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Feminism in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*

In many aspects of life (marriage, work, etc.), Women are viewed as the lesser gender and are placed in a negative light through the eyes of a man. Though Feminism may seem contemporary due to it playing a role in many aspects of the 21st century, literature from the 20th century is successful in showing the clear social differences between a man and a woman. In *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* written in 1936 by Ernest Hemingway, feminism is greatly shown through the only female character Margot Macomber and how she is viewed through the perspective of the male characters and her creator, Hemingway. The author, along with the other male characters in the short story, see Margot as femme fatale and weak due to her constant attempts to break social norms and power dynamics in her marriage. Although she is placed in a bad light throughout the full story, readers are able to feel sympathy for Margot and how feminism impacts her as a character.

Feminism is greatly shown through the patriarchal marriage between Francis and Margot Macomber in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. Macomber is the obvious patriarch figure in his marriage and uses his power as a man to his advantage. This can be seen through Macomber's biased opinion of his wife and how he treats her. In her marriage, Margot is placed into the basic power dynamics of Feminism as the weaker and ignorant individual and is treated

as such. When the Macombers and their hunting group were setting off to see the wounded lion, Macomber impulsively told his wife, “stay here, Margot”(10). In this scenario, along with many others in the story, Macomber sees himself as the power figure in his relationship. In this patriarchy, it is the social norm for him to make all decisions for himself and for his wife. During this specific lion hunt, Margot is assumed to be too weak to continue following the lion and Macomber makes her stay behind without her consent. Along with this, Mrs. Macomber is held to specific standards as a woman in her marriage. One of which is respecting her husband at all times even if she does not receive the same respect back. More specifically, Macomber went after his wife when she made a sarcastic remark alluding to his cowardness. He quickly replied, “Why not let up on the bitchery just a little, Margot”(5). The strict Power Dynamics in her marriage require Margot to never disrespect the power figure, Macomber. However, when Margot comments on Macomber’s accomplishment (shooting an eland) being lesser than he had viewed it to be, Macomber fires back and calls his own wife a bitch. Through the unhealthy, patriarchal marriage between Francis and Margot Macomber, readers are able to see the evident anti-female perspective that Macomber has and acts upon towards his wife. This negative viewpoint on women is carried throughout other male characters in the story who do not experience as intimate of a relationship with Margot that Francis does.

Even though Robert Wilson, the hired guide during the Macomber’s hunting trip, has no power over Margot, unlike that of Macomber, his views (which can easily represent the views of all men) on Margot and women in general greatly portray his disrespect for the female gender. It is clear, in the eyes of Wilson, that he views all women as evil, greedy, and unintelligent. After

Margot's slight remark towards her husband's weakness after the lion hunt, Wilson thought to himself, "How should a woman act when she discovers her husband is a bloody coward? She's damn cruel but they're all cruel"(5). Wilson evidently believes that all women are bitter and rude, especially towards their husbands. He disagrees with this idea because this disrespect from the mouth of a woman does not coincide with the social norm of a woman's behavior towards a man. Related to this, Wilson limits the value of women to just their appearances. He judges Margot by saying, "she had a very perfect oval face, so perfect that you expected her to be stupid"(4). Robert Wilson, along with the male gender, only analyze women at first glance, and use their looks to determine their intelligence, success, etc. This creates an obvious juxtaposition as women are expected to be beautiful, but good looks pin them as ignorant through the eyes of a male. Through his "quick-to-judge" eyes, Robert Wilson makes his hate for women clear to readers and is able to highlight the aspect of feminism in the story.

Attributable to Ernest Hemingway having his own personal disrespect for women, this negative view is seen in his writing as well. In this case, he places Margot Macomber in a bad light by making her selfish, greedy, and femme fatale. Hemingway's anti-feminist approach towards his only female character is shown greatly through her marriage with the assumed protagonist, Francis Macomber. The author states, "Margot was too beautiful for Macomber to divorce her and Macomber had too much money for Margot to ever leave him"(13). Hemingway clearly views Margot as either a). Not strong enough to leave a marriage she is unhappy in or b). Too greedy for her husband's money to choose to be independent. He also alludes to Macomber's only positive view of his wife being her looks; the only positive thing about women

mentioned in the whole story. Hemingway is also able to place Margot in a continued negative light through her affair with Robert Wilson. He says, “Margaret, his wife, looked away from him and back to Wilson”(2). This pins Margot as femme fatale by foreshadowing the affair she ends up having with Wilson. Again, Hemingway places femininity in a bad light by making the only female presence in the story a cheater, greedy, and shamefully beautiful. Hemingway is also able to take one last jab at women through his ambiguous ending revolving around Macomber’s death. Although it could be argued that Margot was not at fault, she is either viewed as too weak to be using a gun or so selfish that she would kill her own husband to have his money and run off with her new lover, Wilson. Due to Hemingway having the ultimate power as the author, he is able to take Margot, along with all women, and have readers see her in a negative way.

In his story *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, Ernest Hemingway displays his negative view of women through his writing and the eyes of his male characters. It is clear that this is one of the main motives of his piece which makes his constant criticisms towards women all the more blatant. This mainly seen through his male characters and how they treat Margot with such little respect. Due to this, readers are easily able to feel sympathy for Margot when looking through at the story through a feminist perspective.