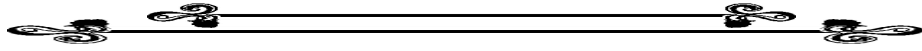


**"The Short Happy Life of Francis  
Macomber" Ashort story  
by The American writer Ernest Hemingway**

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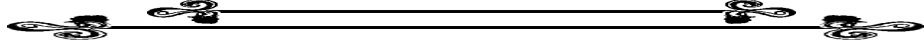
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"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is one of the best stories by the greatest American writer Ernest Hemingway. Let us analyze this short and a very interesting story. First, it was noted that Ernest Hemingway first published "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" in the September, 1936, issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine (2) concurrently with "The Snows of Kilimanjaro"(3). Later, it was among the stories collected in Hemingway's *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (2). It was filmed in 1947 as *The Macomber Affair*, starring Gregory Peck and Joan Bennett (3).

It was noted that E. Hemingway loved his story and some facts also show that not only in the USA, even in other countries The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber was reading. When in the Red Sea, a young British sailor named Clive Cookson had been changing a gin block amidships and was just going forward to clean up when he came upon Hemingway leaning on the rail and gazing out to the sea. He was wearing a white nylon shirt and flannel pants. Gray stubble covered his chin and he was sweating heavily, his face and nose pink in the heat. His chest bulged through the shirt and he seemed to tower over Cookson. The young man said that he had liked the story of Malcolm Macomber. "It is Francis Macomber" fiercely. Cookson blushed and stammered. He had heard rumors that Hemingway was going to Mombasa to write a novel or direct a film. "Damn the rumors," said Ernest. "Bloody rumors." He fell silent and Cookson felt dismissed (1, 513).

As to "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" opens with Francis Macomber, his wife, Margaret (known as Margot), and Robert Wilson preparing for lunch at their camp in



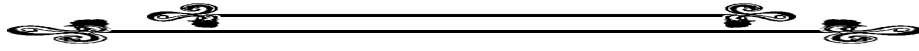
Africa. The Macomers are a wealthy and socially prominent American couple in Africa on a safari. Wilson is a professional hunter, paid to guide their adventures. The three begin discussing the morning's hunt. This topic appears to cause them some discomfort, and soon the source of their discomfort is revealed: while stalking a lion, Francis Macomber panicked and ran (4). We learn that earlier in the day Francis had panicked and, in his own words, "bolted like a rabbit" when a wounded lion charged him. Margot mocks Macomber for this act of cowardice, and that night she sleeps with Wilson. The next day the party chase down three buffalo, and Macomber joins Wilson in killing two of them. Exhilarated by the hunt, Macomber feels transformed and no longer afraid. "You know I don't think I'd ever be afraid of anything again," he says. It is soon learned that the third buffalo was only wounded and has gone into the bush. Wilson and Macomber will have to track and kill the wounded animal, reproducing the dangerous circumstances of the previous day's lion hunt. Still Macomber feels unafraid, and when the buffalo charges him he stands his ground and fires at it, "shooting a touch high each time and hitting the heavy horns, splintering and chipping them like hitting a slate roof". Margot grabs a gun, ostensibly to stop the still-charging buffalo, but her shot hits Macomber, killing him. Though Wilson says he will report Macomber's death as accidental, it is unclear whether Margot shot her husband on purpose or by accident. An important passage in the story occurs in the moments just before Francis and Robert Wilson go into the bush after the buffalo.

"You've gotten awfully brave, awfully suddenly," his wife said contemptuously, but her contempt was not secure. She was very afraid of something. Macomber laughed, a very natural hearty laugh. "You know I have," he said. "I really have." "Isn't it sort of late?" Margot said bitterly. Because she had done the best she could for many years back and the way they were together now was no one person's fault. "Not for me," said Macomber (5).

From this dialogue, the reader sees that Margot has lost her edge in the relationship. She is no longer in charge and deeply resents Macomber's new-found courage.

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" has been acclaimed as one of Hemingway's most successful artistic achievements. This is largely due to the ambiguous complexity of its characters and their motivations, and the debate this ambiguity has generated. The most prominent source of debate, of course, is whether Margot's shooting of her husband was deliberate, accidental, or some combination of the two. In the estimation of critic Kenneth G. Johnston, "the prevailing critical view is that she deliberately—or at best, 'accidentally on purpose'—murdered him" but there are many, including Johnston himself, who hold the opposite view.

Hemingway scholar Carlos Baker calls Margot Macomber "easily the most unscrupulous of Hemingway's fictional females"; a woman "who is really and literally deadly" and who "covets her husband's money but values even more her power over him." Other authors who hold similar views regarding Margot include Philip Young, Leslie A. Fiedler and Frank O'Connor. According to Leslie

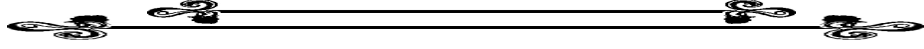


A. Fiedler, a related point that has been widely debated is whether Hemingway intended the reader to view Robert Wilson as a heroic figure, embodying Hemingway's ideal of the courageous, hyper-masculine male. Critics who argue for Margot's innocence are especially likely to question this positive view of Wilson. It is through Wilson's words that Margot's intentions are questioned, notably when he asks after the shooting "Why didn't you poison him? That's what they do in England." If Wilson is intended to be the story's voice of morality, then this implied accusation is damning. But if Wilson is a less-perfect character himself, then his judgement of Margot is suspect. Some critics have noted that Wilson chases down the buffalo in a car, violating the law and perhaps also Hemingway's code of fairness in hunting. Kenneth G. Johnston argues that Wilson "has much to gain by making Mrs. Macomber believe that the death of her husband could be construed as murder," since he could lose his license if Margot accurately described Wilson's use of the car in the buffalo hunt. In *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, author and literary critic Frank O'Connor, though generally an admirer of Hemingway, gives one of the most colorful and uncharitable summations of "The Short Happy Life":

Francis runs away from a lion, which is what most sensible men would do if faced by a lion, and his wife promptly cuckolds him with the English manager of their big-game hunting expedition. As we all know, good wives admire nothing in a husband except his capacity to deal with lions, so we can sympathize with the poor woman in her trouble. But next day Macomber, faced with a buffalo, suddenly becomes a man of superb courage, and his wife,

recognizing that[...] for the future she must be a virtuous wife, blows his head off. [...] To say that the psychology of this story is childish would be to waste good words (6). But there is one point on which Hemingway is perfectly clear: Francis Macomber was only truly alive from the moment he first shot the buffalo until the moment his wife shot him - a period of about half an hour. What ultimately killed Francis Macomber was the difference between what his wife perceived as necessary for the achievement of a masculine identity, and what Francis Macomber thought he needed to do to achieve that sense of identity within himself. Hemingway argues that Macomber's death was not a tragedy at all, but a triumph, because he died in the act of affirming himself (7).

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is a quintessential Hemingway tale of one man's attempt to overcome an internal struggle by mastering the external world. Francis Macomber, hunting dangerous game in East Africa, discovers his own bravery and strength when he ignores his self-consciousness and instead relies on instinct. Though Macomber is thirty-five, his realization of his own bravery marks the true start of his life, but that life ends quickly and violently only minutes later (8). "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is among Ernest Hemingway's most impressive short stories. His famous "Iceberg Theory" (he thereby meant that in his texts, only a short part of the overall content is actually written down, the rest of it stands between the lines) has often caused confusion in reading his short stories and his omissions have tended to obscure their thematic implications - "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", however, is embarrassing by its

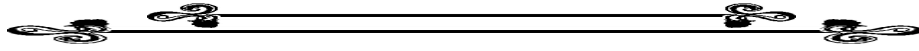


riches. The exciting story is made up of manifold topics being key themes of the literary period of modernism: The main theme of the story, the self-discovery of Francis Macomber, correlates with modernist questions like: "What am I in it? - What's my function in the universe? - What are the limits of knowledge? - What is real?" Another topic of modernism is the breaking up of traditional values such as the development of a new relationship between man and woman, that is, again, a central theme in Hemingway's text. Thus, it becomes clear that the topics in the story are also linked to the time the author has lived in. hat's why this term paper will firstly consider some autobiographical elements in the story. It will then go deeper into the text and examine the incidents and experiences that finally lead to the self-discovery of Francis Macomber. The thesis that "both the constellation of the three major characters on their hunting trip and the powerful experiences in the African wilderness finally lead to the self-discovery of Francis Macomber" will be its central question. Having firstly examined the autobiographical background, the recipient might then better be able to understand the themes in the text as well as the story's plot. The reader is to realize by this term paper that the specific, almost ironic constellation of the characters in the story together with the strong experiences of Francis Macomber in the African wilderness finally lead to his self-discovery, lead to and also end his very short period of a happy life! (9.)

Carlos Baker wrote about The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber in his book entitled Ernest Hemingway; A life story. According to Baker, the story was a brilliant fusion of personal observation, hearsay, and invention. Ernest drew heavily upon his



own experiences in shooting buffalo and lion. He also asserted many years later, that he had drawn his portrait of Francis Macomber from a wealthy young international sportsman - a "nice jerk" whom he had known very well in real life. "He is just how he really was"? said Ernest ambiguously. "only he is invented." Macomber's wife Margot was also invented from a living prototype. Handsome, well-kept, a society beauty with a nearly perfect oval face and a wealth of dark hair, she embodied all the internal qualities that Ernest detested among the wives of his wealthier friends. "I invented her complete with handles" said he, "from the worst bitch I knew(then) and when I first knew her she'd been lovely. Not my dish, not my pigeon, not my cup of tea, but lovely for what she was, and I was her all of the above, which is whatever you make of it." With some small show of gallantry, he added that this was as close as he could come to describing his earlier association with the lady. Robert Wilson, white hunter to the Macombers, was based on Philip Percival. With his rubicund face, cool blue eyes, laconic speech habits, and his enviable combination of courage and judgement. Ernest later said that all he contributed to the invention of Wilson was to disguise Philip slightly for family and business reasons, and in order to keep him out of trouble with the Tanganyika Game Department. What he did not disclose was that the Macomber story was a much embroidered and wholly reconstructed version of a tale Philip had told him one night beside their safari campfire. Percival himself thought Ernest's yarn "devilishly clever". He had some fear that the people (1, 284), he had described to Ernest, including their white hunter, might recognize themselves in fictional disguise.

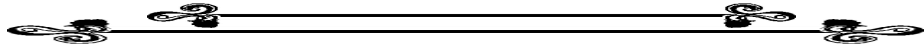


Luckily, his own high standards of professional etiquette had prevented him from naming names, even to Ernest in private conversation. He took some comfort from the fact that Ernest had armed Wilson a 505 Gibbs, a rifle never used by the white hunter in question. Another topic of camp fire talk was the fact that some white hunters had been known to sleep with their female clients. Unlike, Wilson, who was said to carry a doubled-sized cot to accommodate such “windfalls,” Percival himself drew the line at all such activities. But he had mentioned several cases in which one or another of his clients had lost their heads through fear. Ernest picked up this clue and exploited it by causing Francis Macomber to flee before a wounded and charging lion. The denouement of his story, in which Margot Macomber killed her husband while ostensibly trying to keep him from being gored by a wounded buffalo, was likewise one of Ernest’s inventions “As far as I know” said Philip Percival, “no client has ever succeeded in shooting her husband as Ernest Hemingway describes”(1, 285).

Ernest Hemingway has created a masterpiece of mystery in the story. The mystery does not reveal itself to the reader until the end of the story, yet it leaves a lot to the imagination. At the end of the story Margaret Macomber kills her husband by accident, in order to save him from being mauled by a large Buffalo while on a safari in Africa. The mystery is whether or not this killing was truly accidental, or intentional. If it was to be considered intentional, there would certainly have to be evidence in the story suggesting such, with a clear motive as well. What makes this mystery unique is that Hemingway gives the reader numerous

instances that would lead the reader to devise an acceptable motive, yet human nature tells the reader that this killing could not have been intentional. From a purely objective analysis of the story, the reader would see far more evidence supporting the theory of an intentional killing rather than an accidental one. The clues supporting the idea that Margaret killed Francis intentionally can best be seen when observing and studying the background information on both Francis Macomber, and Margaret herself. The marriage between the two is summarized in the statement, "Margot was too beautiful for Macomber to divorce her and Macomber had too much money for Margot ever to leave him." (10).

The fact that one can find all these points for discussion is evidence that *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* is, quite simply, a wonderfully well-written story. It is evident that Hemingway chose each word carefully, even though the same words can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, the description of Wilson's eyes as "cold" and "flat" indicates that he is not an emotional person. Is this lack of emotion something positive, showing that Wilson has the strength to withstand life's pains and sorrows, as one who lives up to the Hemingway code? Or is it something negative, showing that Wilson has taken the code too far and lost all compassion for his fellow human beings? Hemingway's craft also shows in his delineation of the story's action. The lion hunt and the buffalo hunt proceed in similar fashion; because something shocking — Francis's act of cowardice — happens at the end of the lion hunt, the reader expects

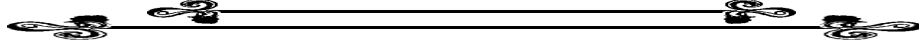


something shocking to happen at the end of the buffalo hunt. The suspense generated by this expectation keeps the reader turning pages, and even after many readings, it's still possible to be shocked by Francis Macomber's death, which is, memorably, shown from Francis's point of view: "He felt a sudden white-hot, blinding flash explode inside his head and that was all he ever felt." The story's use of flashback is another technique that holds the reader's interest (11).

As a result, we can say that The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber story written by American writer is a valuable story and helps for understanding background of life, society, relationship between people and family members. Either western or eastern intellectual views indicates that family members should be faithful one-another. It seems to us that E.Hemingway tried to show in hero code Margot should be devoted to his husband Macomber. All told, the story's many nuances and complications make it subject to a variety of interpretations, which are likely to cause debate for many years to come. Moreover, it is still highly entertaining. The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber is one of those stories that become richer with each reading.

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## Abstract

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" has been acclaimed as one of Hemingway's most successful artistic achievements. This is largely due to the ambiguous complexity of its characters and their motivations, and the debate this ambiguity has generated. The paper draws attention to the context of the story and its background. From a purely objective analysis of the story, the reader would see far more evidence supporting the theory of an intentional killing rather than an accidental one. The clues supporting the idea that Margaret killed his husband Francis intentionally can best be seen when observing and studying the background information on both Francis Macomber, and Margaret herself. The marriage between the two is summarized in the statement, "Margot was too beautiful for Macomber to divorce her and Macomber had too much money for Margot ever to leave him." Either western or eastern intellectual views indicates that family members should be faithful one-another. It seems to us that E.Hemingway tried to show in hero code Margot should be devoted to his husband Macomber. All told, the story's many nuances and complications make it subject to a variety of interpretations, which are likely to cause debate for many years to come.

The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber story

