

James Landis
Not Enough Secrets
May 2, 1995

Robert Wilson lives by the traditional Hemingway code in the short story The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber. This immutable rulebook is composed of three essential parts: wine, women, and sport, each revealed in two parts by Wilson's actions throughout the novel. With each development of the code, Hemingway does not so much reveal Wilson as a character but instead reveals his own philosophy regarding the story and life itself.

The first essential of the Hemingway philosophy is alcohol. The code dictates that it is the common denominator of human relationships. According to Wilson, even after "everything had gone to pot," he would "still be drinking their whisky." Directly after the description of the lion hunt, the reader perceives Wilson's drinking with Francis Macomber as an indication of a bad relationship. However, following Francis' 'coming of age' while hunting buffalo, Wilson is still drinking with Francis but in camaraderie, not duty.

The second Hemingway rule regards women as a necessary evil. At the outset, Wilson describes American women as "the hardest, the cruelest, the most predatory and the most attractive." The reader, realizing that Wilson's primary contact on isolated safaris is with American women, gets the impression that Wilson will have nothing to do the wives of his clients and that he sees them as essentially evil. However, as the story unfolds, Hemingway reveals that the code distinguishes saying from doing. Indeed, a double sized cot accompanies Wilson on every safari to accommodate contingent 'windfalls'. Even after the night spent with Francis' wife, Wilson shows no remorse, laconically responding: "topping," when Francis asks him if he slept well.

The third Hemingway standard represented is that of sports. Hemingway holds sports in high regard not only for the skill of its players, but for the sport itself: the rules of the game are silently obeyed as law. Before Francis matures in his hunting skill, the sport lacks the sense of dignity, because any man with money and a guide can compete. Once Francis truly learns the art of the hunt, the sport takes on a new dignity: it is no longer a diversion for the rich guided by

profiteers, but an architecture governed by a blend of art and laws. These laws include silent understanding - "You're not supposed to mention it..." because "[you'll] talk the whole thing away..." - and precedent - "[to leave a dying lion] isn't done."

After relating his philosophy to Francis during the buffalo hunt, "[Wilson is] very embarrassed, having brought out this thing he had lived by..." Upon the death of Francis Macomber, each aspect of Hemingway's code has been defined twice, leaving the reader with a strong understanding of Wilson's philosophy. His character has not changed, only the reader's understanding his principles. Nevertheless, during The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, Wilson only reveals himself to one man, who dies with his secret. Hemingway reveals himself to the entire world.