

# Observations on Three Hemingway Stories

By Elexis Coleman

As a first time reader of Hemingway (hey, cut me some slack—I am going to business school), I had no idea what to expect. Usually with brevity comes a loss of information and a sense of completeness. However, Hemingway's mastery of the short story is amazing. The characters in the three short stories "The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber", "Ten Indians", and "The Battler" all struggle as they deal with loss, the major focus of each story.

In the hunting misadventure "The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber", Francis Macomber finally finds his moxie, and then also finds half his brain missing not even a full day later, courtesy of a bullet. What was supposed to be an adventurous hunting trip turns sour when the main character disgraces himself and his wife by running away from a wounded lion during a hunt. Francis, his wife Margot, and their robust hunting guide Wilson all battle it out on the plains of Africa as Francis tries to save face - and his marriage.

Francis and Margot are what one could imagine "rich" couples to be like; the husband is awkward but bursting with money, and the wife is hot, not stupid, but not very functional either. Margot could be considered a trophy wife, but unlike trophies, she did move—right underneath Wilson! It is easy to shower Francis with pity; his wife berated, disrespected, and embarrassed him in front of others, and even got away with cheating on him with the safari version of Crocodile Dundee. However, Francis staying with Margot merely out of convenience really was not an apt excuse. Hey, he had money; it would not have been incredibly too hard to find another gold diggin' wife.

As the couple bickers, Wilson, their crass and observant hunting guide flip flops regarding whether or not he likes Macomber. As the typical boy-man, Macomber's pathetic cowardice, yet obvious eagerness to prove himself sat well with Wilson. Wilson comes off as a chauvinist, regarding Margot (and womyn in general) as overly emotional, bitchy, and downright nasty, and as a self-elected spokesperson for said gender, I cannot say his (or maybe Hemingway's) assessment is too far off. Though Wilson had brutishness about him, he did appear to be of a decent nature. After Francis runs off after the confrontation with the lion, Wilson staged Francis's "celebration" for his "participation" in the hunt, which was a fairly nice, though paid for, act. He noted that it was the cowardly husband hunters and their floozy wives who kept him in business, and truly, it was not his fault that the wives desired his fearlessness and esteem. The switching of the narration from third to first person is seamless and ingenious, especially when the reader is invited inside the lion's head and movements and inside Wilson's head as well.

After Francis killed the buffalo during his redemption hunt (and his wife brings up a possible scandal regarding Wilson's method), both Margot and Francis go through a drastic change. Francis finally finds his manhood and courage, and the entire party realizes that the new and improved Francis now is quite capable of leaving Margot. Francis even supplied a few witty retorts to Margot's bashing of the hunt, much to her chagrin. Sadly, Francis's manhood is short lived.

After reading and rereading the ending and the passage about when Macomber's wife blew half his head off, JFK style, the conclusion has been reached that she did not kill him on purpose. His newfound moxie perhaps impressed her and she probably did love him, so she protected him. After all, even the narrator noted that it looked like the buffalo was about to gore the guy. Wilson's response to Francis's death came off as inhuman and robotic. He told the wife to get back in the car, and rather than reflect on Francis's lack of head, he opts to comment on how big the buffalo's head is. His mocking of Margot and suggestion that it would have been much easier to just poison Francis is twisted and morbid, both of which added to the comment's overall hilarity.

Francis likely started out trying to prove something to his weary wife, but in the end, he was just trying to prove his bravery to himself and wound up with a hole in his head. The one time he really should have run, he did not. Was that him exhibiting courage or stupidity? It is hard to say since both terms can often be used interchangeably.

In "Ten Indians", a story about the loss of a first love, Nick finds out that his Indian crush named Prudence is anything but a prude when his dad catches her in the woods with another guy. Was Nick's dad just trying to give his son the 411 on a "cheating" crush, or was he lying to Nick because he did not approve of the relationship?

In the beginning of the story, as Nick heads home with a neighboring family after a July 4<sup>th</sup> ball game and celebration, the Garner's go on and on about "them Indians" and mock Nick for liking Prudence, an Indian that lives in his town. Later on in the evening, Nick returns home only to have his dad tell him a disturbing story about seeing Prudie "threshing" around in the woods with a certain Frank Washburn. It is hard to say if Nick's dad was really lying to him. He does not look at Nick when he tells him the bad news, and even changes his story when Nick further questions him. Instead of consoling his son and further talking about the matter, Nick's dad offers him a piece of pie. Ha! If a large slice of hush-up pie and a good night's rest really could cure a broken heart, all armchair psychologists (think Dr. Phil) would be put out of business.

In "The Battler" what is presented is the loss of mental capacity and a grip on reality. As a big fan of violence in literature, "The Battler" starting off with a literal bang (in the italicized "prologue") was exciting and a story about a bloody gunfight rapidly unfolded in my diabolic mind. Needless to say, when the page was turned and the story continued with the main character being tossed out of a train by a brakeman, I was really confused. What happened with the brutal executions at the beginning of the story? Does the italicized portion have anything to do with "The Battler"? [Editor's reply: No, it doesn't really but who knows, it might.] It was only the first page, and I was already lost. Great, I thought.

After getting tossed out of the train and hit in the face, Nick appeared to be proud of his black eye as he notes how he wishes that he could check his busted reflection out. He wanders around a bit, and comes upon Ad, a former and boxing champion and resident of reality. Ad seems to quickly take to Nick, perhaps because both are apparent fighters. Nick's quick affirmation to Ad in regards to being tough dissolved once he checks Ad's mangled face out. It was interesting how Bugs, Ad's companion and apparent "servant", pointed out that Nick, like Ad, would eventually become crazy ("He's got a lot coming to him.") Free meal or not, why Nick did not simply move on when it became apparent that Ad was a bit crazed is beyond me. Ad likely is some future, whacked out, rejected, and mutilated version of wayward Nick in the distant future. Both meander and both seem a tad on the aggressive side, with a penchant for getting whopped in the face/head/that general area.

Bugs came across as the docile and servile Negro perfected by Melville's character Babo in *Benito Cereno*. Bugs even bops Ad over the head with a blunt object, clearly showing who is running the show, albeit behind the scene. Was Bugs just a gentle giant helping his friend out, or was he someone getting a free ride on an insane man's carpet? Like with most of Hemingway's characters, it is hard to know of any true intentions.

My only regret with these three stories is that they were not longer. Instead, we as readers are left to toil with what excellent text we are provided with. I, like most others, am thoroughly impressed by Hemingway's impeccable ability to relay the physical and emotional implications of loss into such few pages of text.