Reading Cat in the Rain – suggested discussion points

Moral

- No strong, explicit message.
- It is about human relationships.
- About marriage, lack of communication and understanding.
- Too enigmatic.
- Too much is left up to the reader.
- Hemingway doesn’t direct the reader explicitly enough.
- Not didactic.
- At the end of the story, readers are unsure what they should have learned.
- Is it possible to have more than one reading in a moral reading?

Structuralist

- Gaps in the story (i.e. what we’re not told).
- Gap between the plot, the characters and the actual point of the story.
- Ambiguity of the ending – is it the same cat? (This might hang on Hemingway’s use of the definite and indefinite article.)
- The story is told in chronological order.
- Authorial voice: narrated by the authorial voice (refers to characters in the 3rd person); renounces authorial omniscience; refrains from comment or judgement or explanation of motive regarding the behaviour of the characters; restricts itself to the perspective of two of the characters and, for the majority of the story, to just one.
- Free indirect speech.
- Wife’s point of view for the majority of the time, but adopts the husband’s point of view at a crucial moment.
- The way in which Hemingway creates a multi-layered text without any obvious use of metaphor.
- Oppositions:
  - Light v. dark
  - Inside v. outside
  - Social isolation v. mutual dependence
  - Wet v. dry
  - Male v. Female
  - Guest v. servant
  - Italian v. American
  - Culture v. nature
  - Cultivation v. wildness
  - Upstairs v. downstairs
  - Speech v. silent
  - Speaking v. listening
  - Pleasure v. pain
  - Interest v. boredom
  - Listening v. not listening
- Repetitions of ‘liked’ and ‘wanted’.
- Wife has no name: she is referred to as ‘the American wife’ or ‘the American girl’.
Feminist

- ‘The American girl’ and the ‘American wife’ – defined by her marital status (real or how she appears to others).
- Her point of view privileged for the majority of the story, but it is a male writer’s view of what a woman might desire (‘I get so tired of looking like a boy.’).
- Female stereotypes – is Hemingway confirming them or taking the reader beyond them?
- Is the reader encouraged to be sympathetic to the husband or to question the way he behaves and the assumptions he makes?
- Link to the psychoanalytical reading – wants the cat on her lap.
- Link to a post-colonial reading – the position of the non-Americans and the non-male.

Genre

- The short story – beginnings and endings.
- Focus on a single ending.
- Enigmatic.
- Characters sketched in – limited number of characters, small incidents standing for something a lot bigger.
- Where does it sit within the short story genre? It is not situated within crime or mystery genres; more like an ‘epiphany’ sort of story.
- American dream novels/fiction.

Psychoanalytical

- Public garden and rain = fertility.
- War monument = death.
- Cat = wanted child.
- Rubber cape = contraception.
- Wife’s way of life or image of what her life should be like is coming between her and a fertile relationship with reality.
- Desire for motherhood.
- Her relationship with the men in the story – seen as a child or as an adult woman?
- Her husband likes her to look asexual – she wants to look feminine and have everything that would go with that.