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Ernest Hemingway Analysis

A significant author and writer, Ernest Hemingway is known for his novels and short stories. He combined his hobbies and life adventures with a unique short sentenced writing style. Still cherished and examined today, Hemingway is known as one of the greatest authors of the twentieth century. One of six children, Hemingway grew up in Oak Park, Illinois. He was close with his twin sister, Marcelline, and his parents too, until he decided to not go to college. His parents criticized him for choosing to go to Europe to fight in what would be the first world war and they would also later criticize many of his writing pieces. As a boy, Hemingway loved to camp, fish, and hunt. These hobbies would be carried with him throughout his life and would appear in a copious amount of his works (Reef, 8-16). Hemingway lived in a variety of different locations, including Italy, Spain, Paris, Cuba, Africa, the Florida Keys, and various U.S. cities. He had a total of four wives and three children, all of which were boys. Hemingway was a devoted father and always made time for Bumby, Patrick, and George, even though his boys had two different mothers. His writing often reflected the city and his life at the time. For example, he lived in Spain multiple times to be a reporter on the Spanish bullfights, and he lived in Italy during World War I, for that was where he was stationed. Hemingway was characterized for his short, simple sentences that got to the point. His best works were done when he simply wrote what he felt (Reef, 24-40) . In addition, Hemingway was also known for his real life and personal

topics. He would write about life at war and violent/tragic endings for his characters. He was also intrigued by death and would explore these feelings in his writing. Hemingway got along with his siblings and kept in touch with some of them over the years, but he never forgave his mother for her harshness and lack of support as a young man and his views contrasted sharply with those of his father. Finally, when his father shot himself in the head, thus committing suicide, Hemingway viewed this as his father giving up and taking the easy way out. At the end of his life, Ernest himself would succumb to the same fate as his father, along with a few other of his siblings. Historians believe that there was a family trait of suicidal depression in the Hemingway family. By the end of his life, Hemingway was a heavy drinker and found himself in Kansas, where he would take his life (Reef, 138-150) .

Besides writing the stories he is best known for, Hemingway was also a reporter throughout his life. This job is what initially inspired the writing style that readers admire today. The firms told him to use “short sentences, vigorous English, and positivity.” (Reef, 42). Hemingway’s experiences during world war one left a profound impact on his life. He felt separated from everyone else in society, which is why after this period in his life the effects of war were prevalent in many stories. To make the plots of his stories more complex, he would intertwine his hobbies and characteristics of himself. Activities such as bullfighting (something Hemingway was fascinated with) found their way into the novel *The Sun Also Rises*, and his love for fishing is staged in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway is also known to create harsh realities for his characters. He had relationships destroyed from affairs and alcoholism, and in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, the wife shoots the main character in the head. Hemingway’s characters were often inspired by people he knew and experiences he had, which

is what caused them to appear so real. His times of personal struggle were often also reflected in his works such as in *The Old Man and the Sea* (Reef, 77-106). Hemingway's relationships with the people around him, his experiences in the world war and world travels, his hobbies, and changing viewpoints and emotional states are all clearly expressed in the short stories, *The Sun Also Rises*, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", and *The Old Man and the Sea*.

The novel *The Sun Also Rises* portrays how Hemingway was affected by World War I, his hobbies, and the people in his life. Hemingway lived in Europe ("*The Sun Also Rises*" 325) during the war, and he experienced first hand how the war affected those around him both physically and mentally. WWI left many of his decade feeling like they no longer belonged, or were "lost", though Hemingway refused to admit it himself. Hemingway's main character in *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes, was wounded during WWI and it leaves him unable to consummate his love with Lady Brett Ashley ("*The Sun Also Rises*" 327). Through Jake Barnes, Hemingway is able to view society through the eyes of an aimless observer. Set after WWI, Jake takes in scenes and sights that used to bring him joy, but now he just seems out of place (Baker, 48). Hemingway often found inspiration for his works from the people around him. On one of his many travels Hemingway was accompanied by friends including Lady Duff Twydsen, whom Hemingway was in love with. Hemingway watched her become part of a new generation of women and have meaningless affairs, thus making her the inspiration for Lady Brett Ashley in the story. Harold Leob became the character of Robert Cohn after Hemingway learned an affair had occurred between him and Lady Duff. Lady Duff's bankrupt companion became the source of Mike Campbell. Finally, the character of Jake Barnes is not a reflection of Hemingway himself as many assume; instead he is a combination of several real people Hemingway knew

(“*The Sun Also Rises*” 324). In addition to his characters being inspired by real people, aspects of Hemingway’s life style were often woven into his writing. One characteristic of the lost generation was their taking to alcohol, and Hemingway was no exception. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake gets drunk multiple times, as does Brett, Mike and Bill are drunk almost every time they appear in the story, and Cohn too spends a great deal of time drinking. Hemingway acknowledges that the characters in this story are “drunks”, but he was ignorant in the aspect that the alcoholism his character's experience could create alcoholic depression (Djos [database]). In the 1920’s, at the time *The Sun Also Rises* was written, the common phrase among people in cities such as Paris was “Have a drink” (Wilson, 46). Hemingway was immersed in this culture and thus it reflected into his writing as simply what his characters do. Hemingway’s feminine views are also expressed in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*. During the 1920’s, after WWI, the light in which women were traditionally viewed shifted. This became known as the Jazz Age and was characterized by a breakdown of traditional gender roles (Martin, 97). Women could wear more skimpy clothes and they could go out and drink. They were not so dependent on men, which was a change for Hemingway, for he viewed males as dominating over females. He reflects these feelings in Lady Brett Ashley, who represents women’s new ability to express their sexuality . Brett goes to places such as the bar and bullfights that previously women were not supposed to go to and she changed her long skirts for short ones with light fabrics (Martin, 98-101). Brett along with Jake provide an example of Hemingway’s gender reversal in his writing. After being injured in the war, “Jake must learn to accept the discomfort and uncertainty that come with his loss of authority” and this allows him to become “more nurturing and responsive”, which are typically feminine qualities (Martin, 104-05). Brett, on the other hand,

demonstrates a more masculine side of women. “She must learn to make choices for herself and take responsibility for those choices” and this allows her to become “more decisive and responsible” (Martin, 105-06). These gender reversals occurred after WWI and were apart of Hemingway’s generation. As an author known to write about what is going on in the world around him, the reversal of gender roles only solidifies this idea. Through the use of world issues after WWI, complex gender identities, characters based on people Hemingway knew, and topics such as alcoholism, *The Sun Also Rises* clearly expresses aspects of Hemingway’s life.

Another short story written by Hemingway, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, also contains elements of Hemingway’s life. Many of the ideas for Hemingway’s stories are based on real events that happened during his lifetime, and the inspiration for *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* is no exception. The short story is based upon an actual scandal that had taken place in Kenya involving a wife, a love affair, and the wife’s implication in the death of her husband, which was suppressed in the media and covered up by the British government” (“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, 212). In Hemingway’s short story, the main character, Francis Macomber, and his wife, are not in love with one another. On an African hunting trip she has an affair with the tour guide and Francis knows about it. The controversy lies at the end of the story when the wife fires a gun and it kills Francis (Rovit and Brenner, 103-04). The reader does not know if she intended to kill her husband or if it was aimed for the buffalo they were hunting. The trip Francis and his wife are on in the story is a hunting safari in Africa. Hemingway is known for his adventurous spirit, his love for the outdoors, and being a frequent hunter, which commenced with his father at a young age (“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, 212). By the 1930’s, it is also noted that Hemingway

was revealing more of himself in his works. His characters continue to be real life acquaintances and he began writing about experiences he had in places such as Africa, where he went on many hunting safaris (Palladino, [database]). Since he hunted so frequently, he was quite knowledgeable and vastly experienced. In “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, it is noted how accurately Hemingway described hunting techniques and the logistics of charging a buffalo, which all worked to make the story seem additionally realistic (“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, 217). The tour guide in the short story is known as Wilson. Many readers take him to be the embodiment of Hemingway for he is active, loves the outdoors, and deems physical encouragement to be extremely important. These traits were also admired by Hemingway in the aspect that he was a big game hunter. The character of Wilson also expresses the Hemingway code, which can be found in many of Hemingway’s works. This code is that no man should cower back from danger and they must bear their own sufferings and failures (“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, 217-221). Wilson despises the delicate life that wealthy Americans such as Francis Macomber lead and he believes that women should not dominate men, but just the opposite. Wilson believes that these characteristics make him a better man than Macomber. Hemingway, while he still had strong, independent women among his friends, lovers, and story characters, believed that an appropriate relationship was one in which the male was dominant over the female (“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, 218). “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” depicts Hemingway’s viewpoint on masculinity. Hemingway viewed himself as an embodiment of manliness through his passions for hunting, fishing, and bullfighting. In the short story, a strong sense of masculinity is based off of these ideas, which frequently appear in his writing. By creating characters in this light, Hemingway

provides in his works his own gender stereotypes. This includes the feminine stereotype of femme fatale which is, “a woman who schemes her way to riches and fame no matter what it takes” (“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”, 216). This idea is expressed through Francis’s wife, Margot Macomber. She is not in love with her husband, but he has too plentiful of an amount of money to offer that she can not leave him. Thus a possible interpretation for her killing scheme may be categorized among the actions of a femme fatale (Rovit and Brenner, 104). Through his hobby of hunting, personal experiences, and masculine viewpoints, aspects of Hemingway’s life are clearly evident in “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”.

Many aspects of Hemingway’s life are also present in the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway began visiting Cuba in 1928 and years later, in 1940, the coast near Havana became his residence for nineteen years. Due to this, Hemingway knew Cuba quite well and thus it is not surprising that the *The Old Man and the Sea* is set in a small fishing village near Havana Cuba (“*The Old Man and the Sea*” 202). Being familiar with the regions in which his stories are set, once again allows Hemingway to accurately portray the scene in which his stories are set. In *The Old Man and the Sea* Hemingway even refers to the sea as “la mar” which is what Spanish people refer to the ocean as when they love it (Herlihy-Mera, [database]), further showing how the Cuban culture affected his writing. Calling the sea “la mar” also adds a feminine identity to the sea, thus showing Hemingway’s struggle to properly portray women in his writing, and it demonstrates his respect for nature in that he gives it human qualities (Beegal, 201-04). Even though *The Old Man and the Sea* was one of Hemingway’s later novels, it still contains similar aspects of his earlier works. “Gregorio Fuentes, a Cuban fisherman, was Hemingway’s inspiration for the main character of *The Old Man and the Sea*” (“*The Old Man and the Sea*”

203). The main character's companion, Manolin, was inspired by a young man in his twenties that Hemingway was acquainted with in Cuba. Once again this novel is also based on a true story ("*The Old Man and the Sea*" 198-99). In addition, Hemingway once again incorporates current events of the time period into his writing. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway references a baseball player, Joe Dimaggio, and a series of games between the Yankees and the Tigers. This is the series when Dimaggio came back from a slump and this may contribute to the ideas of perseverance and that man cannot be defeated, which Hemingway expresses in the novel ("*The Old Man and the Sea*" 202). Different from many of his previous works, Santiago, the main character, places vast importance on mental qualities such as his self-confidence and expertise in the "tricks" of fishing. Hemingway too aspired to challenge himself mentally through his friendships and writing, as well as physically through activities such as boxing, serving in the war, hunting, fishing, and bullfighting ("*The Old Man and Sea*" 204). A major idea focused on throughout *The Old Man and the Sea* is the idea that "man can be destroyed, but not defeated" (Stephens and Cools [database]). Santiago is defeated by the sharks, but he achieves a sense of triumph in the fact that he endured and persevered and made it out of a tough situation alive. He may have lost the huge fish, but he did not lose himself. These characteristics foretell Hemingway's state of life in the 1950's. "*The Old Man and the Sea* might be the author's way of thinking through the ethical and philosophical problems of taking his own life." "In this respect, the fish, already a symbol of death in general, becomes the representation of the writer's self, his identity as a living thing" ("*The Old Man and the Sea*" 207). Hemingway explored these different aspects of triumph and death in his writing as he struggled with them in his own world. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway also expresses his respect for animals and nature. In

the novel Santiago eventually comes to terms that he is equal to the marlin and respects the great fish, even though he knows he must kill it to survive. He even begs for forgiveness from the great animal. This respect for animals during hunting/fishing was a set of ethics Hemingway began to live by during the 1950's (Stephens and Cools [database]). Another characteristic of Hemingway as a writer that appears in the novel *The Old Man and the Sea* is, the Hemingway hero. However, in this novel, Hemingway portrays his hero as less macho and more appreciative of the world around him. Santiago is an accomplishment in that he is able to face the hardship of being human and he is able to survive while bearing these struggles. Santiago allowed Hemingway to express the power of love in a deeper and more meaningful way than in any of his other works ("*The Old Man and the Sea*" 195). In addition, by Santiago going out too far alone, it expresses Hemingway's view of man's fate, for Santiago achieves a newfound wisdom and strength that he never knew he possessed, but in order to discover this and learn about himself, he had to be pushed to nearly his breaking point (Stephens and Cools [database]). In this way, "Hemingway had achieved a tragic but ennobling vision of man" ("*The Old Man and the Sea*" 214). Through its Cuban culture, use of current events, animal ethics, and themes pertaining to mental strength and perseverance, *The Old Man and the Sea*, clearly shows the connection between Hemingway's later life and his writing.

The works of Hemingway including, *The Sun Also Rises*, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", and *The Old Man and the Sea*, all express aspects of his life such as the WWI influence and many world travels, his hobbies, and his viewpoints changing overtime along with his emotional conditions. *The Sun Also Rises*, which was Hemingway's first success was inspired by his time in Europe and the people that he met while he was there. He transferred

these people to his writing and combined them with the ideas of the era after WWI such as casual drinking and new feminine identity. He expresses his viewpoints about his own masculinity and shares his feelings on the new place of women in society by reversing typical gender roles in his characters. In “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” Hemingway writes about his time in Africa and the situations he encountered there. He adds to his work his vast knowledge and expertise in hunting. He continues to address his belief of male domination over women through both Wilson’s and Francis’s interactions with Margot Macomber. In this story Hemingway also brings to the scene his famous “Hemingway code”, which portrays his own view of masculinity in the character of Wilson. Finally in *The Old Man and the Sea*, which was completed towards the end of Hemingway’s career, a new side of Hemingway is expressed. His mental struggles are shown through Santiago and one of his characters is pushed to the breaking point, but preserves unlike many times before in Hemingway’s works, thus creating a new aspect to the traditional “Hemingway hero”. New themes such as “Man can be defeated, but not destroyed” also emerge. Hemingway’s feelings towards nature are expressed and we see his love for fishing and his Cuban home. Lastly, through the use of each of these different works one can see how Hemingway changed as a person over time, for his works deeply reflected copious aspects of his life.

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