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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2024.44.1.06

Self-sculpting in Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*

Abstract. Ernest Hemingway's posthumously published novel *The Garden of Eden* features arguably the strongest and most transgressive heroine in the writer's work. Catherine Bourne replays a fear present in other novels by Hemingway and in his view of the Fitzgeralds' marriage: she is the rich and controlling wife of a writer, whose masculinity is threatened by her financial position. Additionally, Catherine starts a series of experiments connected to gender and sexuality, testing her and her husband's limits, and ultimately putting at risk their relationship. The paper discusses Catherine's gender-bending practices as a form of self-expression and self-sculpting, looking for an identity beyond the limitations imposed on her by society. Her transgression is analyzed both as an aim in itself and as a means in the process of self-fashioning, in which Catherine is more determined not only than Hemingway's other female protagonists but also than her husband David.

Keywords: transgression; Hemingway; *Garden of Eden*; gender; identity

The Garden of Eden may be seen as Ernest Hemingway's most unusual book, both in terms of its content and the history of its publication. Hemingway began writing it in 1946 but never got to finish it: the manuscript grew to over 1500 pages, which were cut to 200 only after Hemingway's death by Scribner's editor Tom Jenks before the book's publication in 1986. The story that has remained is one of a newlywed couple, David and Catherine Bourne, spending their honeymoon in France and Spain. Catherine is an incarnation of a fear present in Hemingway's own life and in his view of the Fitzgeralds' marriage: she is the rich and controlling wife of a writer, whose masculinity is threatened by her financial position. The real problems for the couple, however, start when Catherine begins to experiment with gender: she cuts her hair short, and introduces a reversal of roles into the bedroom. Finally, she brings home a beautiful young friend called Marita, who becomes the lover of both Bournes. With time, Catherine gets more and more emotionally unstable and ends up leaving David, while Marita enters the role of a supportive and obedient wife.

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What makes the novel's status controversial as a Hemingway text is the degree of changes introduced by the editor. For instance, the part left out by Jenks includes a whole other subplot of another gender-bending couple: the painters Nick and Barbara, and Barbara's lover Andrew. Most significantly, the ending envisaged by Hemingway was not David being "handed over" from Catherine to Marita (herself a more complex character in the manuscript), but a darker turn of events, with David and Catherine (who has undergone psychiatric treatment) returning to the French Riviera and reflecting on their past. Regardless of Hemingway's intentions, however, this paper will focus on the published text, making references to the manuscript only when necessary: firstly, because for better or for worse the novel exists in its 1986 shape as a self-contained whole, and secondly, because most of the points I intend to make are visible, albeit more subtly, in Jenks's version as well.[2]

Given the unusually open treatment of gender in *The Garden of Eden,* many readings of the novel focus on a biographical level: starting with Kenneth Lynn's influential biography of Hemingway, through Mark Spilka's *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny,* to Carl P. Eby's *Hemingway's Fetishism*. Critics have been pointing to Hemingway's childhood, when his mother dressed him in his older sister's clothes, which may have resulted in his gender anxieties, as well as to his marriages to Hadley and to Pauline, and the unconventional sexual arrangements possibly involved in the transition from one wife to the other. I am not, however, interested in following this path: firstly, as Valerie Rohy points out, such readings are problematic since they tend to label Hemingway's behaviors or interests as "pathological" (Rohy 149). Secondly, and more importantly, they seem to be an interpretive cul-de-sac, taking away from the reader the freedom to see literature as literature, and instead making him/her into a detective or the writer's psychopathologist. What I would argue *Garden of Eden* portrays is infinitely more interesting, since more universal, than Hemingway's own gender identification. It is a text about becoming oneself, creativity, and the dangers of crossing one's own boundaries.

However, gender identity – not Hemingway's, but the characters' – is one of the most obvious tropes present in the novel. This is why, in this article, I rely upon readings of *Garden* focusing on the book's gender and queer aspects – by Nancy and Robert Scholes, and by Gerald J. Kennedy among others. At the same time, this is not my only (or even main) methodology, since, vital as the gender aspect is, I do not believe it to be the essence of Catherine Bourne's experiment, as I will discuss further on. Instead, I adapt an eclectic approach combining said gender studies elements with psychoanalytic ones and building upon the heterogeneous reading of Hemmingway's text by Arnold Weinstein.

2 For a discussion of the differences between the manuscript and the published novel, see for example Fleming's "The Endings of Hemingway's *Garden of Eden*" and Peters's "The Thematic Integrity of *The Garden of Eden*."

Finally, I use Mehdi Belhaj Kacem's and Chris Jenks's works on the nature of transgressive acts to explore the broader dimension of Catherine's experiment, which I see not as a search for gender identity but identity *tout court*, a project which I call after Weinstein "self-sculpting."

What is the eponymous Garden of Eden? The first possibility is to see the early life of the newlyweds as paradise: they eat, they make love, they talk. The Edenic innocence is present in the directness of their experiences: it is "a realm of touch and taste, where things have their plenitude" (Weinstein 190); "a world in which the pleasures of the body are not complicated by the ills of the soul" (Comley and Scholes 53). David and Catherine live in a bubble, as if time has stopped and all they can do is enjoy the present moment, savor it and satisfy their appetites: the one for food and the one for sex, defining the rhythm of their honeymoon, giving way one to the other or metonymically standing in for one another. In this interpretation, the fall from innocence happens when Catherine begins her experiments with gender, disrupting the idyll and complicating the Bournes' life beyond repair. Performing the function of both Eve and the serpent, she tempts her Adam to explore forbidden regions, granting him knowledge thanks to which he will never be the same again.

The second option is to see Catherine's endeavor as an attempt at constructing her own Eden: one where the two of them, and her especially, may live beyond the limitations of gender. From the start, David and Catherine look like brother and sister; she wants to blur the boundary between them even more. J. Gerald Kennedy invokes Eliade's interpretation of androgyny as expressing Edenic original wholeness (Kennedy 202), which allows one to see Catherine as not causing the couple's expulsion from Eden, but rather as engaged in a search for it. That the initial stages of the honeymoon are not the true Eden is suggested by Rohy, who points at the way language is used in the novel. According to the critic, the Biblical Eden is characterized by a literalness where words correspond directly to objects, and figurative language appears only with the Fall. Seen in this light, Catherine and David's relationship is from the start anything but Eden; it is a space where "nothing is unambiguous and anything may have a second meaning" (Rohy 157). Eden is not given to them simply through the enjoyment of physical pleasure; it must be sought for if it is to emerge. Therefore, Arnold Weinstein sees in Catherine's endeavor "a voyage to … some essentially dark, originary self.… seeking a knowledge that might, miraculously, be a higher innocence" (Weinstein 195). Her transgression may be interpreted in the light of Mehdi Belhaj Kacem's views, according to which the real transgression is man's appropriation of the Laws of Nature by instituting the rules of social life (Kacem 185). Therefore, what we usually term as transgressive, the violation of those rules, in fact returns us to the primary, animal state. In a similar sense, Catherine, by acting against social norms, does not step into the 'abnormal' or 'unnatural' but strives for a return to the primitive, pre-social, pre-divided; in her case: pre-gender.

As a result of these two interpretive possibilities of what Eden is, the novel may be read as one about "expulsion from the Garden and return to the Garden, loss of innocence and recovery of innocence" (Weinstein 206).

What is, then, Catherine's experiment? The most noticeable change that she undergoes is cutting her hair shorter and shorter, dyeing it a pearl-like color, and talking David into the same hairdo, which is accompanied by a reversal of roles in the bedroom. Thus, she joins the litany of Hemingway's female characters, who are "most erotic when most boylike": the wife in "Cat in the Rain," Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*, Maria in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* – yet Catherine is the only one for whom cutting her hair is a veritable project, loaded with serious consequences (Weinstein 193). She refers to the day spent having her hair colored as "arduous," which reveals her sense of the whole enterprise as labor (Hemingway 85). The outcome is scandalous not because it flouts the fashion and what is considered appropriate at the time, but because, as Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes point out, it is a public sign of private transgression, making visible a deeper transition that Catherine is undergoing (Comley and Scholes 65). The public nature of Catherine's transformation is perhaps what bothers David most: his initial impulse is to insist on a shorter haircut in order to retain (for himself? for others?) a sense of manliness. How threatening the simple haircut may be is testified to by the fact that Catherine's new look becomes the talk of the town and overshadows David's success at catching an exceptionally large sea bass – it is one facet of the rivalry between them, which will be discussed further in this paper.

Another way in which the internal change is reflected on the outside is Catherine's desire to get as dark as possible, which "links this new eroticism to fantasies of miscegenation" (Comley and Scholes 90). This reveals that Catherine's project is broader than gender reversal: she is searching for something, a new identity, and she can get there only by transgressing existing boundaries, be they sexual or racial. The primary impulse behind Catherine's project may be not her gender identification, but gender experiments may be simply a means in the search for something more general: identity, or creativity. On the one hand, it is easy to see that Catherine does not feel comfortable in the traditionally feminine role: she complains about her inability to get pregnant, which might be read as an experience of inadequacy pushing her to look for a different field in which she could realize herself. On the other hand, Rose Marie Burwell warns that Catherine's possible sterility is a red herring, since the manuscript makes clear that being a mother is not her interest anyway (Burwell 202). What is more, Catherine's definition of femininity entails "Scenes, hysteria, false accusations, temperament" (Hemingway 70) – little wonder then that she finds being a woman unappealing.

Being a girl is to her "a god damned bore" (Hemingway 70), and even inhabiting the female body is unexciting: this is why she wants David to focus on her haircut rather than her breasts, which she calls her "dowry": an inherited piece of flesh, which she

finds tedious because it is not a result of her own choice or creation, but merely a gift of biological chance (Hemingway 17). In fact, boredom seems to be one of the key factors behind Catherine's experiment. The honeymoon starts with a polite routine of eating and lovemaking, which begins to feel oppressive in its inescapable hedonism.[3] The cinematic details of the abundance of food on the initial pages contrast with the fact that Catherine and David are always hungry: what they have is not enough right from the start, even if it seems perfect. When Catherine declares: "Don't we have wonderful simple fun?" (Hemingway 10) she seems to mean it in earnest, but the very fact that she voices it may already be read as a sign of upcoming dissatisfaction. Even David's proficiency – as a connoisseur of drinks, a swimmer, a lover – becomes "dull," being part of the same perfect superficiality that characterizes their marriage from the start (Hemingway 191). If the honeymoon on the Riviera is to be Eden, then Eden is hell.

Catherine's sexuality is not seen by her as her primary motivation in seeking the ménage à trois. She claims that she was never interested in women, despite their advances, and even when she brings Marita home she initially does not seem to plan to sleep with her (Hemingway 91, 105). When she comes to the conclusion that she needs to have sex with Marita, she thinks of it as something to "go through with" and "get rid of" – a necessary stage of her quest rather than a goal in itself resulting from desire (Hemingway 105). On the other hand, she later claims that sleeping with a woman was what she wanted all her life (Hemingway 120) – this, however, happens at a phase when Catherine becomes emotionally less and less stable, alternating between the feeling that sex with Marita was a mistake, that she "loved it," and that she should sleep with another woman to see why Marita has not satisfied her after all (Hemingway 192). She becomes more and more restless, seeing clearly that neither the gender-bending practices with David nor same-sex intercourse with Marita have given her the answer she was looking for.

Especially that Catherine does not know what it is she is searching for, and this is what makes her character particularly heartbreaking. It is clear that she is in pain, trying to satisfy both David and herself, but to no avail. "Do you want me to wrench myself around and tear myself in two because you can't make up your mind?" she asks David, but she is equally responsible (or equally not responsible) for the torture she feels, since she too does not know what it is she wants so much (Hemingway 70). Burwell identifies in Catherine's project three stages: first, she makes sure that David will write about her; then, in what the critic terms "the feminist phase," she defies conventions and liberates herself from the limitations of being a "girl," and finally enters a phase of female creativity, looking for illustrators for David's book (Burwell 204–5). However, seeing Catherine

3 At the same time Mark Spilka points out that the published version does not do justice to the fact that the novel's "claustrophobic concentration" on those trivial activities is meant to show them as means of an inner journey (Spilka 34).

as a feminist is rather the critic's wishful thinking, since the character's insistence on womanhood being boring is hardly a feminist stance. What is more, this classification makes Catherine's experience more neat than it is or even should be: in fact, so many factors are intertwined in her project that it is virtually impossible to disentangle them into a linear process. On the one hand, by the end of the book Catherine does feel like her identity-building project has led to something: after having slept with Marita, she feels "grown up" (Hemingway 120), to the extent that she no longer needs either Marita or David (Hemingway 191). On the other hand, the book presents her final state as "madness,"[4] and Catherine herself declares: "now I'm nothing," which does not sound like a successful end of individuation (Hemingway 192).

Certainly, Catherine no longer wishes to be a girl because as a boy she "can do anything and anything and anything" (Hemingway 15). As Comley and Scholes point out, this means to her "social enablement" (Comley and Scholes 61), but it is also freedom in a more general sense, both in bed and in life. She does not simply become a boy, but "a boy too" – a person who unifies within her both genders, escaping the limitations usually connected to being assigned to only one of them. It allows her to explore a completely new territory, and at least at times be in control: she tells David that she has not changed back into a girl during lunch (Hemingway 66), which does not refer to any external actions but her inner feelings; she can also go back to being a woman when David wants it, which probably means returning to a more passive sexual role (Hemingway 67). There are, however, things which she cannot control: the effects the whole experience has on their marriage. When David contemplates the possibility of "go[ing] back where we started," Catherine reassures him: "Of course we can and we will," but the reality is precisely the opposite (Hemingway 69). Like the couple in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants," the Bournes can no longer have everything, and much later in the novel, after having slept with Marita, Catherine states: "I wish I could remember what it was we lost.... It's just gone whatever it was" (Hemingway 118).

There is, too, something narcissistic about Catherine's project: when they switch roles in bed, she becomes another man, a "Peter," but David is to become Catherine (Hemingway 17); she is "finally consummating the sex act with herself, an act achievable only through the agency of David as 'go-between'" (Weinstein 197). And since it is roleplay, the configurations multiply: Catherine makes love to David-as-Catherine, experiencing lesbian sex even before her encounter with Marita and being able to both be herself and have a cubist look at herself, from two perspectives at a time; Catherine-as-Peter makes love to David-as-Catherine, allowing both of them to experience a full reversal

4 I use the term "madness" not to denote any specific type of mental illness but rather a literary trope entailing a sense of loss of mental control.

of agency and power; then, Catherine-as-Peter makes love to David, which is an act of male homosexual intercourse and the aspect which most scares David.

An undeniably important – perhaps the most important – level of Catherine's exploration is creativity. Since David is the writer in the marriage, and since in Hemingway's world there is no real space for female artists, Catherine finds a way to express herself differently. She makes David write the story of their love, calling it "our project," and establishing her role as the book's publisher, looking for artists who would illustrate it and controlling David's process of writing, or – putting "a little order into it" when he becomes "difficult" (Hemingway 188–90). But the more important project is the one she realizes through living, or furnishing materials for David's narrative: a project of "self-sculpting" through sex, which allows her to treat "the human body as artistic material" (Weinstein 194). As the manuscript makes clear, her inspiration for sexual experimentation comes from a work of art: Rodin's sculpture "Damned Women," depicting an act of lesbian lovemaking. Constituting a part of his *Gate of Hell*, it is a warning against homosexuality, alluding to Dante's vision of punishment for those overcome by lust, and to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (Comley and Scholes 54–55) – thus, Catherine's project situates itself within a rich cultural background of works of art dealing with transgression. That her creativity realizes itself most fully through an act of crossing social boundaries is not surprising; as Kacem points out, "since Sade, art has overwhelmingly been the art of a heroism of Transgression" (Kacem 184), and it is this transgressive urge that makes Weinstein compare her to Rimbaud (Weinstein 200).

Female creativity is for Hemingway, however, impossible, or at least dangerous. The final effect of Catherine's exploration of the liminal is madness. While David ultimately becomes a better writer thanks to having explored the taboo (despite his initial worries that Catherine endangers also his work, it turns out that the writer, in Hemingway, needs a little corruption), Catherine, like other women in the eyes of the modernists, "lack[s] something essential to genius," which results in the deterioration of her mental condition (Comley and Scholes 65, 66). And it is the "male-bodied boys" who get to define "what is psychotic, and what is sane" (Rohy 168), and impose their interpretations on Catherine. The critic Rose Marie Burwell sees Catherine as expressing not madness but "healthy anger" (205), yet Catherine agrees that she may be getting "crazy" (Hemingway 100).

Regardless of the fact that Catherine in the end does not seem to get what she wanted, she does not question the direction in which she is going. This is not the case with David, who reluctantly accepts the experiment, but whose reservations persist on many levels. From the very start, when Catherine announces to him a surprise, he is far from thrilled: waiting for her return from the hairdresser's, he drinks alone for the first time, as Hemingway characters do when they feel uneasy (Hemingway 14). So far, he knows only that Catherine wants to change something, but this knowledge is uncomfortable enough, since the only change from their (according to him) perfect life can be a change for the worse.

Then, he is afraid of the pace at which things are developing: "What can there be that will not burn out in a fire that rages like that?" (Hemingway 21). He seems concerned for the future of their relationship and what will be left of it if Catherine keeps realizing her ideas. After the first role-switching in bed, David thinks to himself: "goodbye Catherine goodbye my lovely girl goodbye and good luck and goodbye" (Hemingway 18) – it is a goodbye to the Catherine he knew when he married her, but also to their relationship as he knew and wanted it. For David, this certainly is the moment of the fall from innocence. For Catherine, the turning point is her intercourse with Marita: it is then that she doubts whether she and David are still "us" and whether she was unfaithful (Hemingway 117–19).

However, David also has fears more specifically connected to him and his conception of masculinity. For instance, his condition of letting Catherine experiment in bed is a full reversal of roles: "Not if you're a boy and I'm a boy," he declares, disclosing a fear of homosexual associations (Hemingway 67). He enjoys being "brothers" when they start looking more and more alike, but not what it entails regarding his sexual identity. When he becomes a "girl," the situation is hardly more acceptable: it gives rise to a "fear of castration implied by assuming a feminine role" (Comley and Scholes 60). David's insecurity may be explained through Judith Butler's notion of performativity (Butler 33), according to which gender needs to be repeatedly performed to be reaffirmed, and R. W. Connell's idea of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to men's occupying a dominant position in society – similarly to Butler's idea of gender, being not a permanent phenomenon but one requiring constant reassertion (Coles 40–41). David, in his relationship with Catherine, gets fewer and fewer chances to inhabit a conventionally "masculine" role.

Catherine's experiment is not only hers because it reflects on David, too; her change of gender identity entails his change as well. As a result, looking in the mirror he no longer knows who he is, or, to be more precise, "how" he is (Hemingway 85). By seeing "the image of his divided, androgynous twin – he understands that he has risked an irreparable breach of his own self-identity" (Kennedy 205). As Freud points out, one of the reasons that the breaking of a taboo is always punished is its "contagious" character: it causes "fear of an infectious example, of the temptation to imitate" (83). Similarly, David not only allows Catherine to explore forbidden territories, but is also afraid that he enjoys the possibility to accompany her. What is different in their approaches to the whole process is the fact that David experiences a "taboo sense of guilt" (Freud 78-79), which Catherine does not. He thinks of himself as not "respect[ing] the way [he] handles [his] life" (Hemingway 148), which is perhaps the contrary of what Catherine might have said, her being in the process of regaining her life on her own terms. What is more, Catherine's main interest is herself and her project of self-sculpting, while David seems to truly love both women, which is why the experience is harder for him to make sense of.

David's only way to oppose Catherine is through his art. From the start, one can see rivalry between their creative needs: even though it is David who is the writer, in the

manuscript version Marita notices that Catherine's mastery of words equals David's writing (Spilka 51). This is why Catherine hates David's collecting newspaper clippings containing favorable reviews of his book: they are proof of David's independent, pre-Catherine existence; additionally, they show that he cares about the opinion of others, which to her proves his lack of self-reliance (or of relying uniquely on her, one might add). This is also why she wants him to keep writing the narrative about their honeymoon, of which she is the main character, and for which she, through her actions, furnishes content, rather than the story about his boyhood in Africa. Finally, as Weinstein points out, the rivalry is one between her project of returning to innocence via gender bending, and his – through writing (Weinstein 208).

What is at stake is David's identity not only as a straight male, but also as an independent person, as well as his sense of control. Catherine is threatening because her sexuality fashions his, her creativity dictates what he must write, and her money finances their lifestyle, which is why David insists so much on the fact that his book has made money (Hemingway 25–26). He tries to regain control through such seemingly insignificant actions as his expert preparation of martinis (Weinstein 191), but mostly through reading, which allows him to escape the world organized by Catherine, and writing, even the honeymoon narrative, which gives him a sense of wholeness, since "he wrote from an inner core which could not be split nor even marked nor scratched" (Hemingway 183). However, it is especially the African story that allows him to return to this inner core; as Weinstein notes, the more unorthodox their sexual life becomes, the more David becomes engrossed in the African narrative (202).

The story about his boyhood in Africa, in which his father kills an elephant thanks to information he received from young David, is one whose writing he has been putting off for years (Hemingway 123) – now, however, is the time when he must face the truth about himself and who he is. If he does not want to lose his identity in Catherine's mire, he needs to go back to the very roots of his male self. The African story is about David's individuation through getting to know his father; like Nick Adams in Hemingway's "The Indian Camp," he must confront the idea that his father brings pain and even death, and come to terms with it. After Catherine burns the manuscript, correctly intuiting how threatening it is to her power over David, he miraculously manages to recreate it, feeling that the new version is even better. Burwell sees David's development from a protest against his father's violent nature to the appreciation of his complex personality as regression "to a position from which he no longer needs to judge his father's actions" through "the internalization of a vision that can tolerate nothing that is not unalloyedly masculine" (Burwell 205, 208, 213). However, the fact that writing the African story is David's act of resistance to Catherine is not tantamount to what Burwell sees as insulating himself from the feminine (Burwell 214); the book makes clear that David has become a better writer if not solely then at least also thanks to Catherine's experiment. His newly gained ability

to accept contradictions within human nature is by no means "unalloyedly masculine," just as there is nothing reductionist in it.

It is true that the African story gives David a stable ground when in real life everything shifts beneath his feet. When Catherine accuses him of escaping his duty by writing it (Hemingway 190), she is in a way right: he escapes through it to a time when his life was perhaps not simpler, but its elements were falling into place rather than apart. Contrary to his marriage, the story is "straight," which gives him back the feeling of control: "You have to make sense there. You don't make any in this other," he tells himself (Hemingway 146). It is also a story which teaches him that "the heart will betray us" (Weinstein 206) as well as that the true state of existence is loneliness. In Africa, the ten-year-old David learns to close himself off and protect his vulnerability: a lesson which he must relearn if he is to survive Catherine's influence.

Especially that outside the African story it is Catherine who is in control most of the time. Even though the text calls her a "girl" as opposed to David being a "man," he does not dominate in the relationship in any way other than his connoisseurship of alcohols and fishing. It is Catherine's actions that drive the plot of the novel, and their scope is never limited to herself: from the start it is clear that David is part of her project as well. When, before the first visit to the hairdresser's, she announces that she is going to change, she states: "It's for you. It's for me too" (Hemingway 12). When she brings Marita home, she again acts as if she did it for David (Hemingway 96). One may wonder whether she genuinely thinks that David is in need of a change, too, whether she simply needs his company not to explore the forbidden territory alone, or whether the very nature of her experiment requires the presence and cooperation of her man. With time, however, it becomes clear that David, like Marita, is an accessory whose opinions do not matter: the decisions to invite Marita or to swim together naked are made by Catherine without consulting him. She even tells Marita: "if he ever says no about anything … [i]t doesn't mean a thing" (Hemingway 188).

It is also David's passivity that makes this power relation so one-sided: he agrees to being handed over from Catherine to Marita (appropriately nicknamed "Heiress," as she literally inherits him from Catherine) like an object. So much easier it is for Catherine to be the puppet master of the whole show: there are moments when she meticulously directs the movements of her actors, for instance asking David to kiss Marita (though she does not seem happy to see her wish fulfilled, perhaps counting on David's disobedience (Hemingway 104)). Looking at Marita and David together, she tells them: "I feel as though I'd invented you" (Hemingway 191). Her creative project, therefore, is not only David's honeymoon narrative, nor herself, but also David and Marita's relationship. The latter allows her to leave David with a clear conscience, knowing that he will be "taken care of," but also to test her creative powers on other people, and mold them according to her own will. In this sense, Catherine Bourne is an extraordinary woman in the Hemingway

world: not the male fantasy whose main mission is to fulfill her man's desires, but "The woman-as-(desiring)-subject … even as he [Hemingway] punishes her act of hubris" with madness (Weinstein 209).

This allows us to return to the central question of the novel: what is it that Catherine wants? Are her actions motivated simply by a discomfort connected to her gender? I would argue that the gender experiment is to Catherine a means rather than an end in itself; from the start, she tells David: "I'm the destructive type.… And I'm going to destroy you" (Hemingway 5) – her chief goal is transgression itself and the thrill it provokes. As Susan Suleiman points out, "The characteristic feeling accompanying transgression is one of intense pleasure (at the exceeding of boundaries) and of intense anguish (at the full realization of the force of those boundaries)" – a feeling best achievable through sexual "perversions" (Suleiman 75). At the very least, it is a practice that can make one feel alive to the core. Another argument in favor of the thesis that gender-bending is not the essence of Catherine's experiment is how vaguely her and David's lovemaking is described. Of course, one may simply attribute this to Hemingway's modesty or to literary censorship; however, more important issues seem to be at stake as well. Spilka links this discretion to the fact that Hemingway refrains from describing Rodin's sculpture, the one that has inspired Catherine, as well, which allows the readers, just like the couple, to experience "disturbing sexual ambiguities" (Spilka 35). Rohy connects it to the writer's intention to show the "estrangement of gender from heteronormative conventions" and a "radical dissociation of gender from genital sex" (Rohy 148). On a more general level, the importance of what Catherine and David do lies not in how precisely the experiment proceeds, but in the act of transgression itself. And for the breaking of the taboo to retain its intended thrill, an element of mystery is necessary.

David is not as keen as Catherine on the transgression for a variety of reasons: first, as Comley and Scholes point out, it is clear in the manuscript version that the book's men in general are more cautious in experimenting and only follow women's lead (Comley and Scholes 59). Second, social rules are far less constricting to David, to the extent that he does not realize their presence, unlike Catherine, who feels oppressed by them (Hemingway 15). Since nothing is forbidden to David (or, at least, nothing which he would notice), he does not have the urge to reach for it, as only "The forbidden engenders the fruit of desire itself," and "carries with it a propulsion to desire in equal measure" (Jenks 45–46). Not experiencing the desire, he sees in Catherine's plan more of a danger than of an opportunity.

To an extent, he is right: boundaries are needed if we are to be able to live in society, and the more the action of the novel unveils, the more claustrophobic the atmosphere becomes, with David, Catherine, and Marita constituting a universe to themselves, willingly cutting themselves off from other social interactions. At the same time, though, he is wrong: transgression does not abolish boundaries, quite the contrary. As Jenks

states, "to transgress is … to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law, or the convention," as transgression draws attention to the law it breaks (Jenks 2). "Transgression is not the same as disorder; it opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of order"; "it shows a consciousness of limits not their absence" (Jenks 7, 95). Catherine keeps looking for new rules to break, probes for new opportunities for transgression, because she is in the process of self-making, thus of establishing her own boundaries. What the "necessity of order" means for both Bournes is different: for David, this is entering into a relationship with Marita precisely thanks to transgression, but soon after going back to traditional sexual practices; for Catherine, it could be an establishment of new identity, were it not for the fact that she becomes mad.

Transgression itself may be viewed as an exciting experiment, or it may acquire moral valuation. As Bataille puts it, "evil is not transgression, it is transgression condemned" (Bataille 127). David explains to himself: "a sin is what you feel bad after and you don't feel bad," but he immediately adds: "Not with the wine you don't feel bad … and what will you drink when the wine won't cover for you?" (Hemingway 21). His conscience needs to be numbed with alcohol, which implies that when sober, he does think of Catherine's experiments as not merely threatening but as evil. Comley and Scholes point to the fact that David and Catherine refer to their sexual activities using a "language of condemnation," perhaps to make the whole enterprise more attractive, but "it is not easy to say how deeply they share or how fully they might reject this discourse" (Comley and Scholes 56). One might be tempted to think that while David is tormented by the undertones, perhaps also the moral ones, of what they are doing, Catherine is virtually amoral, which is why it is easy for her to cross all boundaries. At the same time, though, Weinstein points to Catherine's reaction to David's African story ("It's bestial") and sees in it not only an expression of jealousy of her husband's creative self. The comment on "bestiality" refers specifically to David's father's sexual relations with African women, and Weinstein interprets this disapproval of miscegenation as a displaced moral judgement of Catherine and David's sexual experiments (Weinstein 209).

That Catherine also seems to have the sense of boundaries is paramount to her transgressive project's success: after all, "limits to our experience and the taboos that police them are never simply imposed from the outside; rather, limits to behavior are always personal responses to moral imperatives that stem from the inside," hence the inherent desire to transgress them (Jenks 7). Such a sense of boundaries stems from the fact that the taboo is "'sacred', 'consecrated', and on the other [hand] 'uncanny', 'dangerous', 'forbidden', 'unclean'" (Freud 21). The violation of the taboo depends precisely on those two meanings, of the sacred and the forbidden, and there is nothing which serves this purpose better than non-standard eroticism. Suleiman points to the fact that in eroticism, "limits of the self become unstable" and "everyday life becomes subordinated to the excessive, quasi-mystical state we associate with religious ecstasy and generally with the realm of

the sacred" (Suleiman 75). As a result, sex allows one to reach the truth – a principle that Comley and Scholes identify as a recurring motif in the whole Hemingway text (Comley and Scholes 77).

However, the truth which Hemingway means, the one that comes at the cost of transgression, is artistic truth (Comley and Scholes 89). Catherine, on the other hand, perhaps since she does not have any artistic outlet for her creative impulses, does not draw the line between art and life. Initially she promises David: "We won't let the night things come in the day" (Hemingway 22), but it soon turns out to be impossible: the "change" she undergoes at night happens also outside the bedroom. The first level of why this is troubling for David is the confusion of the private and the public, and thus the possibility of being judged by others. As Spilka notes, "it is not androgynous love per se that causes trouble … so much as its public expression through statues, hair styles, and conversations – especially as they convey controlling female power" (Spilka 36). Those public expressions have a castrating potential that makes Catherine's wishes especially threatening. The second level of David's (and the book's) fear of Catherine's experiment is connected to the confusion of different spheres of human experience. Transgression is seen as acceptable in art, but not in life, and "David is presented as aroused by the Rodin sculpture but damaged by an attempt to capture in life the stylized passion of that art" (Comley and Scholes 60).

Catherine does not understand the key distinction between art and life, and for that she gets punished. Freud points to a fear present among "primitive peoples" that "the violation of a taboo will be followed by a punishment" (83), and that punishment in Hemingway is usually madness (Comley and Scholes 59). In this respect, Catherine is very much reminiscent of a character from F.S. Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night:* the "eczema woman," a mysterious patient of the mental facility Dick Diver works at.[5] The novel implicates that she has tried to live "like a man," both in the sense of sexual and intellectual freedom, for which she is punished with a sexually transmitted disease, perhaps syphilis. She states that through her illness she is "sharing the fate of the women of [her] time who challenged men to battle" (Fitzgerald 233). Dick, unimpressed by her sense of mission, questions her feeling of having been at war and dryly concludes: "You've suffered, but many women suffered before they mistook themselves for men," and believes her simply to be not strong enough to explore "the frontiers of consciousness" (Fitzgerald 233;

5 Fitzgeraldian themes in the novel are seen also, among others, by Robert E. Fleming in "*The Garden of Eden* as a Response to *Tender is the Night,*" and Arnold Weinstein, for whom Catherine's madness parallels Nicole's in *Tender is the Night* (Weinstein 192). One could add to this another similarity: in both novels, the wife brings the husband down, and both texts have a similarly "hydraulic" view of couples: partners may stay afloat only at the cost of their loved ones, as if there was never enough life energy to serve them both.

234). Catherine too is punished by "madness": for her inability to keep the private and the public, art and life, apart, and for her unwillingness to inhabit her assigned gender.

One of the strengths of Hemingway's novel is that it eludes easy categorization; one can read it as a text about negotiating gender boundaries, but also about control, a search for identity, the meaning of transgression, and self-creation. Tempting as it is to look for a single key to understanding *Garden,* a neat resolution of the book's internal conflicts (such as seeing in Catherine a straightforwardly queer or feminist heroine) does a disservice to its complexity. Catherine's experiment may be seen as an external expression of internal processes which she undergoes, as an escape from the boredom of her seemingly perfect life, as a narcissistic attempt at making love to herself, as an expression of her creativity realized in life rather than in art, and as a quest for ultimate freedom. She tries to achieve it through an act of transgression, of breaking the taboo, and of going beyond the limits of biological sex, since "[t]o be sovereign it is necessary to make the choice to live rather than accept the burden of living that is placed above one" (Richardson qtd. in Jenks 108–9). It is clear that the story is not only about Catherine's becoming who she needs to be; David too, as a form of resistance to her all-encompassing ambitions, undergoes a sort of individuation through writing the African story. However, it is only Catherine's project, bought with pain as it is, that may be seen as what Weinstein terms "self-sculpting," as it is she that tries to consciously shape her life to an almost heroic degree: through plasticizing gender, race, and identity in general.

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