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THE AMERICAN WIFE IN THE RAIN:
A READING OF HEMINGWAY'S "CAT IN THE RAIN"

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RESUMO

Apesar de ser um conto de apenas três páginas e seu autor ser conhecido por sua linguagem e estilo simples, há quase tantas interpretações de "Cat in the Rain" quanto há leitores, e isso é intencional: Hemingway era o grande defensor do que chamamos de "Teoria do Iceberg", em que "você sempre pode omitir uma parte de uma história, já que você sabe porque está sendo omitido e esta parte reforça a narrativa, fazendo com que os leitores sintam algo além do que eles entenderam" . Assim sendo, podemos dizer que esta é claramente uma história sobre sentimentos e interpretação, como o autor parecia desejar. Este trabalho propõe uma possível leitura do mesmo e irá explorar o quanto de nossas atitudes podem representar sentimentos e questões muito mais profundas do que pode parecer à primeira vista, a fim de compreender as possíveis razões para "a mulher americana" querer tanto o gato. Para evitar frivolidade, basearei essa interpretação em aspectos como o estilo de escrita de Hemingway, seu tratamento da figura feminina, a crítica acerca de suas obras, entre outros.

Palavras-chave: Hemingway, Símbolos, Teoria do Iceberg, Representações, Estado de fuga, Leituras divergentes.

ABSTRACT

Although it is only a three page short story and its author is known for his plain language and style, there are almost as many interpretations of "Cat in the Rain" as there are readers of it, and this was intentional: Hemingway was the great proponent of what we call "The Iceberg Theory", in which "you can always omit a part of a short story, since you know why it is being omitted and this part reinforces the narrative, making that the readers feel something beyond what they understood". Therefore, we can say that this is clearly a short story about feelings and interpretation, as the author himself seemed to desire. This paper proposes a possible reading of it and will explore the concept of how much our attitudes can represent deeper feelings and issues than we may be conscious in the first place, in order to understand the possible reasons for "the American woman" wanting the cat so much. To avoid frivolity, I will base this interpretation on other aspects, such as Hemingway's writing style, his treatment of the feminine figure, the way critics usually analyze his works, among others.

Key words: Hemingway. Symbols. Iceberg Theory. Representations. Fugue state. Divergent readings.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Cat in the rain" is an indeed *short* story – only three pages long – and outwardly simple, since it revolves around an ordinary situation. Furthermore, its author is known for his "simple, direct and somewhat plain style, characterized by simple sentences and few adverbs or adjectives" (COOPER, 2005).

Even though, this story has many different and controversial readings. There is even a story by Vila-Matas that plays with this situation. The author states that "I read it and didn't understand anything, really nothing of what happened in it"[1] (VILA-MATAS, 2003, p. 22) and asks the audience in a lecture that he is ministering to tell him how they have interpreted it. The readings were many and diverse:

> 1) The story reminded another one also by Hemingway in which he spoke of white elephants and in fact the secret history was about the woman's pregnancy and her quiet desire to abort. 2) The short story seemed to be talking about the sexual dissatisfaction of the young woman, which leads her to desiring a cat. 3) The story actually only portrayed the dirty atmosphere of an Italy that had just emerged from a war in which they had required the help of the Americans. 4) The story described the boredom after coitus. 5) The recently married woman was tired of having her hair cut "à la garçonne" in order to satisfy the homosexual desires of her husband. 6) The recently married woman was in love with the hotel owner [2] (VILA-MATAS, 2003, p. 22).

[1] My translation. The original reads: "Yo lo leí y no entendí nada, pero es que nada, de lo que pasaba en él".

[2] My translation. The original reads: "1) El relato recordaba a otro también de Hemingway en el que se hablaba de elefantes blancos y en realidad la historia secreta era la del embarazo de una mujer y su deseo callado de abortar. 2) El cuento parecía estar hablando de la insatisfacción sexual de la joven, que era lo que la llevaba a desear un gato. 3) El cuento en realidad sólo retrataba la sucia atmósfera de una Italia que acababa de salir de un conflicto bélico en el que habían precisado la ayuda de los norteamericanos. 4) El relato describía el tedio después del coito. 5) La recién casada estaba cansada de llevar el pelo corto a lo garçon para así satisfacer los deseos homosexuales de su marido. 6) La recién casada estaba enamorada del dueño del hotel".

Naturally this is just an example of the irony this author is known for, but this story is actually a perfect representation of the range and variety of readings of "Cat in the Rain". Many critics, for example, say the story is about "pregnancy or wanting to be pregnant" or "a ruining marriage", others say it has a biographic element – it would have been written while Hemingway's wife was pregnant - and several of these critics defend that the rift between the husband and the wife *is what the story is essentially about*. Even in the North-American Literature class in which I first got in touch with this short story the opinions were very divergent: most of the students – mainly girls, I must add – defended that the story is about a spoiled girl wanting frivolous things (long hair, new clothes, silver), whereas some other students - including me – defended that these wishes had no end in themselves, they were the representation of deeper issues.

From my very first reading, it was clear for me that the main relation in this story is *between the woman and the cat*; the cold treatment between husband and wife was also very important, but certainly not the most important thing. After all, why did the American woman want that cat so much? How could other people have such different – and hostile - readings of this story?

In brief, all this diversity and controversy revolving "Cat in the Rain" was extremely intriguing for me, since interpreting it as a story based on the outburst and the identification between the woman and the cat was so natural that it was quite astonishing hearing such different interpretations of it.

This work is the result of this astonishment, since it intends to prove and propose a reading based on the conviction that the main relationship in the story is between the woman and the cat, and that the desire of the American Woman for it goes much beyond a mere whim, it indicates much deeper longings, hidden until that moment in the blurred recondite in which the secrets we keep from ourselves are buried.

In order to prove my point and render this reading propose clearer and tightly grounded, I considered it to be necessary to bring to the discussion elements concerning the author and extrinsic and intrinsic matters concerning the story. Thus, this work is structured in four sections: the first one regards information about Hemingway and his concept of writing and Literature and is structured in three subchapters: the first revolving his writing style, known for being lean but extremely measured; the second one over his "Iceberg Theory" – to which the majority of our interpretation questionings can be accounted -, and the last one concerning how extensively his reporter career has influenced his literary style.

In the second section – also divided in three subchapters - the focus is on facts external but relevant to the short story, like the American Modernism; the Rain seen as a symbol in the story and, lastly, one of the most controversial issues when talking about Hemingway: his treatment of the feminine figure.

In the third section – divided in two subchapters-, I offer and overview of the criticism on Hemingway; firstly on his works in general and secondly the discussion on their interpretation of "Cat in the Rain" in particular, this latter paving the reading proposal and interpretation I defend.

In the fourth and last section – again divided in three subchapters – we have the expansion of this reading proposal, with questions revolving over the identification of the woman and the cat, the function of the cat in the story and the discussion of whether there is one or two cats in the story.

Lastly, it is not my intention to offer an end to the doubts raised by "Cat in the Rain". After all, as the old lady in Vila-Matas' story says, "And if the short story is like this and period? And if there's nothing to interpret? Perhaps the story is completely incomprehensible and therein lies its beauty"[3] (VILA-MATAS, 2003, p. 23). Of course I do not consider it to be "incomprehensible" and I believe there are *several* features to interpret, but I do think that a great deal of all the beauty we find not only in "Cat in the Rain" but in Hemingway's works in general lies in the doubts and divergent readings they raise, in the impossibility of proclaiming a definitive reading. Therefore, this reading is in no way definitive, but the defense of the interpretation and feelings this story awakened in me from the very first moment.

[3] My translation. The original reads: "Y si el cuento es así y punto? Y si no hay nada que interpretar? Tal vez el cuento es del todo incomprensible y ahí radica su gracia".

2. THE AUTHOR AND HIS CONCEPT OF WRITING AND LITERATURE

2.1 Hemingway's Writing Style

It is common sense that Hemingway's style is simple and direct, and some critics say this simplicity goes "even to the point of monotony" (WARREN, 2005, p. 44). However, despite this apparently simple nature, interpretation of Hemingway's stories is not in any way obvious or simple; and this is one of the most fascinating contradictions about them.

Concerning his usual subjects,

> They are usually violent. […] Even when the situation of a story does not fall into one of these categories [hard-drinking, sexually promiscuous behavior, the chaotic and brutal world of war, the world of sport or crime], it usually involves a desperate risk, and behind it is the shadow of ruin, physical of spiritual. As for the typical characters, they are usually tough men, experienced in the hard worlds they inhabit, and not obviously given to emotional display of sensitive shrinking. […] Or if the typical character is not of this seasoned order, he is a very young man, or boy, first entering the violent world and learning his first adjustment to it (WARREN, 2005, p. 29).

"Cat in the Rain" is an exception in the scope of themes, but an excellent representative of his style. In this short story, as in many others, we deal with what Hemingway called "The Iceberg Theory"[4], based on which we can conclude that the author wanted us to have doubts and questionings. Because much is left unsaid, the reader does not find many hints on which to support possible readings, like authorial remarks, adjectives and adverbs or speech tags.

There are characteristics in his literature that lead us as far as painting and engineering. Concerning the former, Hemingway himself tells the reader about how Cézanne influenced his work: "I was learning something from the painting of Cézanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough to make the stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put in them" (Hemingway, 2004, p. 8). On the latter, we have Cecelia Tichi explaining how his writing relates to engineering:

[4] A theory created by Hemingway, defending that in a history "the form came from what you choose leave out". Consequently, the meaning of the story is not immediately clear, since, as an iceberg, the core issue lies below the surface. Will be seen in more depth in the subsequent subchapter.

> Hemingway enacted the values of engineering in his tight functional prose. His was the efficient modern style for which Ezra Pound had argued. In the era of the antiwaste Efficiency Movement Hemingway's terse, economical lines brought engineering values into the very sentence itself. He reduced the sentence to its essential, functional components. The famous Hemingway style was essentially the achievement, in novels and stories, of the engineer's aesthetic of functionalism and formal efficiency (TICHI apud FLORA, 1989, p. 5).

Arthur Waldhorn (2022) has much to add on this issue, explaining how the absence of many features in the author's work is intentional and significative:

> His adjectives and adverbs are sparse and relatively unspecific. What delights is usually *fine, swell, lovely, very nice*, or *very good*; what appalls may be *rotten* or *dammed awful*. That they are trite in no way renders them impersonal or ineffectual. Even when trite, the vernacular may suggest deeply felt emotion without wholly revealing all that is felt (p. 35).

We can see this very clearly in "Cat in the Rain". In the first paragraph, for example, Hemingway writes "It was raining". That is it, we have no idea of what kind of rain it is: a drizzle or pouring rain, if he had not said "water stood in pools on the gravel paths" shortly after, we would only know that "it was raining". There are indeed few adverbs in the text and most of them are adverbs of place, like "the wife went downstairs" and "she was under their window"; there are also some adverbs of intensity, but they are very unspecific: "very tall" and "something felt very small and tight inside the girl". Other kinds of adverbs – more significant ones, like adverbs of manner – are very rare.

Concerning adjectives, we have even fewer examples, and this way each adjective acquires greater signification. The first paragraph is an exception, with several adjectives, like "big palms", "good weather" and "bright colors", but they are not very significant to our understanding and reading of the short story. It almost looks like Hemingway is playing with the reader, putting adjectives where it does not make such a difference. The only case of a more significant use of an adjective in this paragraph full of them is "Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the *empty* square". This *empty* gives the reader the dimension of the isolation and loneliness of the American couple. In the subsequent paragraphs, however, there are very few examples of it, and most of them are generic. The paragraph dedicated to the American wife's opinion on the hotel manager is another exception, given that we find several adjectives in it, like the "deadly serious way he received

any complaints" and "his old, heavy face and big hands". These adjectives are relevant to the extent which they call our attention to the fact that what the wife probably likes this man so much for the image of protection he transmits – a sensation she seems to miss in her marital life.

After the wife returns to the room after her frustrated attempt of getting the cat, a few additional adjectives appear. One of them, possibly the most forceful and meaningful one in the entire short story is *poor* – "it isn't any fun to be a poor kitty out in the rain". This adjective gives the reader the dimension of how the wife feels about the cat, not only how sorry she feels for it, but also – and primarily – how able she is to put herself in the cat's place, since if she were not, she would not to know how it feels to be a "poor kitty in the rain" – it "isn't any fun". If adjectives and adverbs are rare in the text, nouns are abundant. "The wife", "the husband", "the cat", all characters are identified by common nouns ("the husband" is the only one named in the story – George). According to Levin (apud Waldhorn, 2002), there is an explanation for this: "It is the noun […] that Hemingway emphasizes because nouns "come closest to things. Stringing them along by means of conjunctions, he approximates the actual flow of experience" (p. 35) Consequently, by using mainly nouns Hemingway approximates the facts in the story to the way facts unfold in "real life", favoring, subtly but effectively, a closer identification between reader and characters. Waldhorn (2002) confirms this, emphasizing the importance of this "everyday speech", this simulacrum of real life: "For Hemingway the brusque understatement of everyday speech […] is the most efficient way to communicate emotional truth"

Another relevant and noticeable feature of Hemingway's writing style is the straightforwardness of the speech tags. They are always as direct as "he said", "she said", "he asked", with no kind of complement that would allow the reader to be certain of the character's feelings. If Hemingway had said, for example, "Anyway, I want a cat", she said *tearfully* or, if he had added a significant speech tag to the moment the wife said "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", the reader would be able to interpret more assuredly the feelings engaged in this outburst, he/she would have more lanes in this interpretive endeavor. As Waldhorn states, "In Hemingway's dialogue as in his narrative prose, the testimony of feeling is conspicuously minimal. Speech tags are cut to "he said", "she said" or omitted altogether. To talk about an emotion is bad form" (WALDHORN, 2002, p. 36).

All this "plainness" in style is not only meant to induce the reader to a more attentive and personal reading of facts and dialogues, but also related to the way the characters themselves deal with their feelings. Still according to Waldhorn (2002), "Because Hemingway's characters dare not fully release their feelings, their unemphatic language communicates feeling without having to define it too explicitly"; and this can be seen in a very clearly in "Cat in the Rain*"*: the American wife is probably facing all those wantings and (repressed) feelings for the first time, that is, she herself does not know yet how to deal with all of this, all these feelings are still being exteriorized in a stream, without deeper awareness of their meaning. This "unemphatic language" is, then, a way of communicating more truthfully all this difficulty in facing, understanding and dealing with these "sudden" feelings. This can be seen clearly in "Cat in the Rain*"* when the American wife comes back to the couple's room after failing to find the cat, and she tells George – and herself: "I wanted it so much," she said. "*I don't know why* I wanted it so much. I wanted that poor kitty" (my emphasis). Demonstrably, she does *not* know yet why she wanted this kitty so much, why the sudden importance of an animal that was not even familiar to her; she is still trying to signify all that to herself and her language accompanies this unawareness.

Having said this, we can conclude that Hemingway's aim was not to *tell* the reader about feelings and reactions, but to give him facts and actions, so that he could draw *his own* conclusions, making his own inferences, having to think over the dialogues and the few explanations given. Furthermore, by not making comments or making direct statements about feelings, each word acquires a greater and deeper significance, and the reader has no option but to look closer at each of them, looking for the clues that the author has not given us. Equally important, by "striping away whatever obscures the object that evokes feeling" (WALDHORN, 2002, p. 34) the readers have to create *their own* significances, without interferences. Moreover, the readers create a *closer relation to the characters,* putting themselves in their places, having to understand and interpret the significances and motifs hidden below the surface of each dialogue by looking closely to the characters and relating to them. After all, how many times does the reader himself, as a human being, pronounce an apparently simple sentence meaning way more than it appears? How many of our sentences are simple merely because we have not realized the profundity of certain feelings?

This seems to be the case in "Cat in the Rain". The American Wife does not seem to be aware of how deep and desperate her feelings are, and how all of her "disconnected

wantings" are actually the representation of a disconnected and confusion life and the desperation she feels because of it.

After taking notice of all of these characteristics, it becomes evident that Hemingway's characteristically simple style *is not a sign of carelessness,* since many readers – and critics - confuse the simplicity of form with simplicity or plainness of meaning.

2.2 The Iceberg Theory

After concluding in the previous chapter that Hemingway's simple style was intentional and meaningful, we can go further, discussing the inherent root of all of that: the Iceberg Theory. As Zhang explains, "Succinct words, deeply implied expression and symbolic technique perfectly epitomize Hemingway's iceberg theory" (2008, p. 52).

Hemingway did not keep this "a secret" for the readers; on the contrary, he talked about this feature several times. The first time he brought up this matter was in *Death in the afternoon,* published in 1932, in which he states that

> if a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water" (Death in the afternoon, p. 154).

Consequently, if "only one-eighth of it is above water", the other seven-eighths are under it, beneath the surface, *waiting for the reader to discover them.*

In another work, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), we have the main character, the writer David Bourne affirming that "the form came by what he would choose to leave out", which was also the author's opinion, as we can see in "The Art of the Short Story"[5], an essay written by Hemingway in 1959:

[5] This essay was not published before "Ernest Hemingway – a Study of the Short Fiction", by FLORA, Joseph M, 1989.

> A few things I have found to be true**.** If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened. If you leave out or skip something because you do not know it, the story will be worthless. The test of any story is how very good the stuff is that you, not your editors, omit (apud FLORA, 1989).

Besides this way of giving strength to his prose, I believe Hemingway was also concerned with compelling the reader to give a more attentive look at the details in his works, looking beyond what was written, what lay on the surface. In works like these we do not only make several readings in order to understand them, but also each reading carries a new significance, especially when some time has passed since the previous one. In "Cat in the Rain", for example, we will never stop finding new details and significances, resignifying them after each new reading, after each new understanding of the complexity hidden in such a *short* story. Hemingway once said "The stories where you leave it all in do not re-read like the ones where you leave it out" (apud FLORA, 1989, p. 140), and he was undoubtedly right.

Therefore, we can only conclude that the Iceberg Theory is the ultimate argument that the simplicity of form in Hemingway's style may no longer be confused with plainness of meaning**.**

2.3 Hemingway's Journalism and Literary Writing

In spite of hearing from his friend Gertrude Stein an advice to quit journalism, since "newspaper work could be dangerous for the serious literary aspirant" and having always said that the only reason for doing journalism was the money, it is almost and unanimity among critics[6] that Hemingway's newspaper work has not only helped shaping his style but also given him a lot of writing material.

He has begun his newspaper career early, while still in High School, in *The Trapeze*, the Oak Park High School's student newspaper. After graduating from High School, he started working as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. When he started working there, *The Star* had already implemented their "Style Sheet", in which 110 rules specified how their reporters should write, how good writing should look like. It does not appear to be a coincidence that the three first rules *were* "Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs.

[6] See DEWBERRY, 1996; FLORA, 1989 and SILVEIRA, 1969, for example.

Use vigorous English" and that "Eliminate every superfluous word" and "Avoid the use of adjectives" were also among them. Hemingway himself admitted that "those were the best rules he had ever learned for the business of writing" (apud TYLER, 2001, p. 16).

As early as in his first actual job in *The Kansas City Star* Hemingway was already giving evidence that he was not there only to follow the rules. In many articles he tested the limits of language and clearly contested the exact report of truth, writing articles that were full of subjectivity and personal touches.

It is relevant to point out that "by the time Hemingway had established himself as a journalist and fiction writer, scholars of journalism had began openly to question whether it was possible for a journalist to portray reality truthfully" (DEWBERRY, 1996, p. 19). Therefore, Hemingway probably started realizing that truth is not something static and exact as it was considered before, but also a matter of *who* was telling the story. In an article named "Battle of Raid Squads", for example, concerning the shooting of two government officials, he closes the text giving the reader two conflicting eyewitness accounts of the story, without evaluating them.

> Both stories sound credible, and both are told by government officials, presumably reliable narrators. Yet the facts of the first version contradict those of the second, indicating Hemingway's awareness that truth and accuracy are relative terms, dependent on the perspective of the speaker (apud DEWBERRY, 1996, p. 20).

Besides showing the awareness of the subjectivity of truth, I believe that by simply putting these two conflicting versions there, making it clear that they were of two "reliable sources" and not making any further comment in order to evaluate them, such as saying which witness was right or wrong, Hemingway was trying to raise this same awareness on his readers.

In addition, in other articles we see a closer relation between journalism and literature, like in "At the End of the Ambulance Run", for example, about a victim of a street brawl named George Anderson, in which he wrote:

> No one knew who he was, but a receipt, bearing the name of George Anderson, for $10 paid on a home out in a little Nebraska town served to identify him.
>
> The surgeon… [said], "Well, George, you're not going to finish paying for that home of yours" (HEMINGWAY, Cub Reporter 28, apud DEWBERRY, 1996, p. 21).

In this article, we see clearly his desire of portraying reality in a more subjective way, focusing on the human side, "to call attention to the inherent subjectivity, even fictionality, of any supposedly objective report" (DEWBERRY, 1996, p. 24)

We can understand this pushing the boundaries between what is supposedly objective/journalistic language and what literature is as attempt at understanding how far he could go in this relation, how high the boundaries between them were.

Further in his career, we can conclude that he considered them pretty subtle, since despite of having said once that

> The journalistic material written by me ... has nothing to do with the other works, which are entirely apart. The writer's primary right is to choose what he will publish. If a person earns his living as a journalist, learns his profession, writing against the clock and in the nick of time, he strives to ensure that his prose is more opportune than permanent, nobody else has the right to exhume this prose […][7] (HEMINGWAY apud WHITE, 1969, p. 1)

he used many of his journalistic work as inspiration – or even their entirety – in fiction work.

Inspiration and more subtle influence can be seen, for example, in *For Whom the Bells Tolls*:

> At least one technique he employs throughout *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, that of substituting obscenities with words such as "unprintable" and "unspeakable", has its origin in the NANA dispatches. More important, it was while writing the NANA

[7] My translation. The original reads: "o material jornalístico por mim escrito... nada tem a ver com as outras obras, que são inteiramente à parte. O primeiro direito que cabe a um escritor é a escolha daquilo que publicará. Se uma pessoa ganha a vida como jornalista, aprende a sua profissão, escreve contra-relógio e em cima da hora, esforça-se a fim de que sua prosa seja mais oportuna do que permanente, ninguém mais tem o direito de exumar essa prosa [...]

> dispatches that Hemingway acquired the understanding of the war that provides the psysical, intellectual, and emotional context for every character and action in *For Whom the Bells Tolls* (DEWBERRY, 1996, p. 31).

In other works, on the other hand, he retrieves previously published journalistic reports in full as fiction:

> 'Italy, 1927', a concrete reporting of an automobile trip through Spezia, Genova and fascist Italy, published originally in *The New Republic* (may 18, 1927) as pure journalism and after used as a short story in *Men Without Women* (1927) under a new title, 'Che Ti Dice la Patria', and in *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938) […] 'Old Man at the Bridge', telegraphed as report from Barcelona and published in Ken (may 19, 1938) and also included in the *First Forty-Nine Stories*, without even changing the title […] 'The Madri Drivers', correspondence dispatched originally in may 22, 1937 by *North American Newspaper Alliance* (NANA) to the subscribers of its foreign service and included by Hemingway in *Men at War* (1942), work edited under the subtitle *The Best War Short Stories of All Time*s (WHITE, 1969, p. 2). [8]

In another case, he converted journal articles into short stories: "At least twenty-five *Toronto Star* articles are directly echoed in *In Our Time*, and the jacket and inside covers of the first *In Our Time* – montages of newspaper clippings about currents events and trivia – served as another reminder of this connection" (DEWBERRY, 1996, p. 25).

As we can see, not only real life and non-fiction had a great influence in his fiction, but probably fiction had a great influence in the way Hemingway saw real life, in a continuous cycle of resignification.

[8] My translation. The original reads: "Itália, 1927', um relato concreto de uma viagem de automóvel através de Spezia, Gênova e Itália fascista, publicado originalmente em *The New Republic* (18 de maio de 1927) como puro jornalismo e depois, usado como conto em *Men Without Women* (1927) com um novo título, 'Che Ti Dice la Patria', e em *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938) [...] 'O Velho na Ponte', telegrafado como notícia de Barcelona e publicado em *Ken* (19 de maio de 1938) e também incluído nas *First Forty-Nine Stories*, sem mesmo alterar o título [...] 'Os Motoristas de Madri', correspondência expedida originalmente em 22 de maio de 1937, pela *North American Newspaper Alliance* (NANA) aos assinantes do seu serviço estrangeiro [...] e que foi incluída por Hemingway em *Men at War* (1942), obra que foi editada com o subtítulo *Os Melhores Contos de Guerra de Todos os Tempos*".

3. EXTERNAL FACTORS

3.1 American Modernism

The factors that contributed to modernity in literature, or to the "modernist sensibility" in America, of which Ernest Hemingway is one of the finest examples, began to occur immediately after the civil war. At this time, several other important factors started to take place, since "The last two decades of 19th century in Europe as well as in America were decades of large intellectual changes. The American society, in particular, moved in the direction of technolization, urbanization, and secularization" (MESHRAM, 2002, p. 5). World War I was considered "the final stroke", hastening this process of change to faster speed. All these changes were felt very intensively by the generation of thinkers and artists whose works appeared in the 1920s. (MESHRAM, 2002, p. 5)

In Our Time, the collection of short stories in which "Cat in the Rain" was included, was published in 1925, just a few years after the end of World War I (1914 – 1918). This has influenced not only those living at the time, but the following generations as well. Hemingway not only witnessed this war period, but participated effectively of it, since early in 1918 he responded to a Red Cross recruitment effort and signed on to be an ambulance driver in Italy. He was only eighteen years old and the experiences he went through participating in the war were very striking for him. About this experience, he commented years later:

> When you go to war as a boy you have a great illusion of immortality. Other people get killed; not you… Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion and you know it can happen to you. After being severely wounded two weeks before my nineteenth birthday I had a bad time until I figured out that nothing could happen to me that had not happened to all men before me (apud PUTNAM, 2006).

The cited wound was serious and he spent six months in hospital to recover from it. According to Meshram (2002), Hemingway offered an effective picture of this period – in general, not only revolving his wound - in two collections of stories – *In Our Time* (1925) and

Men without Women (1926). Nevertheless, this experience appears to have injured him more profoundly, since signs of it appear in his literature in many other works, leading to a "Wound Theory"[9].

All these situations prompted the emergence of the so-called Lost Generation, "constituted by poets, lovers and lunatics" (MESHRAM, 2002, p. 3) According to the critic, this lost generation underwent the traumatic experience of the war, the loss of religious faith, the rapid urbanization which shattered institutions such as family and marriage, the oncoming world of science which blew up the old myths and superstitions and the economic depression, and this has created great nonconformity in them.

Meshram (2002, p. 3) continues: "The young sensitive minds find it intolerable to exist". In fact, in reaction to their experience in the war, Hemingway and other modernists lost faith in the central institutions of Western civilization (PUTNAM, 2006). One of the most frequent responses to this general sense of cultural dislocation was *expatriation*. Artists like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway were some of the writers and poets who left for Europe. "From the twenties into the forties, Paris was at least as important an American artists' colony as New York" (MINTER, 1988, p. 851). Hemingway has lived for some years with his wife Hadley in Paris. It was there, by the way, that he wrote *In Our Time*. According to Stewart (2001, p. 12), "*In Our Time* is the culmination of Hemingway's literary apprenticeship in Paris, a time when he had nothing to lose professionally."

Among the "central institutions of Western civilization" in which modernists lost faith that time was literature. More than ever before, "nothing was more fundamental to American art than its opposition to previous culture and *status quo* society" (MINTER, 1988, p. 845). Thus, literature became a way of expressing their dissatisfaction with "America's failed dreams" and artists responded by either dramatizing the emptiness of words or trying to return language "to a perfect connection to things" (MINTER, 1988, p. 862). Hemingway has chosen the latter option, creating a new style of fiction in which he avoided telling the reader everything directly. Rather, he "established meaning through dialogue, through action, and silences—a fiction in which nothing crucial—or at least very little—is stated explicitly."

[9] Wound theory – theory defended by Young, proposes that Hemingway's life and art has been profoundly motivated by his wound in World War I. (Seen in more depth in chapter 4.1)

(PUTNAM, 2006) For Hemingway, good fiction was way more than a mere mimicry of the world, thus his aim was to achieve veracity and truth.

At the same time, women were digging their place into the work force. According to Minter (1988), women entered the urban work force in substantial numbers in the first four decades of the twentieth century. In 1880, for example, only 4 percent of all employed women worked in offices, while the remainder were concentrated in agriculture. By 1890 this percentage had grown to 20 and thirty years later, women represented nearly 50 percent of all bookkeepers and accountants, and over 90 percent of all typists and stenographers. These new forms of employment had a great effect on women's lives. They became more independent and began definitely to fight for their rights.

"Cat in the Rain" reflects many of these changes in lifestyle. The fact that the couple was traveling - notably not on vacation, since the hotel was completely empty and they were facing the rainy season - and did not have a permanent address are tangible signs of expatriation. Besides, the American woman's haircut "a la garçonne" is a remarkable sign of women's quest for equality at the time. As Modernism's main characteristic was the widespread desire of "breaking with the past" (MINTER, 1988, p. 695), conservative desires like having "a house, own silver, candles, long hair and a mirror in front of which to brush it" started to be considered "outdated" and even treated with prejudice.

Sensitive to the changing times, Hemingway artfully has the American couple leading what was considered a more liberal lifestyle for the times, but instead of showing approval or disapproval of it, the story simply problematizes desires that might have been left unacknowledged and leaves readers to find their own conclusions.

3.2 The Rain as Symbol

Jean Chevalier's *Dicionário de Símbolos* describes rain as being representative of both material and spiritual fertilization. The author explains that, being an agent of soil fertilization, rain is universally related to the fertilization of body and spirit. They even point out that, according to Amerindian traditions, rain is *the seed* of the god of the storm –

understood here in its sexual connotation, since "in the Heaven-Earth hierogamy, rain is the sperm that fertilizes" [10] (p. 236, my emphasis).

Such a definition could lead us to interpreting "Cat in the Rain" as critics such as Barbour, Coulthard and V. Hagopin have (see chapter 4.2 for further details), agreeing with their thesis that this story's gist is the desire of having a baby. However, Hemingway himself said once that "No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in it" (apud WALDHORN, 2002, p. 38). If this was his belief, why would he write a story based on an entirely literal reading of the symbology of the rain?

Waldhorn (2002) explains this apparent contradiction: "Hemingway does not use symbols like a 'symbolist'. Rather than *artificially* impose intellectual significance *from without,* he allows his meaning to emerge *from within*" (my emphasis). Waldhorn quotes Bern Oldsey to complete his plea "Hemingway never practiced the symbolic or mythic overlay. His images and symbols are organic, interior, naturalistic; almost always they come out of the fictional context" (p. 38).

If in Hemingway's works meaning emerges "from within", what would be the inward meaning of the rain in "Cat in the Rain"?

In this reading proposal, in this short story rain is deeply and intrinsically related to *loneliness, isolation and melancholy*. In passages like "Across the square in the doorway of the café a waiter stood looking out at the *empty* square" and "A man in a rubber cape was crossing the *empty* square to the café", we notice Hemingway's attempt of expliciting the isolation of the American couple. In this case this extreme isolation is a result of the rain, which keeps people in their homes, out of the streets. If there was good weather there would be people in the square, "artists with their easels" and "Italian tourists", and this would diminish – at least for the reader - this sense of apartness and solitude.

Rain is here also related to the connection the American wife feels between herself and the kitty, issue that will be treated more thoroughly in chapter 4.3. If there was not rain in this short story, there would be no reason to feel sorry for the cat and consequently there would not be no trigger for her epiphany.

As we can see, there are several indications that *rain* is a capital feature in this short story for internal construction of meaning, conclusion that clarifies how it is not even

[10] My translation. The original reads: "Na hierogamia Céu-Terra, a chuva é *o esperma* que fecunda".

remotely an obvious symbol of fertility or the lack of it. As Hemingway said once, not everything in fiction is necessarily a symbol:

> If a broad comes into a story in the first paragraph, she must reappear later to justify her original presence. This is untrue, gentlemen. You may dispense with her, just as in life. It is also untrue that if a gun hangs on the wall when you open up the story, it must be fired by page fourteen. The chances are, gentlemen, that if it hangs upon the wall, it will not even shoot. If there are no questions, shall we press on? A question? Yes, the unfireable gun may be a symbol. That is true. But with a good enough writer, the chances are some jerk just hung it there to look at (apud FLORA, 1989, p. 132).

Besides, would Hemingway really bother with all the construction of the short story (seen in more depth in chapter 4), construction that calculatedly incites multiple and diverse readings, if the entire resolution of it were contained in such a didactic and obviate interpretation of a symbol?

3.3 Hemingway's Treatment of the Feminine Figure

In his private life, Hemingway has always been known for having very masculine tastes, hunting, fishing, bullfighting and boxing are among them, and for having a very active sentimental life: he was married to four different women. These features, allied to his so-called male themes in literature and his public displays, have made critics and scholars designate him "Papa Hemingway", and made him "synonymous with a stereotypical notion of masculinity" (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 170). That is how most people and critics saw him: as a rough man, or, as he was many times called, a "man's man".

As many times it is difficult to separate a man's preferences in life from the way his literary work is interpreted, all these features also led to "an accusation of male chauvinism hang over the man and his work" (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 170)

From "the very beginning of his career", says Sanderson, "critics made an issue of 'the masculinity' in his writings. […] Critics of the novels declared that Hemingway could not depict women or that he was better at depicting men without women." Later, he continues, it became common for them "to divide his fictional women into either castrators or love-slaves,

either “bitches” or helpmates – the simplicity of the dichotomy presumably mirroring Hemingway’s own sexist mind-set” (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 171).

The influence of this line of interpretation became heavier for Hemingway with the rise of the women’s movement in the 1960s and of feminist criticism in departments of literature, the moment in which he saw himself converted into Enemy Number One for many critics, who accused him of perpetuating sexist stereotypes in his writing (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 171).

Furthermore, it is worth to notice that the conventional use of the masculine pronoun by critics before the advent of feminism to refer to Hemingway’s characters in general and more specifically to talk about the Hero Code as, for instance: “What makes *a man a man* […]”, “the code asks of *a man* that *he* try to impose meaning where none seems possible […]”[11] has probably greatly influenced the reception of Hemingway’s works, since this gives the impression that Hemingway is only concerned about “male heroes”, which is not the case, as will be discussed next.

Despite having been condemned for depicting women as “bitches”, very few such female characters actually appear in Hemingway’s writings, and almost *exclusively* during the 1930s – this specific decade probably motivated by the grief he felt for his mother, whom he blamed for the suicide of his father, in December 1968 (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 185). It is as well noteworthy that many facts indicate that he actually approved this feminist movement and the independent and strong women who were inspired by it. All of his four wives were not only independent and strong, but also older and more mature women, and Hemingway has “always welcomed and praised tomboyish qualities in them – Hadley’s hiking, skiing, and easygoing companionship, Pauline’s riding and shooting, Martha’s hunting, and Mary’s expertise as deep-sea fisherwoman” (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 173). In addition, we have the example of his relationship with Gertrude Stein, a very close friend and generally acknowledged as his “literary mother”, who was not only a “modern” women, but also a declared and notorious lesbian. As seen in several moments in *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway not only visited Stein and her partner in their home, but also respected them.

Returning to the subject of his “bitches” (“the Hemingway Bitch” became a literary icon – and jargon - at the time), as mentioned above, very few such characters appear in his writings, and many of the interpretations which classified female characters as so are, in fact,

[11] Concepts on the Hero Code, cited in the subsequent chapter.

a result of tendentious readings, conditioned by the writer's "macho" reputation as explained above.

Catherine Barkley, for example, the main character in *A Farewell to Arms,* is seen as *"a mere sexual vessel"* by Barbour (1988) and as the novel's *heroine* by Sanderson (1996). This critic explains that

> it is not so much that Catherine is more noble than Frederic; she is simply more experienced. [...] She has lost her love to the war, *but she seems strengthened rather than demoralized* by the experience. In retrospect, she realizes that she "didn't know about anything" before the death of her fiancé. After that death, she behaves like someone who has been psychologically wounded by the war and by the loss of her first love, but she endures and gradually comes to realize the finality of death and what that implies for the living. Typical of Hemingway's heroic figures, Catherine not only accepts her pain but shares her insights and growth with Frederic (SANDERSON, 1996, p. 181, my emphasis).

Accordingly, even if Sanderson had not said "typical of Hemingway's heroic figures", it becomes evident that Catherine can be connected to Hemingway's "*Hero Code*"[12].

A further case of character deemed very negatively by Barbour (1988) is Brett Ashley of *The Sun Also Rises.* While Barbour interprets her as an example of the "Hemingway bitches", she is actually considered by Hemingway as the central character of the book. Accordingly to Sanderson, "in *The Sun Also Rises* the original opening, which was left out of the published book (on the advice of F. Scott Fitzgerald), introduced Brett sympathetically as the central character of the book and as a victim of psychological damage" (1996, p. 178). Willingham (2002, p. 34) reinforces this vision, saying that Brett "provides a model no less significant, important, or romantic than any of the male code heroes who have inspired or influenced countless readers".

Since those two women characters can be interpreted as representatives of "the Hero Code", we can become conscious of how the heroism and depth which are usually attributed by the critics exclusively to Hemingway's male protagonists, are in fact features that Hemingway also imparts on his woman characters.

[12] The ideal of conduct that Hemingway's strong characters try to live up to, involving honor, courage and dignity, even – and mostly – when facing hard times. Seen in more depth in chapter 4.1.

The last character cited by Barbour (1988) is one of Hemingway's most famous "bitches": Margot Macomber of "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber". It is comprehensible why she is seen as a bitch: when, in the end of the story, the husband finally finds the courage to face the buffalo and symbolically finds as well the courage to face her, she fires a shot from the car, killing him. Although it is not made clear whether the shot was by accident or intentionally, the most common reading is that, as soon as she realized her husband was "becoming brave", she decides to end his life, since it was simpler for her to live – and to cheat – a weak man. Nevertheless, we have Sanderson (1996, p. 185) defending that, "the few times Hemingway embodies his fears of powerful women in a fictive "bitch", he is attacking *not only or primarily the woman but rather male passivity and dependence on women"* (my emphasis) and that, in this short story specifically, "the story implies that the woman's behavior is inseparable from the failure of her husband".

This entire discussion is important to the extent that it clarifies how our opinions about writers' personal lives many times condition our interpretation of their literary works. As the stories cited above, "Cat in the Rain" could be read as an example of a sexist story, since the desires the American girl expresses in the end could with ease be interpreted as mere whims of a spoiled girl. Going further, even her denomination as the "American woman", the "American wife", the "American girl" and similar ones throughout the story instead of providing her an actual name, as her husband *George* has, could in the same way be read as a chauvinistic aspect. However, this is not the case. "Cat in the Rain" is actually very perceptive of woman's predicament precisely for the sensitive manner the wife and her desires, anguish and outflow are portrayed.

Consequently, if we add the fact that Hemingway portrayed female characters as representatives of the "Hero Code" to Sinclair's (2002, p. 94) argument that "Hemingway's iceberg principle applies to [these female characters] as profoundly as it does to any other character or novel in the canon", it becomes evident that Hemingway actually treated both male and female characters with the same respect and dedication.

4. CRITICISM

4.1 Of his works in general

Perhaps exactly for having such an apparently simple style of writing which, paradoxically, causes so many different interpretations and reactions, Hemingway's writings have always been largely studied. He did not like it, felt misunderstood many times and distrusted critics of his works, making comments as: "Rain for a scholar is probably after the first blow has cleaned the air, H2O, with traces of other things naturally"[13], leading Levin (1957) to comment that "even the final bridge of the vitality of nature is nothing more than an insipid scientific form for us"[14] (p. 224).

Nonetheless, probably even Hemingway himself would not deny the importance of these critics to the understanding of his works and to the "keeping him alive both in and out the classroom" (WAGNER-MARTIN, 2000, p. 214)

Most of the critics – now and then – agree on Hemingway's talent on bringing reality to his works.

> Critics […] have called his work "the prose of reality". It seems closer to life than other prose [...]. Its effectiveness is to persuade us, virtually, that it is absolutely not something written, and although it may give the impression of walking in the rain or a punch in the cheese, to be literal, it consists of words on a page (LEVIN, 1957, p 226).[15]

[13] My translation. The original reads: "A chuva para um acadêmico é, provavelmente, depois que a primeira pancada tiver limpado o ar, H2O, com traços de outras coisas naturalmente".
[14] My translation. The original reads: "Mesmo a ponte final da vitalidade da natureza não constitui mais do que uma insípida forma científica para nós".
[15] My translation. The original reads: "Os críticos [...] chamaram suas obras 'a prosa da realidade'. Parece estar mais próximo da vida do que outra prosa [...] A sua eficácia consiste em nos persuadir, virtualmente, que não é absolutamente um escrito, e embora possa dar a impressão de passeios na chuva ou socos no queijo, para sermos literais, consiste em palavras em uma página" (LEVIN, 1957, p 226).

This same author defends that "no critic of Hemingway […] can speak long about his style without talking about the men […]"[16] (p. 238). Levin explains this affirmation by quoting Mark Schorer, who states: "Hemingway's style is not just his subject or theme, but it is his perspective on life"[17] (apud LEVIN, 1957, p. 238).

Scholars observation that Hemingway's themes are intrinsically related to his perspective of life is very important in the extend that it helps us realize how inherent the connection between life and literary creation is in Hemingway's work.

This latter perception is also important when we talk about "*the Wound Theory*" and "*the Hero Code*" two very important concepts defended by Philip Young. Both of them also relate Hemingway's life directly to his themes and literary characteristics and despite not being longer so commented and valued today, they have made a tremendous success while Hemingway was still alive and have probably permanently changed the way Hemingway is read.

> Young proposed that Hemingway's life and art had been motivated by the trauma of his wounding in World War I (at eighteen Hemingway had been badly injured by Austrian shell and machine-gun fire while acting as a Red Cross volunteer). […] The author viewed the author's many fictive treatments of courage and violence as repeated attempts to master the terrifying, primal scene of his wounding. From "the Wound Theory" […] evolved the notion of a Hemingway "code": 'A grace under pressure'… made of the controls of honor and courage which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man and distinguish him from the people who follow random impulses, let down their hair, and are generally messy, perhaps cowardly, and without inviolable rules for how to live holding tight […] (BEEGEL, 1996, p. 275).

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that this code does not request the hero to be irreproachable all the time, he does not ask something that no human being can provide: perfection. As Waldhron (2002, p. 26) explains, "the code does not ask that a hero be fearless or entertain illusions about refuge or escape. But it insists that he discipline and control his dread, and, above all, that he behave with unobtrusive though unmistakable dignity. […]" This same author outlines that this code is not an empty exigency for righteousness: "The courage demanded by the code, then, is something more than a thing unto itself. The code

[16] My translation. The original reads: "nenhum crítico de Hemingway […] pode falar durante muito tempo sobre o estilo sem falar sobre o homem [...]".
[17] My translation. The original reads: "O estilo de Hemingway não constitui apenas o seu objeto ou tema, mas é a sua perspectiva sobre a vida".

asks of a man that he try to *impose meaning where none seems possible*, that he try in every gesture he makes to impress his will on the raw material of life." (p. 27, my emphasis)

Also noteworthy is the fact that Hemingway was always respected by both the critics and the public, something rare, since writers that are popular among the public, the so-called common reader are usually not so respected by the critic, and vice versa. Indeed, Hemingway has always been taken seriously by not only critics but also other writers. A significant example can be found in Beegel (1996), in which we read that in the beginning of his career, even before he had published a single word of fiction, Hemingway had the support of Sherwood Anderson, acclaimed author of the short story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio*. This writer recommended that Hemingway go to Paris, and gave him letters of introduction to members of the literary avant-garde living in that city. Many other examples, like his close personal and professional relation with Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald can be seen in many sequences of *The Moveable Feast*.

He was also very dear by to public, not only for his thrilling private life – four marriages, bullfighting, etc – which turned him into almost a celebrity, but also for the undeniable quality of his fiction and his way of portraying characters with whom many readers could identify. This identification and admiration is evidenced in numbers: "His first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, sold more than one million copies during his lifetime, and *The Old Man and the Sea*, published near the end of his life, reached five and a half million people when published in *Life* magazine" (BEEGEL, 1996, p. 269).

After his death in 1961, his reputation only increased, since "death is the truest test of a writer's critical reputation" (BEEGEL, 1996, p. 272). The author explains this point of view arguing that not until authors have "departed from earth" can we begin to determine whether their work will continue being interesting and relevant to the next generations. Hemingway himself said once that "if it's good enough it lasts forever" (HEMINGWAY apud BEEGEL, 1996, p. 269), and his works certainly are. A practical example of the quality of his work is the increase of scholarly articles in the first ten years after his death, as it would probably happen with a popular writer but with no potential to become canonical. However, even more than twenty years after, from 1985 through 1991, "the productivity of Hemingway scholars […] doubled, and in some years almost tripled the output seen in the energetic period of canonization immediately following his death" (BEEGEL, 1996, p. 289). This period – 1985-1991 – refers to the survey undertaken by Beegel. So far no specific statistics related to the

two subsequent decades were apparently made. One way or another, even if scholarly articles have actually declined, Hemingway has already conquered his way into the canon.

4.2 Of "Cat in the Rain"

Before discussing my argument that the main aspect of the story is the relationship and identification of the wife and the cat, I consider it to be necessary to discuss the issues previously cited by the critics in general: pregnancy – or the desire of it – and the ruining of the marriage.

The issue of pregnancy – being or desiring to be – is considered by many critics as the main point of the story. Barbour (1988, p. 101) states that "it is never mentioned that the 'kitty' is meowing, but it almost certainly would be. To all those who have heard one, a cat in the rain at night sounds very much like a baby crying", view to which Coulthard adds: "it is interesting to note that in American English the pronunciation of 'kitty' is very close to the pronunciation of 'kiddy' [which leads] most readers to assume the couple to be childless and see the kitty as a potential child substitute". John V. Hagopin (1975 apud LODGE, 1981, p. 25) says it is "a crisis in the marriage… involving the lack of fertility, which is symbolically foreshadowed by the public garden (fertility) dominated by the war monument (death) in the first paragraph". Hagopian's reading of the story hinges on the identification of the cat as a symbol of a wanted child; and Carlos Baker (1972 apud LODGE, 1981, p. 30) tries to prove that "Cat in the Rain" was about Hemingway, his wife Hadley and the manager and chambermaid at the Hotel Splendide in Rapallo, where the story was written in 1923 "[…] the Hemingways had left the chilly thaw of Switzerland and gone to Rapallo because Hadley had announced that she was pregnant".

To say the truth, reading all these opinions made me think: why do so many people, when hearing "a woman wants a kitty" immediately make a connection with "maternal instinct – she wants to be a mother"? Do we really have to make a *gynaecological reading* (to use Lodge's expression[18], meaning the equation of biology and gender) of every story in which we see a young woman and a puppy?

[18] LODGE, 1981, p. 30

Of course there is the possibility of the "kitty" being a temporary substitute for a wanted child, especially when the wife says later that – between other wishes – she wants "to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles", symbols that can clearly be related to having a home, a family, a stable life; however, even if it was so, this would be far from being the main point of the story.

About the prospect of a crisis in the marriage, consider the passages in which the American wife talks about the hotel owner: "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" and "she had a *momentary* feeling of being of supreme importance". We can perceive that many of the adjectives she uses to praise the hotel owner are related to stability, dignity and protection and infer that, if she is so impressed by noticing these qualities in this man, it is conceivable that she resents the lack of them in her husband. Besides, the use of the adverb "momentary" seems very meaningful: if the sensation of being of supreme importance is only momentary, *not usual*, it is possible that she resents the husband for not giving her much attention, for his inability to make her feel important.

Nevertheless, there is no material indication of an actual crisis in the marriage. There is undeniably a crisis *in this story*, but I believe it is *the woman's crisis*. After all, in the moments in which the couple is together, the actual signs of apathy and indifference are mainly unilateral: they come from the wife. Yes, the husband is described as lying reading propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed; however, we cannot forget they are facing a rainy day in a hotel. What else could he been doing? Besides, when the wife says she is going to get the cat, *he offers* to go himself; when she comes back to the room, he is still on the bed reading, but *he putts the book down* to ask if she had get it, and *does not look away one minute* while she was talking about "how much she wanted that cat" and asking if he thinks "it would be a good idea if she let her hair grow out":

> She went up the stairs. She opened the door of the room. George was on the bed, reading.
> 'Did you get the cat?' he asked, *putting the book down*.
> 'It was gone.'
> 'Wondered where it went to?' he said, resting his eyes from reading.
> She sat down on the bed.
> 'I wanted it so much', she said (…)
> George was reading again.
> (…)

> ‘Don’t you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?’ she asked, looking at her profile again.
> George *looked up* and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy’s.
> ‘I like it the way it is.’
> ‘I get so tired of it,’ she said. (…)
> George shifted his position in the bed. *He hadn’t looked away from her since she started to speak.*

Hence, we can infer that the woman may be hurt for a certain reason, and it *may be* about the husband, for a previous fight, for example, or for resenting not having stability and more attention, but there are no *evidences* in the story that could allow us to conclude that the *main* point is “a crumbling relationship”.

5. A READING OF "CAT IN THE RAIN"

5.1 The Identification with the Cat and its Representative Function

Subsequently, after concluding that the reasons for wanting the cat were not necessarily related to being or desiring to be pregnant or to a ruining marriage, we can now face the story through a new perspective: the American woman wanted the cat because *she identified deeply* with it and the cat was the representation of many things that she quietly longed for.

First, as Coulthard (1983, p. 10) said very well, "sheltering from the rain is also *in a situation analogous* to that of the wife – *confined by the same rain* to the hotel room and, despite the presence of her husband, lonely" (my emphasis). This identification gets clearer – almost obvious - to the reader when the wife says "I wanted that poor kitty. It isn't any fun to be a poor kitty in the rain". (How would she know that "it isn't any fun…" if she did not relate and identify with it?) Besides, from the beginning the American wife considers the cat to be a female: "The cat was trying to make *herself* so compact that *she* would not be dripped on", and as Benson (1990, p. 252) draws our attention to,

> When she sees the cat in the rain, she has no way of knowing that it is a female, yet she immediately makes a subconscious transference of her own sense of homelessness to the cat, and she wants to do for the cat what George will not do for her, provide a place of acceptance and comfort.

Furthermore, when she notices this "cat trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on", she relates to her in the sense that she also lives this way, so compact as possible, to not be dripped on: she does not confront her husband, despite of her apparent discontent with him; she uses her hair short, despite being "so tired of looking like a boy"; she is living in a hotel room and not in a house, a home of her own, despite desiring one, as she later expresses. Therefore, when the wife goes in the rain to get that cat, she is unconsciously trying to rescue herself too.

The fact that she wants her own home can be seen if we go through the story: in the very first sentences we read “There were only two people stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room”. This implies obvious loneliness and isolation. Further, there are other evidences that indicate that the couple is hosted at this hotel for some time; this is not their first day. How would the woman already have a formed opinion of the hotel owner -

> She 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

- if they had not been installed there for at least a couple of days? There was no way she could noticed details as “the deadly serious way he received any complaints” if that was their first day there. Complaints do not happen every day.

By the time we reach the last part of the story, when the woman is telling her husband all the things she wants, we see it even clearer: “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 to brush my hair in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes”. All these wishes show *a clear desire of a home*: how can she have a cat, for example, if she does not have a house? Cats do not like travelling or changes. Besides, according to Barbour (1988, p. 102), “the images mentioned after all those ‘I want[s]’ add up to a picture of what any wife wants around her in a home. A table, silver, candles, some new clothes, these images appear as almost a bridal catalog”.

Returning to the list of desires that the wife discloses to her husband in the end of the short story –

> 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

- we are tempt to consider them quite random, and I believe many of the readers have this interpretation, which is probably the reason why many consider this woman "spoiled and confused". However, this is not the case, her desires *are not random*, they are actually a case of what Barbour (1988, p. 98), calls "a Fugue State":

> A clever innovation Hemingway developed through the course of several short stories in the twenties and thirties. He frequently associated the use of this device with his woman characters. This technique may be termed literary fugue. Using this technique, Hemingway presents the reader with a cluster of symbols. These symbols are sometimes antagonistic to each other. Their meanings function in several ways; they show the confusion of the character who perceives them and they also tie characters to systems of meanings within the story. […] The meanings appear to compete with each other, or they may be subject to several interpretations, providing the moment in the story with an ambivalent tension.

Still according to Barbour, Hemingway used this *fugue device* here "to show a private, quiet kind of desperation" (1988, p. 98) and this gets evident for the reader when he sees the wife telling her husband all the things she wants.

5.2 The Function and the Meaning of the Cat as Character in the Story

The function of the character of the cat in all these desires is also not random in any way. The cat is actually the *material representation* of all the longings and wishes and sorrows that she carries inside her – perhaps for some time, considering her desperation when unburdening them. The American wife herself tells us that when she says "I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, *I can* have a cat".

The cat is, thus, something *possible and tangible*, among impossible wishes like "I want it to be spring"; the ones she considers very unlikely, like "to eat at a table with my own silver" and the boredom of that rainy day stuck in a room that is not hers, even in a country that is not hers . Therefore, the cat is, according to Baker (1972, p. 136), *"between the actual and the possible"*: "The actual is made of rain, boredom […]. The possible is made of silver, spring, fun, a new coiffure, and new dresses. Between actual and possible stands the cat."

5.3 One or two Cats?

This is certainly the part of the story in which we clearly see Hemingway's desire to create doubts, to incite different readings and by no means allow us to have a definitive answer.

After the discussion of the previous section, we can agree that although getting the cat would not solve all the woman's problems, being however a great consolation at that particularly melancholic moment. According to Baker (1972, p. 136), in the end "the cat is finally sent up to her by the kindly old inn-keeper".

I must admit that I had a great feeling of discomfort after reaching the end of the story, the part when we read that the maid "held a big tortoiseshell cat pressed tight against her and swung down against her body". And then? What happens? It is the "right cat", the one the wife saw previously in the rain, or a different one?

At first, we are led to believe that this is a different cat, since during the whole story, we hear the woman calling the cat she sees in the rain a "kitty" ("I'm going down to get that kitty"), and this latter cat is called "a big tortoiseshell". There is undeniably a difference when we hear "kitty" or "big tortoiseshell". In the former, what comes to our mind is a puppy or a very small cat; something indeed different from the latter, a "big tortoiseshell swinging against the maid's body". Furthermore, Hemingway is well known for his "economy" on using adjectives, what could lead us to think that, if these adjectives were used, there was a reason for it.

Michael Stubbs (apud KIKUCHI, 2007, p. 149) suports this view, saying that "Hemingway implicates that it is not the same cat. He does it by inserting information which is otherwise irrelevant […] a big tortoise-shell cat. Informally, we might say that there is no reason to mention what kind of cat it is, unless this is significant".

According to Kikuchi (2007), however, the use of these adjectives is not so simple, and it is part of the devices Hemingway uses to avoid giving the short story a definite ending. He says that the cat was "verbally made to be small", since from the beginning of the story, the narrator uses expressions that give us the *impression* of "smallness of the cat". To support this opinion, he quotes the part in which we read "The American wife stood at the window looking out. Outside right under their window a cat was *crouched* under one of the dripping

green tables. The cat was trying to make herself *so compact* that she would not be dripped on." To him, "the cat could actually be small, but with these two words, we find ourselves facing a cat verbally made to *appear* small." (p. 151). Of course there is also the denomination "kitty" – which is used many times during the story and is one of the main reasons that make us believe that the two cats are not the same – but if we look at it attentively, we realize that this adjective is always provided to us by the American woman, never by her husband or by the narrator, who refers to it only as "cat".

Besides, when the woman uses "kitty", she does not necessarily refers to its size, since, when we like an animal – or even a person – we tend to use affectionate diminutives when talking to or about them.

Still according to Kikuchi, in what he called "devices to conceal the cat's true size and sort", even the fact that the husband is lying in bed reading is intentional.

> In the setting, it is not unnatural for the man not to go to the window to look at the cat. Had the husband been sitting on a chair, he might have gone to the window to have a look at 'the cat' as a natural course of action. To eliminate this possibility, the narrator had him lying on the bed, creating thus a limited situation in which the husband only sees the cat brought up by the maid towards the end of the story. […] The narrator apparently made the cat ambiguous by making it exist only through *subjective* reporting (2997, p. 151)

It also seems relevant to notice that she does not say "I wanted *that* kitty", implying that the cat she saw was the one she was calling "kitty"; she used the indefinite article "a", giving space for us to question if the cat in the rain was perhaps not so small after all, and her interest was aroused mainly by the fact that it was a cat.

To this interpretation, we can add Lodge's brilliant perception of the issue:

> The first paragraph adopts the common perspective of the American couple, making no distinction between them. With the first sentence on the second paragraph, 'The American wife stood at the window looking out', the narrative adopts her perspective but without totally identifying with it. Note the difference between 'her husband' in line 30, which closely identifies the narration with her perspective, and 'the husband' in line 33, 'the wife' in line 36, which subtly reasserts the independence of the authorial voice. From this point onwards, however, for the next fifty lines the narration identifies itself closely with the wife's perspective, following her out of the room and downstairs into the lobby, and reporting what she thinks as well as what she sees. […] *When she returns to the room the narration separates*

> *itself from her again*. There is a lot of direct speech from now on, no report of the wife's thoughts, and occasionally *the narration seems to adopt the husband's perspective alone*, e.g. 'George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy's' and – very important:
>
> Someone knocked on the door.
> 'Avanti', George said. *He* looked *up* from his book.
> In the doorway stood the maid. She held a big tortoise-shell cat…
>
> We can now fully understand why the ending of the story is so ambiguous: it is primarily because *the narration adopts the husband's perspective at is crucial point*. Since he did not rise from the bed to look out of the window at the cat sheltering from the rain, he has no way of knowing whether the cat brought by the maid is the same one. […] If, however, the wife's perspective had been adopted at this point and she had said this same speech ("She held *a* big tortoise-shell cat…) then it would be clear that this was not the cat that the wife had wanted to bring in from the rain (in which case the definite article would be used). It is significant that in the title of the story, there is no article before "Cat", thus giving no support to either interpretation of the ending. (1981, p. 29)

Concerning Lodge's observation about the title, we can infer that a title like "*A* cat in the Rain" would suggest *any* cat in the rain, not necessarily the one the wife gets in the end, and give us support to think that these two cats are different cats. If, on the other hand, the title had been "*The* Cat in the Rain", we could easily presume that both of them were one and the same. Even the most stubborn defender of the former theory – two different cats -, has to admit that short stories *titles* are usually not deprived of an article.

As a way of conclusion, I dare saying that no one can claim to be sure about any of the possibilities, simply because, as said previously, Hemingway has architected the story to be this way, and intentionally finished the story at this point, in order to deprive us of further information. After all, all the devices discussed here would have been worthless if the story had continued.

CONCLUSION

After all the discussions, the analyses of details and dialogues, of all "reading the lines" done in this work, it came to my mind the desire that I felt when reading the story for the first time, for that North-American Literature class. I was so baffled with that closing, so impatient to know if the American wife had finally got something to appease all the anguish that she was feeling, that the wish that came to my mind was to ask the author whether that was the right cat or not. "He", I concluded, "would have the answer". Of course the myth of "what the author wanted to say" has been deconstructed long ago during these years of graduation; however, I considered that if Hemingway had in mind a specific answer, it would be likely that he had left material signs throughout the short story, like clues for an attentive reader.

A few weeks later, after many readings on Hemingway, discovering how labyrinthic his writing is and becoming aware of "the Iceberg Theory", I concluded that definitely, *no one* besides Hemingway would be capable of providing me a definite answer. As this was not possible, I read the short story a few more times and tried to keep on constructing my individual interpretation of it.

Some time afterwards, however, while reading for final paper, I found out something unimaginable for me: not even Hemingway knew the end of one of his most famous short stories, since, when asked about "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" - if Margot Macomber had shot her husband on purpose or not - Hemingway answered: "No, I don't know whether she shot him on purpose any more than you do. I could find out if I asked myself because I invented it and I could go right on inventing. But you have to know where to stop. That is what makes a short story" (apud FLORA, 1989, p. 135). After reading this, it became impossible not to consider the possibility of him not knowing as well the end of "Cat in the Rain", an ending as controversial as the one cited.

After this awareness, I concluded that not only Hemingway was constructing his fiction in a way that would preclude the reader to be sure of what happens in the end, but he also engendered it in such a magistral way so as also – perhaps primarily – incite the reader to make a closer and more attentive reading through *the entire* short story, in such a way that the closing of it would not mean all, but just a further step in these individual interpretations.

If Hemingway himself “did not know” the so-called proper end of the story, we conclude that there were no signals for us to read throughout the story in order to understand the closing of it. With the certitude of no definite “proper reading”, we realize that all that matters are the endless personal interpretations of each individual reader. The important thing for us is to know about all this engendering, since

> Once the reader has become aware of what Hemingway is doing in those parts of his work which lie below the surface, he is likely to find symbols operating everywhere, and in a series of beautiful crystallizations, compact and buoyant enough to carry considerable weight. (BAKER, 1972 , p. 117)

Therefore, if there is not the slightest possibility of a definite and “correct” reading, we can merely speculate about the possibilities and defend the opinions and “beautiful crystallizations” his stories arouse in *each one of us*. This essay was my attempt of doing so, and I hope it may be read not only as an interpretation of a short story but also as a tribute to the enchantment we all feel when reading a great short story for the first time. This enchantment is what literature – and life, actually – are really about.

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APPENDIX

CAT IN THE RAIN

There were only two Americans stopping at the hotel. They did not know any of the people they passed on the stairs on their way to and from their room. 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 cafe a waiter stood looking out at the empty square.

The American wife stood at the window look¦ing out. Outside right under their window a cat was crouched under one of the dripping green tables. The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.

‘I'm going down and get that kitty,’ the American wife said.

‘I'll do it,’ her husband offered from the bed.

‘No, I'll get it. The poor kitty out trying to keep dry under a table.’

The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed.

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‘Don't get wet,’ he said.

The wife went downstairs and the hotel owner stood up and bowed to her as she passed the office. His desk was at the far end of the office. He was an old man and very tall.

‘Il piove,’ the wife said. She liked the hotelkeeper.

‘Si, si, Signora, brutto tempo. It is very bad weather.’

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

Liking him she opened the door and looked out. It was raining harder. A man in a rubber cape was crossing the empty square to the cafe. The cat would be around to the right. Perhaps she could go along under the eaves. As she stood in the doorway an umbrella opened behind her. It was the maid who looked after their room.

‘You must not get wet,’ she smiled, speaking Italian. Of course, the hotel-keeper had sent her.

With the maid holding the umbrella over her, she walked along the gravel path until she was under their window. The table was there, washed bright green in the rain, but the cat was gone. She was suddenly disappointed. 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.

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

‘I suppose so,’ said the American girl.

They went back along the gravel path and passed in the door. The maid stayed outside to close the umbrella. As the American girl passed the office, the padrone bowed from his desk. Something felt very small and tight inside the girl. The padrone made her feel very small and at the same time really important. She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance. She went on up the stairs. She opened the door of the room. George was on the bed, reading.

‘Did you get the cat?’ he asked, putting the book down.

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‘It was gone.’

‘Wonder where it went to,’ he said, resting his eyes from reading.

She sat down on the bed.

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

George was reading again. She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her head and her neck.

‘Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?’ she asked, looking at her profile again.

George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy's.

‘I like it the way it is.’

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

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

‘You look pretty darn nice,’ he said. She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

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

‘Yeah?’ George said from the bed.

‘And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.’

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

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

‘Anyway, I want a cat,’ she said, ‘I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.’

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

Someone knocked at the door.

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

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

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