

ERNEST HEMINGWAY
THE SHORT HAPPY LIFE OF FRANCIS MACOMBER

Like Joyce and Proust, Hemingway is a writer who uses the material of his own life to construct fiction. For example, "A Farewell to Arms" (1929) was inspired by his war experience in Italy, and "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (1940) reflects part of his experience after travelling in Spain. He believed that the writer's role was to work hard and write about true things. Therefore he once remarked that his job as a writer was to "put down what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way I can tell it." He writes only about those aspects of life he has encountered personally, although those are many – warfare, big-game hunting, sports, fishing, bull-fighting, etc.

The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber (1936) is based on the 1933-1934 African trip. It is the tragic story of an American couple, Francis and Margot Macomber who arrive in Nairobi and hire a professional hunter named Wilson to take them on a hunt expedition. Macomber is a rather spineless character- his wife despises him and makes no effort to conceal her affairs to other man. Macomber hopes the solitude of the safari will bring them back together. But on first day of hunting he disgraces himself and loses his chance to win his wife esteem. He wounds a lion but dashes away in front of it. Margot now snubs at him totally and begins to throw herself at Wilson. Macomber knows about the affair, but in his disgrace he is too weak to make any objections. At this point, Margot hates Francis, Francis hates Wilson, and Wilson is beginning to despise them both.

The buffalo hunting scene represents the climax of this story. The description of the chase shows us Hemingway as a writer preoccupied almost exclusively with action, both in real life and in the life of his characters, whose inner life is revealed by the actions they undertake. Even the finer sensation of his characters – love, fear, loyalty – are re-scaled by their physical reactions, thus Macomber is dominated by two conflicting sensations – the first one is of terrible fright and the other of unrestrained hatred. In order to render to the reader a feeling of Macomber's almost animalic fear, Hemingway operates exclusively on the level of the concrete images of the chase, as perceived by his character's eyes. Macomber perceives all the dangerous anatomical details of the galloping bull with the accuracy of a camera. He sees the bull "bigger and bigger", "huge", "with shiny horns", his "plunging hugeness". His actions are hasty, precipitated and he tries to shoot at the buffalo from the moving car, afraid of an encounter with the animal on the ground. Once Wilson calls him "a fool" and he has "no fear, only hatred for Wilson", his physical reactions change completely. He becomes a self-assured, cool, buffalo killer, aiming carefully at the haunted animals. His total change on the physical level then results in a feeling of "drunken elation", symbolic of his newly acquired manliness and self-

respect. Macomber experiences danger and his change is obvious. Danger becomes the most challenging test in his experience, being both impressing and exciting. From this point of view, Hemingway is not only a writer who copes with life, with the problems of violence and death, but also a novelist interested in the fundamental human experiences including fear as a psychological phenomenon inherent in the human condition. It is not only fear when facing death, but man's dramatic fear of being cut off completely from his fellow human beings. His change takes place keeping the calm of the hunting, passing from weakness, cowardice and fear through disappointment to confidence and courage, ending in manliness and self-respect. In the course of "his short happy life", he develops character and enthusiasm for life. Both Wilson and Margot sense the transformation. Wilson congratulates him on his entry into manhood, but Margot, who realizes that she can no longer control him, is furious.

Hemingway's language relies mostly on nominal parts of speech, while verbs are used sparingly or are converted into verbal nouns, in order to render their action more dramatically. Thus, condensed noun phrases, as "the gray, hairless look of one huge bull", "the shiny black of his horns", plunging hugeness", "galloping", "rounded back" reduce the syntax to a minimum. The endless repetition of the conjunction "and" has a dramatic effect, keeping the reader's attention alert. The point of view is that of omniscient, the author knowing everything what is happening in the story.

Throughout his work, Ernest Hemingway sent a message to the reader: that man can be destroyed, but never defeated. He truly believed in man, in his courage, honesty and – above all – dignity.