human beings that they are. In other words, using stereotypes is a mere exercise of power or superiority over others. To summarize, the gender discussion has resulted in a new understanding of the issue, leaving it up to every individual to define themselves as they see (feel) fit. Accordingly, the term gender identity is defined as “an individual’s *self-conception* as being male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex” (Encyclopædia Britannica; italics mine).

Precisely because of its long-term controversy, the issue of gender identity found its way into literature. Not only the actual life, but also the world of literature have traditionally been patriarchal and male-dominated, and for a long time both texts and contexts supported a stereotypical image of women as mere caretakers. By the time Hemingway published his first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems* in 1923, women in the United States had the right to vote (which they won in 1920) and became, thereby, politically equal to men. Interestingly, America was not the promised land for Hemingway. He traded it in for France, where women had to wait until 1944 to achieve political equality. In such a “cli-

mate”, exceptional women who tried to break the patriarchal illusion by making decisions on their own typically ended up ostracized, laughed at or even proclaimed mad. Their empowered behaviour endangered the male image of themselves as the dominant sex, and it had to be contained by making these women seem eccentric and unwomanly.

It was not necessarily the writers’ decision or intention to depict women as inferior, but it resulted from what was culturally understood, implied, expected and, most of all, it resulted from how life was *lived*. Although it is understood that the writer *decides* on the issue he or she will write about, still it happens more often than not that issues are being discovered by readers. In other words, it is not exclusively the writer who intends for gender issues to be the object or subject of the text, but they are discovered as significant during the process of reception.

Gender issues dominate the Hemingway Text¹ and there have been a significant number of discussions and publications about Hemingway and his genders (Hewson, Kennedy, Spilka, Vernon). However, the objective of this paper is not to determine whether Hemingway *intended* to write about gender or whether Hemingway’s readers and critics *discovered* gender as one of the dominant issues that creatively inspired him. The aim is to provide a somewhat new insight into the issue from a Lacanian point of view by showing that Hemingway’s male characters, both consciously and subconsciously, assign to their women and wives a stereotypical role of a *nurse*, a helper, caretaker, and faithful supporter with no life of her own in order to sustain their own ideal image of themselves. The analysis will refer to Hemingway’s novels *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Garden of Eden*, the first and last of his novels, and to three short stories from the collection *In Our Time*: “Indian Camp”, “The End of Something”, and “Cat in the Rain”.

In these texts, male characters use the institution of marriage or a relationship as a means of supporting their male supremacy and female subordination in which the reduction of a woman to a nurse, helper or

1 Hemingway Text is a term used by Comely and Scholes in their book *Hemingway’s Genders. Rereading the Hemingway Text* to refer to the totality of Hemingway’s writings both published and unpublished.

even apprentice, helps the man to gain a feeling of power. The idea of Hemingway's woman-nurse is not new. In her book *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison argues that many of Hemingway's female characters are "nurses": "They are essentially the good wives or the good lovers, ministering, thoughtful, never needing to be told what the loved man needs" (1992, 81) as well as "tender helpers—with nothing to gain from their care but the most minimal wage or the pleasure of a satisfied patient" (1992, 82). And the patient is, of course, a man. By depicting women only as nurses, they are being reduced to mere "help staff" for the "important people", which are men.

While Morrison discusses the issue of "blackness", as she calls it, and not the motives and causes of the male need to dominate, Lacan's "The Mirror Stage", offers a plausible explanation of the male characters' need to have such a woman by their side. She will not contribute to their life and marriage by her distinct personality and life force, but will support the husbands' own ideal picture of themselves by serving as a "reflective surface" (Homer 24). The woman becomes a "mirror" in Lacanian sense. In describing how the ego is constructed,

Lacan insists that the ego is based on an illusory image of wholeness and mastery and it is the function of the ego to maintain this illusion of coherence and mastery. The function of the ego is, in other words, one of mis-recognition; of refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation. (Homer, 2005, 25)

In seeing their own ideal image through the reflection in the faces of their supportive female partners, the male characters get a confirmation of their superiority; they need their women to prove to them that they are real men.

To exist one has to be recognized by an-other. But this means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other. The other, then, becomes the guarantor of ourselves. We are at once dependent on the other as the guarantor of our own existence and a bitter rival to that same other. (Homer, 2005, 26)

Therefore, the marriages and relationships described in the selected texts are being used by men as a means of reinforcing their superiority by suffocating the true self of the women. The women are only supposed to reflect and nourish the male ego. They must not see themselves as equals, because that reduces the man's power. The woman must recognize her man as the leader and acknowledge him as someone stronger, smarter and abler than herself. The women-nurses, who comply because they lack the motive for self-realization, stay married and keep their man. The women, who stand up for themselves, because they refuse to be reduced to being a man's mirror-image, remain alone, and often unhappy. The same happens to women who recognize the man as their equal and wish to stay in a happy and healthy relationship of equals. This kind of mature relationship is not possible in Hemingway's stories because the men *need* to feel superior.

In *The Garden of Eden*, his last and posthumously published novel, Hemingway describes how a young woman, Marita, is brought into the Bourne marriage by Catherine, the wife. Their *ménage à trois* presents probably the most complicated relationship of all. Namely, each of the three characters has a gender problem; they are all searching for their feminine or masculine identity. Their quest ends up stereotypically, that is reaffirming both the patriarchal world order and the nurse-role that women have in it.

David and Catherine are on their honeymoon. It is a typical place of patriarchal heaven: the macho husband and the supple, sensual wife ready to satisfy his every need. She is patient and invisible throughout the day, giving him space to do his "masculine" things, fishing and writing, and she is eager and willing to please him in bed when he returns to their "cave" after his day of "hunting". However, their life in paradise ends soon because Catherine embarks on some sort of a personal quest for her gender identity, or, as Spilka puts it, because of "the painful struggle of the heroine, Catherine Bourne, to define herself creatively" (1990, 12). She refuses to be defined by her husband and starts to explore other possibilities of defining herself. She becomes more masculine and thus, in Lacanian terms, she becomes David's *rival* as she tries to play

the male role in bed and to achieve physical likeness with him: she cuts her hair short and forces him to color his hair. She insists on becoming *twins*, wants to be identical to David, most probably because she wants to become a man, “a boy”, as she says, believing that this is how she will become a “real” person, an important person, someone whose desires or hobbies are equally valid as David’s. She realizes that men can do whatever they want to do and not what is *expected* of them. Men are active and women should be passive, but Catherine decides to take things into her own hands. After each stage of the change, she and David look into a mirror as if they are looking for more than just “information” on their new looks:

Catherine stood up and looked at herself very seriously in the mirror... “I like it so much,” she said. “Too much.” She looked in the mirror as though she had never seen the girl she was looking at. (Hemingway, 1986: 81)

“So that’s how it is,” he said to himself. “You’ve done that to your hair and had it cut the same as your girl’s and how do you feel?” He asked the mirror. [...]

He looked at the mirror and it was someone else he saw but it was less strange now. (Hemingway, 1986: 84)

He looked at the face that was no longer strange to him at all but was his face now and said, “You like it. Remember that. Keep that straight. You know exactly how you look now and how you are.”

Of course he did not know exactly how he was. But he made an effort aided by what he had seen in the mirror. (Hemingway, 1986, 85)

Their transformation is obviously not just physical; they both sense the inner change in them. While Catherine becomes more self-assured as she constructs her new identity, David has a feeling that he will soon lose his. It seems that neither of them can go on without a mirror anymore, so they order one to be placed in the bar of the hotel, where they spend a lot of their time: “A bar’s no good without a mirror. [...] We’ll both get it and then we can all see each other when we talk rot and know how roddy it is. You can’t fool a bar mirror” (Hemingway, 1986, 102-103). The mirror here is both a literal and a symbolic object: they literally look into it analyzing their new looks, but symbolically it represents an omniscient being who is supposed to help them get in touch with

their own identity; they ask the mirror to tell them who they really are. In Lacanian terms, by means of a mirror they are trying to construct themselves or to form their “ego through the identification with an image of the self” (Homer, 2005, 18). In the search for her independence, Catherine exercised her masculine traits, strength and dominance over David, because she refused to be the silent partner in the marriage. She understood or felt that she needed to become more like David in order to become a full, self-realized person. As the new self emerged, the old feminine self died and Catherine, in her newly created masculine determination, decided to find a replacement for her old self. She brings David a new obedient woman because she herself cannot bear to play the nurse role anymore.

Marita is also a woman searching for her identity and trying first to get in touch with her femininity by having a female partner, Nina. She then engages in a bisexual relationship with the Bournes because she understands that she needs a man to make her a “real” woman. She tells David, “I’m glad I’m smaller. [...] I mean I thought you might like someone of my size. Or do you only care for tall girls?” (Hemingway, 1986, 98), implying not only her physical stature but also her personality—she does not mind being *smaller* than a man. She will be more supportive, whereas the tall Catherine is the subversive one. Their search for identities ends in a stereotypical way: Marita goes *straight* both literally, renouncing homosexuality, and symbolically, creating a “real” woman out of herself. She becomes David’s nurse, takes care of him and his writing, supporting thus his masculinity. She is a total opposite of Catherine who burned David’s stories about Africa, because they were an expression of his masculinity and represented a “recuperation of manly powers through artistic resistance to the hazards of androgynous adulthood” (Spilka, 1990, 3). Catherine’s strong “masculine” behavior was subversive and it emasculated David. Her desire to dominate is ultimately “punished” in Hemingway’s patriarchal world: she loses both of her lovers, a husband, a friend as well as *her mind*. A strong woman who refuses to fit into her socially constructed role, who not only challenges the “natural position” of women in a heterosexual marriage but imitates

a man, must be mad. The Bournes were in Eden as long as Catherine played the expected role. Once she decided to create her own self on her own terms, to become who she wanted to be, and not to serve as David's ideal reflection anymore, their "perfect" world, that is marriage, fell apart.

Similarly, in Hemingway's other novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, Brett Ashley tries to exercise her womanhood in the "wrong" way. She is punished by an unhappy existence in which only drinking can numb the misery caused by her inability to live in a harmonic marriage. Lady Brett Ashley is a woman who keeps the company of men; she has no female friends, and in many respects she is more of a man than the men she socializes with. Her love affairs and marriages fail because she cannot be subordinate to a man. In her first marriage, the husband used to abuse her physically and verbally, but Hemingway explains and excuses his abusive behavior by the fact that he is a sailor who probably has some sort of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and who is therefore a man in need of a woman nurse. However, Brett is not one. She refuses to live in fear and leaves her dysfunctional husband who abused her in order to relieve his frustrations and prove himself a man. Even though Hemingway only briefly refers to her first marriage, we get a distinct impression that her first husband did not try to dominate her by force merely because of his own traumas. He seems to have felt intimidated by her personality and had to keep up a superior, masculine image of himself by humiliating her, that is sadistically forcing her to sleep on the floor and continuously threatening to kill her. The marriage ends because Brett is too strong of a person to put up with any man's need to undermine her in order to prove himself a real man.

Interestingly, later on Brett volunteers as VAD during the war. This was her literal attempt to become a nurse. She ends up in a hospital where Jake Barnes is on recovery after he got wounded during the war. They immediately make a bond deeper than friendship; to a romantic reader they might seem like soul mates. However, even when she finds someone she likes, respects and loves, she renounces the position of a weaker party, of a woman caretaker. They do not get involved; she no

longer works as a volunteer nurse and starts, paradoxically, to exercise her womanhood in a totally masculine way: she drinks, is promiscuous, and watches bullfighting. She is one of the guys. Both of her men, the sadistic one and the gentle one, required her to be a nurse, and this did not appeal to Brett. She concluded that if being a woman means being a nurse, she must then behave as a man in order to have the right to be herself, to be a person and not any man's shadow.

Throughout the novel, the reader gets the impression that love between Jake and Brett is real, that they have true feelings for each other. Interestingly, Jake's literal physical impotence caused by his war injury is not what prevents them to be together as a real couple. It seems that he is figuratively castrated by Brett. She is not the type of woman to support an "illusory image of wholeness and mastery" (Homer, 2005, 25) for any man. She is very strong, almost masculine, a man-eater and it is clear to Jake from the very first moment that Brett does not intend to change for anyone. A man has to feel somewhat intimidated by such a figure and develop the fear of not being able to perform well, that is to satisfy her. For this reason he, on the one hand, masochistically lets her go with other men and even sets her up with Romero, but, on the other hand, he tries to gain some strange feeling of control over her by playing the match-maker. He becomes the confidant, someone she will always turn to for advice or comfort.

Her infatuation with Romero, the ultimate Man—a handsome, young, honorable and principled bullfighter—could have been crowned with a marriage. She is offered a chance: "He really wanted to marry me. So I couldn't go away from him, he said. He wanted to make it sure I could never go away from him. After I'd gotten more womanly, of course" (Hemingway, 2006, 246). Romero told her what a "real" woman should look like and how she should behave in order to be blessed with a happy life: she needs to have long hair, as a symbol of femininity, and always stand by her husband's side. However, this is unacceptable to Brett and, once again, she sacrifices a possibility of having a man, a husband, for something much more important: a chance to have herself. She must be the one in charge, deciding on the destiny of a relationship, which is a

purely masculine prerogative. In a patriarchal society the man leads and his woman follows, not the other way round.

Her flirt with Robert Cohn could also have ended up in a marriage, but, interestingly, she could not stand his chivalric behavior which she mistook for a display of femininity: he was constantly following her, wanting to be close to her and to make an honest woman out of her. He seemed to be too submissive and, in Hemingway's world, not much of a man. Once he was a boxer and that gave him the masculine edge he needed to survive. But now, Cohn is a person disliked by everyone. He is a Jew and a romantic, sentimental soul. He wishes to have a partner, a woman he would love and who would love him back. The implied equality of partners in the romantic relationship he envisages with Brett is outrageous to all their friends, especially because he seems to want both of them to be "feminine", that is full of understanding for the other partner and gentle to each other. In the Hemingway text, this kind of a man is not "manly enough". He is a disgrace to his gender and therefore must be ridiculed. Hemingway thus shows him to be naïve: he does not believe it to be possible that Brett could get married to someone she did not love (Hemingway, 2006, 46), even though Jake tells him "She's done it twice" (Hemingway, 2006, 47). He is always the fifth wheel in the company and they all make (cruel) jokes about him. Because of his Jewishness, naivety and his romantic ideas he is generally perceived as a character with distinctly "feminine" qualities, and in the Hemingway text this constitutes a flaw: he is not a "real" man, but inferior and weak and, as such, undesirable both as partner and friend.

Brett's "curse" is that she wants to be an equal to a strong man, but it seems that a successful marriage requires one of the partners to be subordinate. Jake, who accepts her as a person, an equal, cannot become her partner. He remains a friend. The rest of the men, who were or wish to become her partners, are either too weak (Cohn), which is unattractive for her, or too domineering (her first husband and Romero), which suffocates her true self. And that is why she must remain alone. In order to find her true self she has to detach herself from the suffocating marriage and relationships, or, in Lacanian terms, "[f]or a person

to identify themselves as an autonomous coherent self they must first distinguish themselves from others and from their social environment” (Homer, 2005, 21).

Similarly in *The Garden of Eden*, Catherine Bourne wanted a change in order to feel like a real woman, because being only David’s *wife* was not enough for her to feel like a full person. First she tried to construct her new identity by playing a role of a boy, but, of course, playing roles cannot bring real long-lasting satisfaction, fulfillment or feeling of self-realization. To define herself, she had to get out of her role and distance herself from her environment. Mark Spilka recognized this need for emancipation in Hemingway’s female characters, but has reduced it only to sexual emancipation:

Brett’s style-setting creativity becomes, in *The Garden of Eden*, the leading characteristic of Catherine Bourne, whose smart boyish haircuts, blond hairdyes and matching fisherman’s shirts and pants—all shared with her androgynous husband David—are plainly expressions of the new postwar mannishness, the new rivalry with men for attention and power, for a larger stake in the socio-sexual pie: new sexual freedoms and privileges, then, new license. (1990, 204)

It is true that both Brett and Catherine’s sexual behavior is unorthodox, but Brett’s promiscuity and Catherine’s bisexuality is not their *goal* but one of the means for personal development and full emancipation. They do not fight for sexual privileges but to become full persons, independent, self-sufficient, women who do not need to be defined by their men, and who refuse to serve as mirrors to their insecure partners.

It seems that, although Hemingway allows the women to become independent, he does not allow them to be happy and thus implies that a woman *needs* a man to be happy. In other words, there is no bliss outside a traditional, patriarchal home. What is more, for deciding to construct her own identity someplace other than in the reflection of her husband as her superior, Hemingway *punishes* a woman by madness, loneliness and unhappiness. Once a woman truly “emancipates” it seems that there is no possibility of another marriage (or relationship) in a world where

men only wish to marry a half-person, someone who will be satisfied to only serve as a helper.

This pattern can clearly be recognized in Hemingway's shorter fiction. The short story "Indian Camp" from the collection *In Our Time* is a very interesting example of male incapacity to accept their partner's female individuality. The story revolves around Nick's father, the doctor, performing a Cesarean section on an Indian woman. "She had been trying to have her baby for two days" (Hemingway, 1958, 16). At one point, the injured husband who is in the upper bunk commits suicide by cutting his throat. If we take it that people commit suicide in moments when they do not see a way out, when they feel worthless and their self-image is severely compromised, it is quite legitimate to ask what causes the feeling of inadequacy in this man at the point when his wife is about to produce an heir, a daughter or a son.

Obviously, the woman having a baby is in pain and screaming. Her screams are not just an expression of pain but also of the essence of her femininity: the women's ability to give birth is both a blessing and a curse and the magic of the moment is incomprehensible to men (unless they are doctors, as Nick's father is). Labor is a violent departure from the ideal picture of a woman interested in her man. She is much more interested in herself and the baby and there is no room for a man at that particular moment, unless the man is ready to play the role of a nurse. Of course, "[t]he men had moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke out of range of the noise she has made" (Hemingway, 1958, 16). They are not willing to participate in an event where they do not play the major role but can only stand in fear and awe of a new life being born. They cannot stand to be the helpers, the support. However, fate wanted it that the husband of the woman giving birth had been injured three days before and he is unable to run away from her screams. He must listen to her; he must endure hours and days of screaming which only emphasizes his momentary inability. His wife is unable to take care of him, not only because she is in need of nursing herself but also because she is performing a heroic deed struggling to bring new life into this world. It is the ultimate expression of her femininity and her identity making

her the strong hero; the husband is an injured weakling and he cannot bear it. Whatever their relationship might have been prior to this, and we can only guess, at this point she ceases to be the “silent partner”, both literally and symbolically. By letting her voice resonate throughout the Indian camp, she lets him know that he is not a real man. He cannot do anything to help her and he cannot go away to smoke with the rest of the men. He is emasculated and humiliated by his injury. And he does not know how to deal with fear, insecurity, and his own inadequacy, so he ends it all by killing himself.

When Nick asks his father for an explanation why the man killed himself, the doctor says: “He couldn’t stand things, I guess” (Hemingway, 1958, 19) and, importantly, adds that “not very many” men and hardly any women kill themselves. The man could not come to terms with how things turned around: he was not the center of his wife’s world, and what is worse, he was not the most important in the family, either. Nobody called for the doctor when he injured himself, whereas her suffering deserved medical treatment. This realization destroyed the image of the husband as the senior of the family in terms of priority, importance. At that moment, or for the duration of the two days of her labor, he lost his superior position and his symbolic death as the Man led to his literal death through suicide.

According to Lacan, a subject identifies himself/herself with an image in the mirror and then mis-recognizes himself/herself. To put it simply, we are not who we are but who we want to be. We do not recognize what we are but what we choose to see (mis-recognize) in the mirror. The imaginary is “at the core of our experience” because it is a “realm of identification and mirror-reflection; a realm of distortion and illusion. It is a realm in which a futile struggle takes place on the part of the ego to once more attain an imaginary unity and coherence” (Homer, 2005, 31). Clearly, the constant process of defining and redefining who we are is at the core of the texts discussed in the paper. The men would like to define both themselves (through the adoring eyes of their women) and their women (by means of the stereotypically constructed roles), whereas the

women struggle to stop being “mirrors” and to learn, decide and create for themselves who they really are.

In his book *How to read Lacan*, Slavoj Žižek discusses the impossibility to penetrate someone else’s personality, the “abyssal dimension of another human being” (Žižek, 2007, 42) and explains that we err if we believe to fully know other people, even those closest to us, because “beneath the neighbour as my mirror-image, the one who resembles me, with whom I can empathize, there always lurks the unfathomable abyss of radical Otherness, of one about whom I finally know nothing” (Žižek, 2007, 43). It could be argued that what drove the man to suicide in the story “Indian Camp” was the shocking realization that his wife had the ability to endure such excruciating pain for such a long time and the embarrassing realization that he himself could not bear such pain. The breakdown of stereotypes creates a world of uncertainty. We cannot know who others are; we are left to our own devices to construct ourselves and *learn* about others. It is a world where we are not in control of others and that is why the idea of wives “surprising” their husbands with unexpected virtues and qualities is so unsettling for Hemingway’s men.

The men, breadwinners and hunters, seek supportive, non-assertive women as their mates so that they can sustain an ideal “macho” image of themselves for life. What is more, they *deny* the possibility that their women are or could be separate individuals who may think differently or have different *desires* than their men. In the chapter on fantasy and sexual relationship, Žižek analyses a beer commercial in which a woman kisses a frog to get the man, but the man then kisses the woman to transform her into a beer bottle. The significance of the story is, as Žižek explains, in the fact that there cannot exist a “natural couple of the beautiful woman and man” (56) because the woman’s “love and affection (signaled by the kiss) turn a frog into a beautiful man, a *full* phallic presence” whereas what the man wants “is to *reduce the woman to a partial object*, the cause of his desire” (56; italics mine). Even though Žižek’s comment is undoubtedly humorous, and, as such, might be rejected by some as not “serious” enough, still the story clearly illustrates the point of women and men having different desires. While women wish to be-

come equal with men and have a real human being as a partner, men need to feel superior and would therefore be much happier with a beer bottle: an *object* of their desire.

This commercial-type of scenario is evident in all of the previously analyzed texts, but also in the story "The End of Something". The love relationship between the two major protagonists in the story, Nick and Marjorie, turned out indeed to be the institution of male supremacy over a subordinate female. Nick was very happy with Marjorie for as long as she was someone who looked up to him, who was taught to fish by him and who would listen to him as his superior. She was an apprentice and he was happy to let her in on all the secrets of fishing, an activity that defined him as a man in contrast to a girl who, as Nick believed, could never learn how to do it properly. He did not think it possible that she will indeed master all the "masculine" fishing skills and thus become his equal. Now that he has taught her everything and she knows all the things that he does, Nick does not feel the same passion anymore: "I can't help it," Nick said. "You do. You know everything. That's the trouble. ... 'I've taught you everything'" (Hemingway, 1958, 34). At this point they cannot play the pupil-teacher roles any longer. She has symbolically graduated into a real person by acquiring "masculine" knowledge and skills. This bothers Nick, because Marjorie cannot serve as his mirror anymore. He cannot look into her curious eyes reflecting an ideal image of a man who knows everything. They are now two people who know "everything".

The difference between them is in the fact that Marjorie enjoys being in a relationship of two adults, two equals, whereas Nick needs to feel superior. He therefore ends the relationship, but he does it without a real explanation. He leaves it up to her to figure out what has gone wrong and how *she* changed. She is not fun anymore, and he wants to make it seem as if it is her own fault that the relationship is over, because she tried too hard to become like him. The appeal of a helpless, naïve girl is gone and Nick does not feel man enough next to a real woman.

Even though it is Nick who wanted to break the relationship, the reader gets the impression that things end up the other way around. Mar-

jorie takes the boat and leaves the “spoiled brat” to walk home on his own, making this a real story of a woman’s emancipation. She does not show remorse or sadness; more precisely, she does not show weakness or neediness. She knows she has herself and that life will go on, even without Nick. Nick, on the other hand, feels extremely irritable, because subconsciously he expected her to make a scene, to cry or shout or beg, because he wanted her to be needy. His ideal image of himself was compromised in a relationship with a girl who knew “everything” and now, after he has left her, it is completely crushed by Marjorie’s strength and determination. His idea of regaining the upper hand by breaking up suddenly and without explanation, because a Man has the right to decide over the destiny of their relationship, has backfired. She is not left helpless, crying or insane. She does not need him to live on, but he, on the other hand, needs someone who will help him feel superior and needed. Someone he can *teach* about life. Even his friend Bill expected a scene, because that is what women do when their men leave them. But here, it is Nick who is “lying, his face on the blanket” (Hemingway, 1958, 35) as if he were crying and who needs to be left alone: “Oh, go away, Bill! Go away for a while” (Hemingway, 1958, 35). “The End of Something” thus becomes the end of many things: the end of a relationship, obviously, but also the end of an illusion. Nick is not such a strong, irresistible man after all. Marjorie is not a girl anymore; she is a woman, a *person*. In the end, the mirror is broken and the reflection of an *Übermensch* is gone. What is left is the truth and the reality of life with which a man must now learn how to cope. He must learn to love his true self as well as to love another real person, and not to be in love with the unrealistic image of his superior Self as mirrored by others.

This idea of loving one’s partner for who he or she really is, is also central to the short story “Cat in the Rain”. It is a story about an American couple in Italy, on a rainy afternoon. They are in their hotel room, George is reading and his “American wife” (we do not know her name) is looking out the window. She sees a cat hiding from the rain under a garden table and she goes to get it. Her sudden and very strong urge to get the cat is the crucial moment; it is the key that unlocks the truth to their relationship.

George is much more interested in the book than in his wife. She is of secondary importance. Although he offers to go and get the cat, he does not even look up at her. It is just a mechanical offer with no real intention behind. It is actually a dismissive gesture that serves to show how busy he is with “serious” reading while she rambles about a stray cat. The fact that the wife has no name is another proof of her insignificance in the relationship: she is George’s wife. He is the defining subject in their marriage. As she goes down, she sees the hotel owner, “an old man and very tall. [...] The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper. She liked his old, heavy face and big hands” (Hemingway, 1958, 92). The way she feels about the hotel owner tells us a lot about her. The hotel-owner took her seriously when she had complaints, wanted to serve her and he was happy with himself, with who he is. The conclusion that he is everything that George is not is somehow inevitable. The hotel-keeper does his best to anticipate her needs and to make her feel special, important. That is what good hotel personnel do; it is business and they live off of it. But it gives the wife precisely that feeling which she lacks in her marriage: “The padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important. She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance” (Hemingway, 1958, 93). The fact that they do not have children, because “they” are presumably too busy for that, that she has short hair to please George and that she has no fun whatsoever, proves that she does everything George wants. He does not recognize a real person, a woman in her. He believes that all that is good and interesting to him should be just as good, interesting and sufficient to her, too. He does not take her seriously. When she expresses a distinct desire to have a home², silver and candles, and long hair and new clothes and a cat, the reader feels it as an outcry for attention, for recognition. But George

2 This echoes a woman’s desire to have a „room of her own“, a place where she can be herself, where she does not have to play the role her husband envisages, where she can grow and construct her own identity. Also, her desire for home, traditionally a woman’s space, place of warmth, constancy and beauty, is a contrast to the hotel rooms where keep staying, which are a masculine places of business and inconstancy.

only says: “Oh, shut up and get something to read” (Hemingway, 1958, 94). He dismisses her as if she were a petulant child and then she starts to behave like one: “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” (Hemingway, 1958, 94).

The cat is a symbol of all of her needs that remain unsatisfied in this marriage. Everything is played by his rules; she can only play along or shut up. To different reader the cat may symbolize different things: a child that she wants to have, or a friend, a companion, someone to talk to, or someone who will pay attention to her. It may also be the feline, that is feminine, side to her (as opposed to the canine-male side) that she has lost or had to suppress in order to be an adequate companion to George, but now the soft, furry femininity wants to burst out of her every pore. The cat can symbolize the unfulfilled sexual desires, or warmth of a home with a fireplace and a cat sleeping in front of it. The cat’s fur might remind us of the long hair she so desperately wants to have, but that she had to have cut in order to please him.³ The cat is the whole world, a whole life she lost when she decided to become his wife and follow him to wherever he wants to go.

Hemingway refers to George’s wife also as the “American girl”, defining her thus as a young person in need of guidance. Clearly, George, as her husband, should function as her guide but that is not the case. He may be her physical guide, taking her on a European tour, but spiritually, emotionally and sexually he leaves her in the dark. He suppresses her development into a person, a woman with a name and with her own

3 The motif of forcefully cutting (women’s) hair deserves attention, perhaps in a separate discussion or paper. Long hair in women is a symbol of their femininity and by being made to cut it they are robbed of what is most feminine about them. This is an act of aggression on a woman, but also on a person. In many instances in history or literature the act of cutting one’s hair forcefully was an equivalent of raping, hurting, humiliating people. Samson lost his superhuman strength when his hair was cut off. People in concentration camps were shaved, as are still professional soldiers. While the question of hygiene comes to mind in this last instance, it seems to me that cutting a soldier’s hair is more of an act on appropriation of the soldier by the Army („You belong to us now, you are not who you were, we all look, think and act alike here.“) and a moment where he loses what was his own, something intimate and unique, which later on makes him less vulnerable in the battle, because he already lost his individuality.

desires and needs, because she must be his “girl”: silent, grateful and obedient. The term *girl* indicates that the female person in question is young, but in Hemingway Text it “signals a refusal to grow up ... Womanhood negates girlhood” (Comely and Scholes, 1994, 51), which is why *a girl* can give an adequate mirror image to her man; she is not yet a woman, a fully developed person, but someone who needs a father or a role-model to look up to. She remains therefore an anonymous girl throughout the story, but we may anticipate her awakening somewhere outside or after the story. “In Hemingway Text girls become devils when they seduce their fall guys into sexual transgressions” (Comely and Scholes, 1994, 52). This refers to Catherine Bourne, of course, but shows that most of Hemingway’s female characters deserve a different name only after they embark on the quest for the real inner self, and even then they do not become women, but *devils*.

The hotel manager is a stranger who accepts “the wife” as a real person. Ironically, she gets more satisfaction from the client-manager relationship than from her own husband. Her marriage turns out to be a prison for her as a person. George is not violent, he is not cheating on her; he finds her beautiful, but all she is to him is an object. He owns her. He makes decisions for her and decides that she should have short hair or that she should keep quiet. He is the master. Subtly, but undoubtedly, the conclusion that this marriage must fail sooner or later creeps into the reader’s mind. Maybe one cannot pinpoint a factual proof that she will want to escape, but the feeling of her being trapped is so strong that it cannot be ignored. And the moment she realizes that she is indeed trapped is also the moment of her awakening⁴.

In the final analysis, Hemingway created a world of men and women where their union, relationship or marriage may exist only in terms of female obedience and male superiority. Men who are not leaders in relationships are failures; women who are not compliant are doomed to single life. Catherine and Brett are such female characters who dared to

4 Kate Chopin’s famous novel „The Awakening“ (1899) deals with the idea of a woman who tries to find happiness outside her home, on her own. It has been highly significant socially and academically and opened up many discussions on „women’s issues“.

construct their own identity refusing to fit into their men's expectations and therefore they remain single and unhappy. We do not know what happens to Marjorie, and fortunately this allows the contemporary reader to get a positive feeling of a satisfactory ending for the female protagonist who remained single. She is young and strong and we believe in her ability to make a new start. The same goes for the American wife in "Cat in the Rain" who begins to see her situation clearly and who will probably act upon her instinct. On the other hand, Marita is a woman who decided that she must live up to the expectations and sustain the husband's ideal image of himself, sacrificing thus her own identity. In her case, this occurs out of true conviction that a "real" woman should support her husband as his silent partner. The Indian from the story "Indian Camp" is an example of a man who could not bear to live two days in the shadow of his wife's heroic pain and accomplishment, which supports Hemingway's idea of marriage as an institution functioning only when the man is the one who has the upper hand.

Whatever the society's norms and expectations, ultimately everyone can and must construct their own individual identity according to their own belief of what is right, because only finding and remaining true to one's real self can make a person happy. It seems also that the need of these male characters to reduce the woman into a mirror-image of themselves on a subconscious level (their behavior is not premeditated nor ill-intentioned, it is simply the way the "Hemingway men" function) is not necessarily "evil", if they find a woman willing to accept the arrangement in which she only serves as a means of fulfilling their desires. Here the matter of free will is crucial, because, unless it is the woman's conscious decision to obey, then, sooner or later, she will wake up and decide to leave. In cases like Marita's, when a woman *chooses* to obey, her exercise of free will serves as a proof that they too are "real" persons who just make a *choice* to serve their men. Although a legitimate choice, it seems highly unlikely that the awareness of being just a "nurse" to their men could provide women with long-term satisfaction. The story of Marita's life after five or ten years of "nursing" has yet to be told, because

this is the only relationship in the analyzed Hemingway's texts that met the requirements for a happy marriage.

“For Lacan, the ultimate ethical task is that of the true awakening” (Žižek, 2007, 60) which is why we can truly admire only those female characters who actually woke up and fought for their self-realization, even if it meant losing the “security” or convenience of a relationship or marriage.

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