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**The Devilish Ways of Catherine Bourne: Breaking  
Heteronormative Gender Roles in *The Garden of Eden***

**by Ernest Hemingway**

**Treball de Fi de Grau**

**Grau en Estudis Anglesos**

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## **Abstract**

Catherine Bourne can be seen as, if not the first, the most feminist hemingwayesque heroine. *The Garden of Eden*, published posthumously in 1986, presents the journey of Catherine into the discovery of her gender and sexual identity as she transgresses all the established norms and rejects heteronormative rules. Androgynous haircuts, experimental sexuality in which she involves David, her husband and Marita, a woman introduced in her marriage as an equal, are some of the tools Catherine uses to break free from the patriarchal system. She intends to build a personal world in which she makes her own rules free from the concept of normality.

## Introduction

Fifteen years of Ernest Hemingway's life were invested in working on the manuscript for *The Garden of Eden* (1986) starring one of the best female characters in the entire Hemingway repertoire. Catherine Bourne is a complex dominant figure in the narrative that breaks with the female character we would expect from Hemingway. Even though his female heroines had been complex and deep characters, none of them had been given such aggressive and dominant attitudes. Amy L. Strong describes Catherine as one of Hemingway's greatest feminist women (Strong 2002: 203).

*The Garden of Eden*, a novel published posthumously from a long unfinished manuscript, is not one of the most popular books by the American writer, its heavy editing, and a significantly different style pushes Hemingway's fans away. Nevertheless it is certainly appealing due to the treatment of topics such as gender and sexuality. Catherine's gender fluidity between boy and girl throughout the novel, her interest in the androgynous look in her relationship, the pursuit of creativity through her appearance and her will to break gender roles, are central aspects in this novel.

Traditionally Hemingway has never been regarded as an author who is sympathetic to the plight of female characters; however, the fact that he has Catherine acknowledge the social and relational power that comes with being a man is credit to him (Riobueno 2012: 54). Furthermore Hemingway presents alternative notions of gender identity and traditional heterosexual relationships which it is not an isolated event. Kemen Zabala analyses the female characters in both *The Garden of Eden* and *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and defends that both of them are compelling interpretations of Hemingway's heroines. Zabala argues that

Hemingway uses female characters such as Catherine as agents for questioning and challenging heteronormativity in society (Zabala 2007: 48).

Catherine's behaviour in the novel has been attributed to madness or some kind of "crisis of sexual identity" (Anderson 2010: 104). The aim of this paper is to prove that her behaviour does not breed from mental illness but rather from frustration and a will to break with the binary terms of gender because she is unable to feel fulfilled in a traditional wife role. Her physical transformation, which begins early in the novel with a new haircut, is just the tip of the iceberg of a series of changes she is willing to make to create a world in which she and David can be happy as equals.

In this paper I intend to analyse the character of Catherine Bourne in depth through the reading of the novel, articles related to it and the character and feminist theory that can be applied to Catherine's case. I will be mainly focusing on her interest in pursuing an androgynous look and getting her husband David and her to look the same as well as the reasons behind her androgyny. I will also examine how her body becomes a creative project in a world where women's creativity is undermined. I will pay attention to her role in her marriage and her rejection of traditional heteronormative relationships and sex. Furthermore I will argue if any emotional distress exists it is caused by David's rejection of her new identity and her labelling as madness is due to David considering her a threat to his career and masculinity.

## **1. The Feminist Body, Gender Equality and Agency through Physical Appearance**

One of the first characteristics that strikes us about Catherine Bourne in *The Garden of Eden* is her progressive transformation into an androgynous figure through her constant changes in appearance, especially her hair in an obsessive

way. In the opening pages of the novel she already informs David that she is going to change and that it is going to be a “wonderful dangerous surprise” (Hemingway 1986: 12). The first noticeable change that Catherine performs is getting her hair cut as short as a boy’s. Her first hair cut is just the starting point of a series of physical transformations that will take Catherine to use her body as a canvas (Mintler 2008: 66) in order to become David’s equal, not only physically but also to acquire the power of dominance and agency through what would be considered a masculine appearance. Catherine will also find in her physical appearance a source of creative satisfaction by using haircuts, bleaching and clothing as an artistic media.

### **1.1 Blurring Gender Difference Through Androgyny**

The changes in Catherine’s appearance can be interpreted as an attempt to twin David (Sully 2000). Scholars such as Samantha Long in *Catherine as Transgender: Dreaming Identity in The Garden of Eden* (2013) defend the idea that Catherine’s acts are “an attempt to reverse her gender role” (43) and therefore her physical changes have the goal to become like her husband, a man. This idea would be supported by what Catherine says on her second haircut, when she insists on having it cut just the same as David’s, “I told him to cut mine just the same as yours” (16).

It is not only haircuts that reflect this sameness between them. Throughout the novel we can see how both Catherine and David wear similar outfits. It is Catherine who encourages this twinned clothing trying to dress like David and making him dress like her, “Put on your dark blue shirt will you? The one I got you like the one of mine” (143). They even buy their clothes in the same place and wear them at the same time “They sat there in their striped fisherman’s shirts and the shorts they had bought in the store that sold marine supplies”(6). The clothing is used to show

Catherine's progression from the young, feminine wife to a more complex woman who uses her appearance to question the confines of her marriage along with the defined role society dictates (Recla 2008: 16). We can see the transformation throughout her outfits; in chapter five we see her wearing "a skirt and a cashmere sweater and pearls" (43), which could be considered as typical feminine attire. As the novel advances so does the androgyny in her outfits, "She wore her old Grau du Roi striped shirt..., new grey flannel slacks and espadrilles" (79). Catherine and David are mistaken by brothers when they dress the same and that confusion "pleased the girl very much" (6). This is the first reference in the novel of this brother imagery, but it is certainly not the last. Catherine and David address themselves using 'brother' as their physical sameness grows, "You're my good lovely husband and my brother too" (29). This reinforces the idea of Catherine wanting to be like David, "I want us to be just the same" (176).

While these actions seem like an attempt to mirror David's identity, as well as suggestive of her desire to become him or at least a man, as stated by Long, they are more than this. Her physical transformation and the willingness to get David into following her into androgyny have the goal of "creating visual sameness that will result in a visual representation of gender equality by blurring gender difference through androgyny" (Mintler 2008: 93). She is conscious that trying to resemble a man physically is a transgressive act and it would be noticed by the others.

No decent girls had ever had their hair cut short like that... It could mean too much or it could only mean showing the beautiful shape of a head that could never be shown as well (16)

In this passage she knows that her act is so much more than just a haircut, it is a statement of Catherine claiming agency that men are allowed by joining them through a physical similarity. It is a change on the surface so everyone can see her statement.

Catherine wants to be David's equal by making man and woman look physically the same. Mintler points out that her second haircut does no longer mirror David's. Even though it is a masculine cut it is not the same style as her husband's. Catherine reverses the imitation and now David has to resemble her by cutting and dying his hair like hers. This is evidence to refute the interpretation that Catherine wants to be like David or become a man, supported by scholars such as Long; however, it does support the reading that she wants to possess the power of a man (Mintler 2008: 94).

“You see...That's the surprise. I'm a girl. But now I'm a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything” (15). After cutting her hair, Catherine correlates having access to the masculine side of her as gaining independence and more importantly, dominance (Zabala 2007: 56). Her new look deletes the cultural differences that gender establishes by erasing the stereotypical appearance that a man and a woman must have. They become twins physically so she can feel that there is no difference between them, and furthermore to demonstrate that, regardless of being a woman, she can be in control. She often refers to David as her brother more than her husband. Placing herself as her twin brother puts her at the same level as him, as an equal rather than a subordinate wife. Being his twin not only puts them at the same level, but she decides to be David's brother and not sister. By making herself his twin brother, no difference in age or gender exists and she puts herself at exactly the same level as him.

The reason why Catherine's first steps at claiming gender equality and agency are physical transformations is because she is conscious that the femaleness of her body is what has been denying her this. After her first haircut there is a scene in which we see Catherine rejecting her breasts, an obvious feminine trait, “Where I'm holding you you are a girl”, making reference to her breasts, “They're just my

dowry” (17). David draws attention on “the anatomical part of her that remains sexed female” (Mintler 2008: 75). It is significant that after this the next step she takes to assert her dominance is an exchange of roles in sex. This scene in the first chapter of the novel encourages her to keep reinventing her appearance to make sure that her female traits do not stop her from her goal, standing as an equal to her husband with the same freedom to make choices as him.

Although this might appear as a rejection of femininity from Catherine’s side, what she is doing is rejecting the arbitrary cultural meanings that are assigned to the female body. Although Catherine accepts her identity as a woman she abhors the socially imposed restriction placed on women (Zabala 2007: 55). She creates her own concept of femininity in which she embraces feminine and masculine traits to achieve gender equality and to be able to assert power that has been foreclosed to her.

## **1.2 Physical Transformation as an Act of Creative Fulfilment**

Catherine’s transformation does not only aim for physical sameness to blur gender difference, but it is also reclaiming female creativity and authorship. Throughout the novel we discover that Catherine feels frustrated because she is unable to create, in the traditional meaning of the word, as in painting or writing.

The whole way here I saw wonderful things to paint and I can’t paint at all and never could. But I know wonderful things to write and I can’t even write a letter that isn’t stupid. I never wanted to be a painter nor a writer until I came to this country. Now it’s just like being hungry all the time and there’s nothing you can do about it. (53)

Regardless of this feeling of inadequacy, Catherine is unwilling to accept David as the only one in the relationship who can accomplish his creative objectives. She will not take David’s accomplishments as her only source of fulfilment. According to Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), women were expected to drop any ambitions, if they ever did have any besides motherhood and housewifery, once

they got married. In the second half of the twentieth century in America, where Friedan centres her study on, a woman's world was confined to her own body and beauty to facilitate the charming of a man that would lead to motherhood and the physical care and serving of the husband and children (Friedan 1963: 42). Marriage and motherhood were presented as the most desired achievement in women's life, and therefore source of satisfaction. Women were constantly told that "all they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children" (Friedan: 16), and that was the only answer to their happiness.

Catherine Bourne is not a woman from the 1950's, nevertheless she finds herself restricted by the same traditional female roles but she refuses to narrow her life to what is expected of a young middle-class woman (Raeburn 1990: 116). She will not allow to be defined by her marriage and her husband's accomplishments. Her goals go beyond the traditional roles for married women. Catherine cannot simply be the caretaker of an artist; she must create and express herself to feel fulfilled (Recla 2008: 22).

Facing a patriarchal dominance of the arts, Catherine uses her body and appearance rather than language like David, as her own creative project. By modifying her own body she assumes the artistic authorship that has been denied to her by the male dominating system (Willingham 1993: 47). Throughout the novel Catherine expresses her insecurity and feelings of inadequacy when it comes to written language "I can't write things, David. You know that" (222). Having no confidence in herself in a male-controlled genre of literature, she turns to an alternative medium of expression (Willingham 1995: 185). Catherine Bourne decides to "become her own art" (Anderson 2010: 107) by creating a text with her body with actions such as cutting and bleaching her hair and dressing with what

could be considered as conventional male clothing. This reading is validated by Catherine herself: “like a painter and I was my own picture” (54).

What is also relevant in considering her physical transformations as her art is the way she chooses to display herself in public. As readers, we get the feeling that she wants everyone to see her creation as she insists on appearing in public places while being a boy, “I’m going to the Prado in the morning and see all the pictures as a boy” (56). It is relevant that she would make the decision of going to an art museum to show herself as a boy, placing her body in an art gallery for the public to see her as an art piece.

Analysing her actions through a feminist critical point of view we could see that Catherine is in fact embracing the artistic expression that Hélène Cixous advocates in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), in which the female body is linked to artistic creativity, comparison previously made by other scholars such as Willingham in her dissertation *Ernest Hemingway and the Surrealist Garden* (1995). Cixous defends that the creative act will give women power over her body back (Cixous 1976: 880). Therefore, Catherine’s artistic expression on her body empowers her as well as satisfies her willingness to be an artist. Cixous compares the advantages that writing can bring to women to the same kind of liberation that reclamation of the body can. “Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it” (Cixous: 876). Catherine takes her body and she “writes her self”. She does not allow male censorship in her art, because censoring her body would mean censoring her own creative project and her “breath and speech at the same time” (Cixous: 880).

She is making up the painting of her own picture, just as her husband creates his stories, and she is conscious of it. “Was I good to invent it?” (48) says Catherine

after her first haircut confirming that she has found something worth creating (Anderson 2010: 107). Catherine selects and enacts the physical changes to be made on her body, just as David writes and constructs his stories, and turns herself into her own narrative. Her body becomes what Domna Stanton calls “autogynography” or narrative of the self, such as diaries, letters and journals (Stanton 1988 cited in Willingham 1995: 185), which are traditionally modes of literary expression for women that have been forced to give voice to their artistry in alternative sources. Catherine finds in her body this alternative source of expression that subverts David’s patriarchal moratorium on her creativity (Luckman 2014). He is reluctant to write the narrative that tells their story, which is in fact Catherine’s creative project, so she decides to focus her creative desire on something that will not depend on her husband, her own body which will tell her own story in her own way.

In *The Garden of Eden* Catherine’s body becomes central to the novel as her haircut is the first step into a diversity of changes to break with heteronormative gender roles. Her physical transformation opens the door to claiming the power she wishes. It becomes the base for her to take control of her relationship and try to adjust it to her own views and norms which stride from the conventional marriage and roles both wife and husband have in it.

## **2. Reinventing the Heteronormative Relationship**

The novel revolves around Catherine and David’s marriage and the evolution of the relationship as well as its components. At the beginning the newlywed couple seem to be enjoying an idyllic start of their marriage. However as the novel advances and Catherine starts to experiment with her gender and sexuality, the nature of their relationship also changes. She rejects the established norms for

relationships as well as she rejects the boundaries between male and female appearance, as seen in the previous section. Her marriage also becomes part of her creative project as she makes attempts to shape it to her own ideals of how the relationship should be.

At the same time Catherine deconstructs the physical boundaries of gender differences through her transformation, she also tries to build a relationship that strides away from the traditional heterosexual marriage and fits her values and ideas on what her marriage should be like. Through the reversing of the established sexual roles and the rejection of monogamy and compulsive heterosexuality, Catherine makes an attempt to create a marriage in which the gender stereotypes do not define her or anyone in it.

## **2.1 Marita the Puppet Wife and the Rejection of Traditional Wifehood**

Catherine's role in the marriage at the beginning seems to fit the traditional concept of the ideal wife. The traditional model of perfect wife that was considered ideal is described by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* as an acceptance of what is called the feminine nature, meaning that a woman is inherently sexually passive, obedient, nurturing and maternal (Friedan 1963: 9). Therefore a wife was expected to embrace these traits that were natural in her character. Catherine displays this willingness and interest to please David in all the ways she is able. She appears to be the embodiment of every man's fantasy, unthreatening and sexually compliant (Craciun 2012: 5). Their relationship is harmonious and uncomplicated, and although not strictly traditional in all the ways, it stays within the heterosexual constructs which are socially instituted and regulated, therefore accepted (Leunis 2015: 25). It seems they are living their honeymoon in paradise.

Once Catherine starts experimenting by trespassing the gender boundary lines through her appearance and sexual roles, it becomes clear that she is not willing to be the submissive and servant wife. Their Eden is destroyed by the acknowledgment of Catherine's unwillingness to be the all feminine supportive wife without ambitions of her own (Recla 2008: 32-33). One of her strongest statements in the novel shows her thoughts on her role as a wife and woman. In chapter twenty six, David takes a clear patronizing attitude by trying to stop Catherine from driving alone and even taking the train by herself when she decides to leave. After Catherine burns all of David's stories about Africa and his clippings she goes away to find some artists to illustrate the narrative about her and David's marriage. Now that she has put an end to the stories she can organize the publication of the novel. David is deeply hurt by the burning of his work and he is reluctant to continue writing about him and Catherine. He tries to stop her from leaving, to which Catherine responds "I'm of age and because I'm married to you doesn't make me your slave or your chattel. I'm going and you can't stop me" (225). She becomes a dominant person as the novel advances showing since early stages that she will not submit to the expectations the patriarchal society has placed on women and wifeness. She is aware of the social stereotypical constructs that define her according to society and she is not willing to live up to them (Craciun 2012: 196). Her personal concerns outweigh David's needs. Regardless of this she stays true to her convictions.

Throughout the novel Catherine insists on the uniqueness of their relationship. She is against following the rules and perpetuating the category of women that defines her as submissive, weak, compliant and obedient.

We're not like other people. We don't have to call each other darling or my dear or my love nor any of that to make a point. Why do we have to do other things like everyone does? (26).

The conception of normality abhors her. She is aware that ideal and normative female role in marriage is oppressive and predictable, and she wants to escape from it (Strong 2002: 193). When her attitude starts driving David away she feels torn between the role of the “good girl” and her individual pursuit of an identity. In Madrid Catherine tries to commit herself to being a good wife, submissive, dutiful, and accommodating, “I’ve started on my good new life and I’m... looking outward trying not to think about myself so much” (53). However, her attempts to live according to the standards of wifeliness soon are unsustainable. By the end of the novel when she recalls how she tried to put aside her gender exploration and be “a girl” for David it shows how much it affected her and how she stands firmly this time not to do it again: “I did try and I broke myself in pieces in Madrid to be a girl and all it did was break me in pieces” (192).

Madrid becomes a turning point in the Bourne’s marriage. After having failed at turning herself into the wife society expects her to be, Catherine makes the decision to find a solution. In order to give David a true wife, she decides to find a woman that will fulfil the traditional roles she rejects. In this way, she is able to enjoy her individual liberty and continue in the marriage without having to accept its conventions. In Strong’s words, “Catherine sets up a puppet regime in her marriage inviting Marita to join them while she claims her space to act freely without feeling self-conscious about her lack of enthusiasm for the wifely ideal” (Strong 2002: 197).

The couple meet Marita in Cannes at a café when she approaches them to ask about Catherine’s haircut. She immediately gets dragged in by the charm of the couple as soon as Catherine invites her to stay with them after their second encounter. Although Catherine brings her as a present for David, “I brought you a dark girl for a present” (103) she has very clear plans of how this “dark girl” will be

useful to her too. Marita, to whom the appropriate nickname of “Heiress” is given, inherits Catherine’s role as David’s wife. Catherine uses her to please her husband with the submissive and supporting good wife he so strongly desires (Craciun 2012: 195), but most importantly, to ensure that she will not have to assume that role now that it is someone else’s responsibility. Marita willingly assumes this role of substitute wife, she worries about David, she takes care of his food and sexual needs as well as helping him do his writing offering a supportive environment (Recla 2008: 22). “I’m trying to study his needs” (122) says Marita in chapter thirteen. She embodies all the characteristics that a wife should have; she is supportive, motherly and attendant to the needs and desires of her brilliant author husband. Marita’s submission to David becomes so extreme that it almost becomes a parody of itself, like “a puppet on strings with no will of her own” (Craciun 2012: 195). In a conversation with David about a woman having a black eye, she says, “There’s a difference in age and he was within his rights to hit her if she was insulting” (243). Her attitude is totally opposite to Catherine’s who more than once has shown her independence and strength when David has tried to stop her from doing something or even when she has felt he spoke to her badly as in chapter twenty six when he says “All I want to do is kill you. And the only reason I don’t is because you are crazy” and she answers “You can’t talk to me like that” (223).

As Catherine’s heir tries to fashion herself into an ideal wife she grows increasingly mainstream. Amy Lovell Strong even draws attention to the fact that she reads *Vogue* magazine, a text written explicitly for women and the ultimate source of codified female behaviour, source of normative femaleness. This culturally prescribed normalcy aspect of their relationship is a powerful force on their side that supports their union. “Marita and David join in a conservative

powerful alliance of heterosexuality” (Strong 2002: 197). They psychologically transform themselves into a married couple, “Are we the Bournes?” to which David replies “Sure. We’re the Bournes.” (243).

Catherine becomes more marginalized in the relationship as David and Marita’s relationship grows stronger falling back on a familiar source of cultural power, heteronormativity. When this conventional union alienates Catherine completely she has few options to try and preserve the world she was trying to build with David. Her effort to deconstruct gender roles and stereotypes is crushed by the desire of Marita and David to build a life in which they both know their roles and live within the prescribed boundaries of gender (Strong 2002: 198). Marita destroys Catherine’s project by reinscribing David into the world of patriarchal normative heterosexuality, which she has spent so much time trying to deconstruct. What initially was Catherine’s attempt to prove that gender identity is a dynamic and fluctuating entity, even if it meant defying the strict rules concerning sexuality established by patriarchal society (Craciun 2002: 194), ended in a reaffirmation of the established gender roles and her alienation from the marriage she had tried so hard to build.

## **2.2 Shifting the Heteronormative Sexual Dynamics**

Catherine not only deconstructs the concept of traditional marriage through the incorporation of a third party, she also starts a journey of sexual discovery and experimentation presented to us from the novel’s beginning. Her experiments with sexuality represent her struggle for equality and agency in her marriage and society.

At first, when the couple is introduced to us, Catherine appears to be sexually inexperienced compared to her husband. After one of their sexual encounters in chapter one, Catherine asks David whether it is normal to be so hungry after sex.

When he answers she concludes with “Oh, you know so much about it” (5), showing that she is not familiar with the feeling and confirming her inexperience. Despite her initial inexperience and submissiveness, Catherine soon evolves from the patriarchal desired model of docile wife to someone willing to challenge the established roles (Craciun 2002: 193).

Their sexual role reversals take place the night after Catherine’s first haircut. The description of the sexual act suggests that she penetrates David anally.

He lay there and felt something and then her hand holding him and searching lower and he helped with his hand and then lay back in the darn and did not think at all and only felt the weight and the strangeness inside. (17)

Catherine clearly steps outside the sexual restriction of strictly heterosexual sex in a heteronormative marriage, which involves penile-vaginal activity only, by reversing heteronormative sexual roles as she becomes the penetrator and David the penetrated (Zabala 2007:57). By adopting the sexual practice that is reserved to men, she is claiming her power and desire to stand as a total equal to David. “Now you can’t tell who is who, can you?” (17), says Catherine after having penetrated him.

Some scholars (Leunis 2015, Modellmog 1999 quoted in Strong 2002) defend that Catherine is in fact trying to dominate David. Catherine’s domination of her husband in the bed is analysed by Nena Leunis in *Unravelling Hemingway’s Bitches: The Portrayal of Women in The Sun Also Rises and the Garden of Eden* (2015) as a way of uncastrating herself to possess the power of her husband. Her article suggests that Catherine wants to take control of the marriage and that when she reverses her prototypical female role into that one of Peter she has the right to be dominant. “By adjusting the dominant conventions, Catherine criticises the assigned gender roles” (Leunis 2015: 26). In my opinion Catherine uses sexual roles as a way of fighting against the binary conception of gender which defines

women as passive and submissive. By interchanging the traditional roles she is trying to show that in bed, just as in society, gender roles are not strict and fixed such as those that are perpetuated by the patriarchal norm. Her sexual experimentation blurs the rigid definitions of sexual identity and tries to change David's view of what a male is supposed to be and do sexually and what a female is supposed to be and do sexually (Riobueno 2012: 49).

Furthermore, Catherine adopts the name of Peter while having sex as well as she assigns the name Catherine to David. This is further evidence to show that Catherine's objective is to prove the fluidness of gender. She destroys the binary concept of male and female by acknowledging she is a fluid combination of both genders and trying to make David do the same (Riobueno: 49). She is accepting that regardless of their gender their roles in life and sex are not dictated by society but by them, and they can bend them and exchange them as they please.

The introduction of Marita in the marriage is also an aspect that deserves attention. Previously to becoming the heiress of Catherine's duty as a wife, she is introduced as an equal partner to both of them (Riobueno: 45). Catherine reinvents the concept of marriage by destroying the heterosexual monogamy limits that come with it. She takes the initiative to expand the conception of marriage as well as she fulfils her desires towards another woman. Through transforming her relationship into a threesome she explores an alternative method for everyone's sexual enjoyment outside of heterosexual sex bounds (Zabala 2007: 58).

Catherine pushes the moral boundaries with Marita. The first contact they have is when they drive together around Cannes, in chapter twelve, and they kiss in front of everyone. Similarly to what she did by exposing herself in El Prado, she chooses to kiss Marita publicly where everyone can see how little concerned she is with

society's rules. She even goes against David's rules when he clearly states that she should not have sex with Marita. "Don't do it." to which she answers "I have to. Ever since I went to school all I ever had was chances to do it and people wanting to do it with me. And I never would and never did. But now I have to" (114). Society has limited her chances to experiment and discover her sexuality, and she has decided she is not going to take that anymore. Catherine is willing to discover her true identity and no moral conventions about sexuality will stop her.

In spite of her efforts to make this transgressive relationship work, she sees it fall apart when Marita ultimately re-establishes the heterosexual relationship conventions with David. As mentioned previously, Marita embodies the submissive wife ideal and she serves as a reaffirmation of David's masculine dominance over female sexuality (Craciun 2012:195). When she and David have sex she offers the possibility to "do her [Catherine's] things" (185) to him. However, she places David as the dominant figure in sex, contrasting to his submissiveness when having sex with Catherine. Once David has found in Marita the endorsement and familiarity of the traditional sexual roles, Catherine decides she cannot longer be part of the relationship. "You can spend the rest of your lives together, I have no further need of either of you" (191) says Catherine. Her project has failed as the people she loves are unwilling to build their relationship far away from the suffocating limitations of society.

### **3. Catherine's Madness and its Link to Heteronormative Transgression**

Catherine's behaviour has often been analysed as a sign of mental illness. Critics such as Sarah Wood Anderson in *Hemingway's Feminine Madness in The Garden of Eden* (2010) defend that the origin of her transgressive behaviour is a "crisis of sexual identity" (Anderson 2010: 104). Nevertheless some scholars such as Amy L.

Strong, among others, have decided to analyse beyond this statement and have suggested that interpreting Catherine as mad is a fatal weakness of the novel because it ignores David and Marita's moral responsibility for their actions. "Relegating Catherine to the edges of madness rejects her way of understanding the world, by judging her view as a skewed one, her avid desire for multiplicity, complexity and diversity in human relationships is being devaluated" (Strong 2002: 192).

Working against the critics that suggest that Catherine Bourne is in fact mad I defend that her experimentations with gender revolve around her anxieties to break beyond the definitions of normality and to find a place where her less constrained, personal identity can emerge. Even though there is evidence in the novel that suggests mental instability, these breakdowns are due to David and Marita's rejection of her project of building this binary free world away from society's social and moral constructions.

### **3.1 Punishing the Unperformance of Femininity**

Judith Butler says in *Performance Acts and Gender Contitution* (1988) that "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (Butler 1988: 522). This is precisely Catherine's case. Her unconventional gender expression and her transgressive sexual experimentations are condemned as a sign of madness. Catherine's mental instability is used as the cause and origin of her gender transformation and her rejection of heteronormative gender roles. As mentioned above, arguing in favour that the reason for her actions is in fact product of mental illness rejects her fight against patriarchal constraint on women and their role on society.

In her search for identity far away from the limitations of her gender, Catherine breaks with what is understood as conventional femininity. She invents her new identity challenging the categories upon which identity is based on (Strong 2002: 192). The first step she takes is transforming her physical appearance. With transformation she blurs the differences between man and woman in their appearance, as discussed in section one. She gives up looking feminine, or at least what society understands as feminine, in order to regain the power that society denies her due to her gender.

Not only does she change her physical aspect but she also tries to change her marriage. As mentioned in section two Catherine transforms her relationship with her husband and the way she is supposed to act publicly and privately. Her marriage also becomes a canvas (Anderson 2010: 108), similarly to her body, that she can modify to match her values and identity. She does not limit her creation to her own self. When it comes to her relationship she also shapes it to match her identity and values. When it comes to David and Marita she sees them as part of her creation: “You look wonderful together and I’m so proud. I feel as though I’d invented you” (191). Catherine has made herself and her marriage her own creative project. By taking control of it, she tries to make David aware of the stereotypes that define her as weak passive and submissive, as well as erasing them from her identity so their marriage becomes unique and suitable for her. She transcends submissive girlhood through her desire for a metamorphosis of gender (Comley and Scholes cited in Sasaki 2012: 49).

Labelling Catherine Bourne as mad is a punishment for her transgressive behaviour that opposes the ‘sane’ world of normative heterosexual relations. (Sullivan n.d.). David and Marita are the representatives of this ‘sanity’ and they are

the ones that accuse Catherine of being mentally ill after they have joined in a heterosexual relationship. They have both rejected Catherine's "perversions" and they have concluded that the only explanation for her behaviour is mental illness. Even if her experiments have positive consequences for her and help her build her identity and evade the heteronormative world, they undermine male sovereignty as well as questioning traditional gender roles, and that cannot remain unpunished by society (Craciun 2012:195).

The first time Catherine gets labelled as crazy is when she tells David that she is going to have sex with Marita and there is nothing he can do to stop her. Her sexual discovery and experimentation is answered with a "You're talking crazy, Devil" (115). He even refers to Catherine's gender troubles and sexual experiments as "crazy things" after describing them as "worthless schemes and plans" (196). At the sign that Catherine is claiming agency of her actions and not letting David stop her from what she wants to do, she is called crazy. Furthermore in this case her actions involve homosexual sex and exclude David from her sexual experiments for the first time. Catherine makes the decision to pursue her desire towards Marita because it is something she has always wanted to do and now she is able to ignore the male power trying to stop her and it is important for her self-discovery. Nonetheless, her disobedience to heterosexual and monogamy norms lead her to punishment; she becomes a madwoman in the eyes of her husband.

"Gender is what is put on, invariable, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure" and those who contest the scripts of gender by "performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisation" are strictly punished (Butler 1988: 531). Catherine is seen as an actor that has abandoned her script and she must be corrected. David's attempts at rejecting her unnatural behaviour do not

have an effect on her, therefore the only explanation left is that the reason why she will not or is not able to abandon her unfeminine attitudes is mental illness. At one point Marita says “You can’t be angry at someone who is ill” (194) after they have a big argument. Marita uses the word “ill” to describe Catherine’s condition. She perceives that Catherine is ill for not being feminine. In the argument previous to this quotation she accuses Catherine of not being enough of a woman for the way she acts and treats David, and that to her is a sign of mental illness. The construction of gender is understood as natural and innate and the only reason Catherine would reject it has to be madness.

Butler compares gender performative acts to theatrical acts that have been recreated for so long that have become natural and no longer fictional or imaginative as in theatre; the line between performance and identity has been blurred (Butler 1988: 527). Catherine’s ‘wrong’ performance of her gender gets her alienated from her marriage as the heterosexual couple marginalizes her. She is punished for pushing the boundaries of gender roles and traditional sexuality and she is excluded from the heteronormative Eden that David and Marita have created.

### **3.2 David’s Rejection as Source of Emotional Trauma**

It seems quite apparent that Catherine does suffer some kind of emotional trauma. At some points she describes her mood as “gloomy and morbid” (170), and she even uses the word “crazy” in certain occasions. Having said that, it is important to highlight that these breakdowns we see at some points of novel are not causing her transgressive behaviour. Many critics (Craciun 2012, Long 2013, Strong 2002) defend that the origin of Catherine’s distress is in fact caused by the frustration she feels when David rejects her new identity and her project of redefining the traditional concept of marriage.

The reason she starts this odyssey of finding her identity is to be able to live in a world in which they are both free from the confines of society, a world in which she can be herself and David will accept it. In order to create this world in which both of them are safe from the world's standards or "everyone else's rules" (15) as Catherine calls them, both partners have to adopt a certain attitude and values that David is unable to accept. According to Amy L. Strong the reason he rejects Catherine's project is because he sees her as a threat to his masculinity, as well as his public image. He feels comfortable with the benefits he receives from a culturally constructed identity, such as his status as an author, and this prevents him from embracing Catherine's mission (Strong 2002: 195). These cultural constructions of himself are what stand in direct opposition to her project. David holds on to the cultural image of masculine authority while she strives to destabilize such construction.

Catherine challenges David to revise his conception of 'self' and he finds that his assumptions about masculinity and morality fail to cope with Catherine's experimentations (Pond 1989: 46). The ideas of male dominance and traditional heterosexual sex are so internalized in him that taking part in Catherine's "perversions" makes him question if they are morally acceptable. He feels guilty for his complicity. This becomes clearer when he and Catherine meet Colonel John Boyle, who had served with David during the war, for lunch. He and Catherine speak about her being a boy at El Prado. After this scene we can see that David finds it embarrassing that the Colonel knows of their androgyny, "My chest feels like it's locked in iron", and wishes that Catherine had not told the Colonel about their private lives, "You can't trust people like that" (67). The Colonel symbolizes masculine ethics and dominance, and the fact that he knows about his private life

makes David's remorse grow and awakens in him the patriarchal concept of himself (Pond 1989: 53-53).

The encounter with the Colonel marks the downfall of the marriage. Their honeymoon is brought to a premature end as David begins to write again and stays away from Catherine's role reversals. Madrid, as mentioned before, is a turning point in the relationship as it marks the beginning of David's rejection. Starting at Madrid the difficulties he experiences in coming to terms with his guilt cause him to take out his anxiety in baiting attacks that have a destructive effect on Catherine (Pond: 61). The resentment he feels leads him to marginalize Catherine and label her as mad.

David excludes Catherine from the world of art; her creative project has been dismissed by the only person whose involvement and acceptance was important. He stifles his wife's creativity which ultimately leads to her frustration and mental instability (Long 2013: 44). Catherine's desire to live between the binaries goes against social pressures and fears of possible ridicule, rejection and alienation (Brown and Rounsley 1996 cited in Long 2013) and David's inability to forget about his public image, which is the one that would suffer this ridicule, holds him back from exploring his non-normative sexual desires.

David holds Catherine responsible for his embarrassment and she is increasingly marginalized as he favours Marita, who will not push him beyond his moral boundaries. Catherine sees in his actions the rejection of her only attempt at artistry which causes her emotional trauma. Furthermore, in David's rejection the loss she suffers is double as she loses her art and her husband at the same time (Anderson 2010: 115). This feeling of inadequacy and loss generates in Catherine these behaviours that could be considered as symptoms of her mental distress. The most

evident is the burning of David's clippings and short stories about Africa. She sees in the clippings and stories the reason for David's rejection, as they embody his masculinity, in the case of the African stories, and David's public image and career, something she will never have the chance to enjoy, in the case of the clippings, something she will not be able to enjoy due to the male dominance of the arts. In fact madness might not be required to explain her action, anger and hurt towards what kept David from joining her in her project is enough to propel extreme action and would blind her to how damaging the destruction of the manuscripts would be to him (Long 2013: 53).

David's need for social and sexual conformity in order to be assured of his own position within the structure (Craciun 2012: 194), prevent him from being part of his wife's creative project. The fear that the full involvement in Catherine's transgressive practices would damage his public image, result in rejection and alienation. He is unwilling to endanger his reputation and he is unable to relinquish his dominance. Catherine's only wish was her husband's acceptance, "(...) love me the way I love you" (86). Therefore, when David refuses to continue being part of her art, she loses her lover and the person that would determine the success of her project.

## **Conclusion**

Catherine dominates the novel as a character that stands out for her determination to live by her own rules and not as a madwoman having an identity crisis. She symbolizes the complexity of sex and gender, their importance to the creation and recreation of identity and how this complex structure is something that each individual must build on their own free from society's impositions.

In *The Garden of Eden* we see a woman claiming back the powers that have always been denied to her. She breaks free from stereotypical femininity in order to become her husband's equal in all the ways possible. She starts her transformation with her appearance taking control of her body, something that has been negated to women. Catherine decides that the first step to become her husband's equal is to look the same, not by copying him but by both copying the same style. Her physical transformation becomes her own creative project which gives the power to create over a canvas in which male domination is not allowed, contrary to the majority of creative modes.

In her searching for a gender and sexual identity different from those provided by the strict standards of the heteronormative world, Catherine also creates a relationship in which the pressure of being the ideal wife is relieved by placing Marita in that role. She claims her independence and the possibility of being something else than what is expected by refusing to become a submissive and pleasing wife, as well as an opportunity to explore her non-normative sexuality with Marita as she did with David. However, those who had been her allies in the creation of a personal and accepting world free from constrictions, David and Marita, turn against her and reject her, making madness the cause of the behaviour they find so threatening.

The heroine in *The Garden of Eden* tries to destabilize the strict impositions of the patriarchal society and for that she is punished by the figure of male power in the novel, David, with rejection and madness. Madness was never a cause of Catherine's behaviour but rather the punishment for transgressing society's norms. Furthermore, if any kind of mental distress exists in Catherine it is caused by David's rejection of her new formed identity.

Catherine Bourne is a feminist woman trying to create a feminist world with the person she loves, a world in which she is allowed to be independent, to cut her hair and dress how she wants, to pursue a career instead of becoming a housewife and to explore her sexuality even if it breaks with heteronormative rules. Catherine stands out among Hemingway's female characters as a complex and strong. She successfully sheds light on the elaborate concept of gender, sexuality and identity formation in a society ruled by heteronormative rules.

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