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Bondage and Entrapment in the Fiction of Ernest Hemingway

Abstract
Although scholarly journals are flooded with articles analyzing the work of Ernest Hemingway, one of the most prolific authors of the 20th century, there are few that explore his portrayal of marriage and its allegorical relationship to "modern" metropolitan life. Many critics have read Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and commented on its blatant representations of misogyny, hyper-masculinity, and even its manifestations of latent homosexuality. While these elements are certainly prevalent in the novel, and many other works by Hemingway, they are but micro-manifestations of a larger scheme. It is my intention to analyze *The Sun Also Rises* using a series of primary texts by Hemingway and ideas/concepts by an author who influenced his views on metropolitan life. The works by Hemingway include, but are not limited to: "Cat in the Rain," "The End of Something," and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." The views and works of Henry David Thoreau are also paramount to my interpretation. Hemingway's stories serve to identify a theme of bondage and entrapment that does not begin and end on the feminine side of matrimony, meaning that these representations cannot be dismissed as mere misogyny. Although the connection between the bondage of marriage and the constraints of metropolitan life is prevalent throughout SAR and Hemingway's short stories, Thoreau's works aid in establishing Hemingway's influence, and they offer a broader theoretical mindset in which these works can be discussed sufficiently. Any claims about Hemingway's life that serve to advance the analysis of the texts are supported by *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway*, a work that provides detailed descriptions of Hemingway's life and, of course, letters written by him. This thesis takes the form of a 40-60 page research paper.

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BONDAGE AND ENTRAPMENT IN THE FICTION OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

By

Cy Maughmer

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

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Abstract

Although scholarly journals are flooded with articles analyzing the work of Ernest Hemingway, one of the most prolific authors of the 20th century, there are few that explore his portrayal of marriage and its allegorical relationship to “modern” metropolitan life. Many critics have read Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* and commented on its blatant representations of misogyny, hyper-masculinity, and even its manifestations of latent homosexuality. While these elements are certainly prevalent in the novel, and many other works by Hemingway, they are but micro-manifestations of a larger scheme. It is my intention to analyze *The Sun Also Rises* using a series of primary texts by Hemingway and ideas/concepts by an author who influenced his views on metropolitan life. The works by Hemingway include, but are not limited to: “Cat in the Rain,” “The End of Something,” and “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber.” The views and works of Henry David Thoreau are also paramount to my interpretation. Hemingway’s stories serve to identify a theme of bondage and entrapment that does not begin and end on the feminine side of matrimony, meaning that these representations cannot be dismissed as mere misogyny. Although the connection between the bondage of marriage and the constraints of metropolitan life is prevalent throughout SAR and Hemingway’s short stories, Thoreau’s works aid in establishing Hemingway’s influence, and they
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**Introduction**

In an effort to effectively organize an argument that performs a cross-textual analysis of a good deal of Hemingway’s fiction, I have divided the discussion into individual sections that focus on themes that are significant to my overall argument. A majority of the paper discusses Hemingway’s representations of marriage in *SAR* and many of his short-stories. The paper concludes with a conversation in which I discuss the constraining factors of marriage in an effort to examine the entrapment of modern society as a whole. Like Hemingway, my views on modern society have been influenced by that of Henry David Thoreau, who provides a sophisticated framework in which seemingly insignificant instances of marital constraint can be examined and extended in order to achieve a more significant and encompassing argument.
**Obligatory Monogamy**

In *The Sun Also Rises*, monogamous relationships are represented almost exclusively as acts of desperation. At the start of the novel, Jake’s characterization of Robert Cohn suggests that monogamy and matrimony are products of extreme and extenuating circumstances. “He was a nice boy, a friendly boy, and very shy, and it made him bitter. He took it out in boxing, and he came out of Princeton with painful self-consciousness and the flattened nose, and was married by the first girl who was nice to him” (12). After reflecting on Cohn’s unpleasant experiences at Princeton, the cause of which Jake attributes to his Jewish ethnicity, Jake relates that Cohn “was married by the first girl who was nice to him.” Although Jake’s description of Cohn could be considered unreliable, because of the competitive and bitter nature of their relationship (which spawns from their mutual desire for Brett Ashley), this description is consistent with Cohn’s personality, and reveals a theme that is prevalent throughout the entire novel: marriage out of necessity.

While Cohn appears to be at the epicenter of obligatory monogamy in the exposition, he is far from the only representation; case-in-point: Frances (Cohn’s post-wife mistress). According to Jake, Cohn’s first wife left after “he had been thinking for months about leaving [her] and had not done it because it would be too cruel to deprive her of himself...” (12). The satirical
attitude with which Jake approaches Cohn’s first marriage is, again, questionable, but not necessarily unreliable. Jake’s reflection of fact is not flawed throughout the novel, although his tone is often incredibly biased, so this revelation is likely accurate. In his narration, Jake describes Frances as “a lady who hoped to rise with the magazine. She was very forceful, and Cohn never had a chance of not being taken in hand” (13). “[Taken] in hand” is an old colloquialism that suggests that Cohn was the target of Frances’s advances, rendering him the subordinate in the relationship; however, Frances’s motivations did not lie in any physical or emotional attraction to Cohn. Cohn was the sole-editor of an up-and-coming magazine. As Jake relates, Frances “hoped to rise with the magazine,” so she pursued Cohn romantically, virtually guaranteeing herself a position of success as the lover of a successful editor; however, Cohn’s success is short lived, which leaves Frances deeply disappointed.

From Jake’s description, it is evident that Frances had financial and social gain in consideration when she married Cohn. Although her disappointment about Cohn’s failure is intense, it is as brief as Cohn’s editorial career. Frances “found toward the end of the second year that her looks were going, and her attitude changed from one of careless possession and exploitation to absolute determination that he should marry her” (13). Again, Frances’s attitude towards Cohn does not change because of any heightened emotional connection with him; it changes because her looks
start to fade with age. Frances’s waning aesthetic appeal produces an anxiety that derives from the realization that she is no longer as desirable as she was at the start of the relationship. This circumstance provides Frances with the ulterior motive that almost seems like a prerequisite for relationships, at least at this point in the novel.

*In the Face of Temptation*

Cohn’s impulsivity, however, is not restricted to premature wedlock.

Then there is another thing. He had been reading W.H. Hudson. That sounds like an innocent occupation, but Cohn had read and reread ‘The Purple Land.’ ‘The Purple Land’ is a very sinister book if read too late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described. For a man to take it at thirty-four as a guide-book to what life holds is about as safe as it would be for a man of the same age to enter Wall Street direct from a French convent, equipped with a complete set of the more practical Alger books.

(17)

In this instance, Jake compares Cohn to a priest from a “French convent” that has stumbled upon “Alger books” in “Wall Street.” The “Alger books” that Jake speaks of are fictional “rags to riches” tales by Horatio Alger, which
tell stories of young men who overcome their poverty stricken conditions and obtain wealth and power. Wealth and power are hardly things that a humble, non-secular priest ought to be concerned with, and this is where the joke lies. Jake’s simile places religion and marriage at the forefront of a sardonic comparison between these two institutions; as a result, both become subject to ridicule. Jake’s pessimism about these long-standing traditions serves to advance the theme that marriage, like religion, is an unnatural act of faith, which deteriorates in the face of temptation.

No one, it seems, is more aware of the dangers of temptation than Frances.

I suggested we fly to Strasbourg and walk up to Saint Odile, or somewhere or other in Alsace. ‘I know a girl in Strasbourg who can show us the town,’ I said.

Somebody kicked me under the table. I thought it was accidental and went on: ‘She’s been there two years and knows everything there is to know about the town. She’s a swell girl.’ I was kicked again under the table and, looking, saw Frances, Robert’s lady, her chin lifting and her face hardening. (14)

Over a casual meal, on one of their many nights out-on-the-town, Jake, Cohn, and Frances begin to discuss the possibility of going on a trip. When Jake brings up the fact that he knows a nice girl in Strasbourg who could show them the town, Frances kicks him and glares at him from across the
table. The level of insecurity that Frances shows in this instance is significant. First of all, the fact that Frances publically displays her anxiety about Cohn being in the same city as a “nice girl” conveys an attitude of possession and desperation; secondly, it reveals the fragility of the relationship, and by extension, monogamous relationships in general. If Frances is uncomfortable with Cohn being in the same city as a ‘nice girl’ when she (Frances) is by his side, then her anxiety is communicated to a level that seems almost hyperbolic. This exaggerated display of bondage is arguably a not too subtle critique of monogamy and serves to explicate the themes more indirectly explored at other points in the novel.

*Psychological Concerns*

The constraining factors of Cohn’s relationship with Frances appear to have a profound effect on his consciousness. This can be seen during an encounter he has with Jake at his apartment. Cohn comes over to Jake’s apartment (unannounced and, of course, uninvited), and states, “Don’t you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you’re not taking advantage of it? Do you realize you’ve lived nearly half the time you have to live already” (19)? This, Cohn communicates after pleading with Jake to go to South America with him. Cohn’s statement evokes a sense of malaise, or a vague dissatisfaction with life. Because of the confining relationship that Cohn is committed to (which arose out of necessity on both ends), he feels
trapped and that “life is going by and [he’s] not taking advantage of it.”

From the evidence in the novel, it can be argued that Cohn’s malaise derives from an additional source, briefly mentioned in the discussion regarding the institutions of religion and marriage. Sigmund Freud argued that people suffer from a mild dissatisfaction with life because of the suppression of their animalistic urges, which he referred to as the “Id.” In order to function in society as human beings, people must largely abstain from deep seated sexual and violent urges. The main institutions that serve to restrict the impulses of the “Id” are religion and marriage. Because Cohn is denied the ability to even be around another woman, let alone express his deep-seated sexual urges, he feels a sense of malaise that is a direct result of the bondage and entrapment of marriage. Freud’s theories provide effective constructs for the analysis of Cohn’s relationship with Frances and serve to align with constraining evocations within the book.

In an attempt to compensate for the complete suppression of sexual urges in the name of marriage, Braddocks, Mrs. Braddocks, Cohn, Frances, Jake, and Georgette go out to a night club.

‘Why, the dancings. Don’t you know we’ve revived them?’ Mrs. Braddocks put in. ‘You must come, Jake. We’re all going,’ Frances said from the end of the table. She was tall and had a smile. (25)
Night clubs are inherently sexual; people go to them to dance erotically, get drunk, and find sexual partners. The fact that all of these couples gather at a nightclub shows that they are attempting to practice collective constraint. While Jake is single, and could presumably sleep with whomever he desires, he is rendered impotent by his injury and must, therefore, suffer the same fate as his monogamous friends; however, it is not long before temptation pops the group’s bubble of collective constraint. “She stood holding the glass and I saw Robert Cohn looking at her. He looked a great deal as his compatriot must have looked when he saw the Promised Land” (29). This quotation describes Cohn’s reaction when he first sees Brett Ashley; it is significant for many reasons. The first and most obvious element of this quote is that Cohn is aroused by the appearance of Brett Ashley and distracted from his wife. The second, and more interesting detail, is that Jake alludes to Moses when he describes Cohn. This can be determined by his mentioning of “the Promised Land” and “compatriot.” As already explained, Cohn is Jewish; therefore, it would make sense that Cohn and Moses are “[compatriots],” or, from the same country of origin. Moses was the heavenly ordained leader of the Jewish people, and it was his job to guide his people to the Promised Land, or, the land that God had set aside for the Jews; however, Moses died before he ever reached this land. If Brett Ashley is representative of “the Promised Land” and Cohn takes the place of Moses, then it would make sense that Cohn ought to die before sleeping with
her; however, Cohn opts to end his marriage with Frances instead, so that he can indulge in his sexual urges. This example serves to reveal the futility of marriage in the face of temptation and is consistent with the ongoing theme.

**Relational Parallels**

A relational dynamic that merits significant discussion is that of Brett Ashley and Jake. These star-crossed lovers hardly seem to parallel the cold and mechanical relationship of Frances and Cohn, but beneath the surface, the dynamics are arguably the same. From their words, it would seem that the only thing stopping Brett and Jake from having a committed and genuine relationship is Jake’s injury. Although Jake never specifically describes his wound, there are many clues throughout the novel that are suggestive.

She touched me with one hand and I put her hand away. ‘Never mind.’ ‘What’s the matter? You sick?’ ‘Yes...’ ‘You oughtn’t to drink Pernod if you’re sick.’ ‘You neither.’ ‘It doesn’t make any difference with me. It doesn’t make any difference with a woman.’ (24)

After having lunch in the courtyard, Jake takes a cab with a “poule,” which is French slang for prostitute. When the “poule” attempts to grope Jake and he stops her, she asks, “you sick?” The implication behind the words of the “poule,” or Georgette as she is later called, is that Jake is temporarily
plagued with erectile dysfunction. This can be determined by Georgette’s claim that Jake “oughtn’t to drink Pernod if [he’s] sick.” If Jake is in fact a temporary sufferer of ED, alcohol would make the situation worse. Jake responds to Georgette playfully by stating that she should not drink it either; to which she replies, “It doesn’t make any difference with a woman.” From Georgette’s response, it is clear that she has mistakenly diagnosed Jake as temporarily impotent, when in-fact, Jake was rendered so indefinitely during his service in the First World War. This is a fact that Brett Ashley never lets Jake live down. When Jake first meets Brett at the nightclub, he makes a snide comment about her friends, and she replies,

‘Aren’t they lovely? And you, my dear. Where did you get it?’ ‘At the Napolitain.’ ‘And have you had a lovely evening?’ ‘Oh, priceless,’ I said. (26)

This interaction takes a good deal of close examination and an intricate understanding of Jake and Brett’s relationship to interpret. First of all, Georgette is a prostitute, which is likely why Brett refers to her as “it;” additionally, when Brett asks if Jake has “had a lovely evening,” she is patronizingly asking if he slept with Georgette. This would appear to be a logical thing to ask a person who has spent an evening with a prostitute, but not Jake. As noted earlier, Jake is permanently impotent; therefore, he could not possibly have “had a lovely evening” with Georgette. Jake playfully (as he did with Georgette in the cab) jokes back by stating that his evening has
been “priceless,” meaning that he has not had sex with Georgette, and as a result, he has not had to pay her--hence “priceless.”

One might question how, despite their somewhat bitter interactions, Brett and Jake’s relationship resembles that of Cohn and Frances. To answer such a question, one must look beneath the surface of their relational dynamics and uncover the bondage that ties Brett and Jake together. Throughout the exposition of the story, Brett bounces from man to man, stopping intermittently to discuss her exploits with Jake. During one such interaction, Brett reveals something that is telling.

‘Do you still love me, Jake?’ ‘Yes, I said. Because I’m a goner,’ Brett said. ‘How.’ ‘I’m a goner. I’m mad about that Romero boy. I’m in love with him, I think.’ ‘I wouldn’t be if I were you.’ ‘I can’t help it. I’m a goner. It’s tearing me all up inside.’ ‘You ought to stop it.’ ‘How can I stop it? I can’t stop things. Feel that?’ Her hand was trembling. ‘I’m like that all through.’ (187)

After her trip to San Sebastian with Cohn, Brett and Mike meet Jake in Pamplona, at Montoya’s. Shortly after arriving, Brett lays eyes upon Romero, the young and handsome bullfighter; her response is both mental and physiological. She repeatedly states, “I’m a goner” and that she “can’t help it.” In this instance, Brett is giving in to her hyperactive sexual drive, which makes her hands and body shake. These symptoms are likely the result of nymphomania, or sex addiction. From the first sight of Romero, Brett is
captivated and determined to know him romantically; so much so, that she outwardly displays her arousal in front of Jake and the rest of the world.

At this point in the book, it seems that Brett sleeps with virtually every man that she comes into contact with: Mike, Cohn, The Count, and soon to be, Romero. Her sexual desires appear to be in the driver’s seat in regards to who she surrounds herself with, and she always succeeds in seducing the men she pursues; Jake is the only man that throws this pattern off, because, due to his injury, Brett is unable to sleep with him.

‘You mustn’t. You must know. I can’t stand it, that’s all. Oh darling, please understand!’ ‘Don’t you love me?’ ‘Love you? I simply turn all to jelly when you touch me.’ ‘Isn’t there anything we can do about it?’ She was sitting up now. My arm was around her and she was leaning back against me, and we were quite calm. She was looking into my eyes with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes. They would look on and on after everyone else’s in the world would have stopped looking. She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things. ‘And there’s not a damn thing we could do,’ I said. ‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I don’t want to go through that hell again.’ (34)
This quotation presents an unusual depiction of Brett Ashley, which, again, shines a spotlight on her sexual addictiveness. After stating that she “[turns] all to jelly when Jake touches her,” Brett looks at Jake with an expression “that made [him] wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes.”

Here, it can be argued that Brett enters a trance-like state after being touched by Jake, which is almost certainly a psychological response to her intense desire for him sexually. Now, unlike Romero, Brett cannot sleep with Jake; this, I argue, both draws her to him and drives her away from him. The pull factor has to do with her attraction to Jake (which frankly has little to do with Jake and more to do with the fact that he is a man and has a pulse), because she cannot have him. In this way, Jake’s inaccessibility renders him enticing to Brett’s animalistic urges. Further, Brett is simultaneously driven away from Jake because of this very same fact—hence, the push factor.

While Brett and Jake’s relationship seems, at-least ostensibly, much more genuine than Frances and Cohn’s, the same basic structure remains; in fact, the only thing that varies is the ulterior motive. For example, Frances pursued Cohn because she hoped to gain financial and social status; similarly, Brett fraternizes with Jake because her uncontrollable impulses push her to do so. Jake is the itch that cannot be scratched; he is the fruit just out of reach, and the pool of water that quickly recedes below Brett’s feet. Although Brett knows that her desire will never be quenched, she
continues to reach for the thing that will satisfy her animalistic urges. Just as Tantalus endured his punishment in Tartarus, Brett does so in the restaurants and taxicabs of Europe.

On the same token, Jake is simultaneously drawn and driven away from Brett.

‘Couldn’t we live together, Brett? Couldn’t we just live together?’

‘I don’t think so. I’d just tromper you with everybody. You couldn’t stand it.’ ‘I stand it now.’ ‘That would be different. It’s my fault, Jake. It’s the way I’m made.’ (62)

Jake’s desperation in this instance is almost palpable. He begs Bret, “Couldn’t we live together, Brett? Couldn’t we just live together?” He even, however shamefully, gives her permission to continue sleeping with other men if she agrees to live with him. “I’d just tromper you with everybody. You couldn’t stand it.” “I stand it now.” It is Hemingway’s style to give the reader as little as possible in each scene, leaving them to fill in the missing pieces. This technique is famously referred to as the iceberg principle, where ninety percent of the story’s mass and depth is located blow the surface of the lexical arrangements; hence—Brett stating that she would “tromper [Jake] with everyone” means that she would continue her promiscuous lifestyle despite leading a quiet life with Jake in the country. Jake implicitly gives her permission to continue this behavior when he states that he already deals with it. Here, Jake is suggesting that since he has stayed by
Brett’s side for all of these years and through God knows how many lovers, he could continue to do so in the future; however, Jake’s words also insinuate that he knows her behavior is wrong, and that he recognizes his deplorable/pathetic situation. This can be determined by his suggestion that “[he stands] it now.” Jake does not say that he enjoys, embraces, welcomes, or accepts the situation for what it is... he simply says that he “[stands] it.” In other words, Jake, largely because of his desperate need to be with Brett Ashley, will acquiesce to her lack of respect and loyalty; however, I am not convinced that it is love prompting Jake to seek out Brett. As already stated, Jake was injured in the war, rendering him impotent. Brett Ashley was a nurse in the hospital that he was admitted to after his injury. It could be argued that Jake, similar to Brett, is drawn to her because he cannot have her. The passion and desire that Brett showed Jake at the onset of the relationship, combined with the shellshock of PTSD and her nurturing care, portrayed Brett as an appealing companion for Jake; however, it is only because Brett is unable to sleep with Jake that she continues to be involved with him. As with her exploits with Mike and Cohn, it is of no surprise that if Brett had had the ability to sleep with Jake, she would have surely lost interest and moved on.

As further evidence that Jake is not truly in love with Brett, I submit the following quotation: “They’ve stopped over in San Sebastian. Send their regards to you.” “Why I felt that impulse to devil him I do not know. Of
course I do know. I was blind, unforgivingly jealous of what had happened to him” (105). This excerpt occurs after Jake receives a telegram from Brett and Mike in San Sebastian. Cohn smothers Jake with questions to find out anything he possibly can about the whereabouts of Brett Ashley; however, Jake knows that Brett does not care for Cohn romantically, so, why should he hate Cohn for what had happened to him? As previously stated, Brett sleeps with virtually every man that she sees... why should Cohn be any different? Cohn is definitely not a man that Brett would seek anything binding with; although, I am not so sure if such a man exists, the comfort should still remain. The reason, I argue, Jake is so “blind, unforgivingly jealous” of the exploit that Brett and Cohn had in San Sebastian is because of the physical aspect of the engagement. Cohn, who Jake obviously sees as inferior to him in every way (intellectually and socially), has sex with Brett Ashley. This is an act that Jake wants desperately, but cannot perform because of his injury. Since Jake has shown his restraint with Brett’s lovers in the past (even giving her permission to engage with them during a committed relationship with him), it can be argued that Cohn’s exploit ought to produce no more anxiety in Jake than her activities with Mike, The Count, Romero, or anyone else; however, his jealously lies in the fact that Cohn has sex with Brett and nothing more. This quotation serves as compelling evidence that Jake does not truly love Brett Ashley.
It is not unusual, it seems, for women to assume the traditionally masculine role in *SAR*. Brett avoids running off to the country with Jake and getting married for a life of promiscuity, and Frances pursues and secures Cohn romantically, at least until her looks fade. By the same token, however, there seem to be traditional representations of more typical marital relations that echo many of the same themes. During their bus ride up to the mountains, Jake and Bill encounter an elderly couple that provide some insight into the representation of marriage throughout the text.

‘I suppose you’re Americans, aren’t you?’ the man asked.

‘Having a good trip?’ ‘Wonderful,’ said Bill. ‘That’s what you want to do. Travel while you’re young. Mother and I always wanted to get over, but we had to wait a while.’ ‘You could have come over ten years ago, if you wanted to,’ the wife said. ‘What you always said was: ‘See America first!’ ‘I will say we’ve seen a good deal, take it one way and another.’ (91)

Following Hemingway’s style, readers must piece together the relational dynamics at work behind this laconic conversation between Jake, Bill, the husband, and the wife. In this conversation and in ones that follow, the wife makes it perfectly clear that the husband is free to do what he wants, and she is of no hindrance to his desires. She even says that she voted against prohibition so that he could have some liquor around the house, after he makes the claim that she will not let him drink, of course. It seems that the
dynamic that the old husband wishes to portray is one of the overbearing wife and the constrained husband, but the wife will not allow it. She insists that he has all of the autonomy in the world. Although it would be difficult to prove, the old man probably seeks to communicate more than just the fact that his wife is overbearing. These people are depicted in the story as sitting on the floor, or standing in the aisle, indicating that they cannot afford a seat. Perhaps inadvertently, the old man resents his wife because of the situation that they now find themselves in. It is likely that he sought after his fortune in America and never found it, returning home with the same social stature that he left with. Arguably, this is the reason why the old man urges Jake and Cohn to travel while they are young, which could be symbolic for single life as well. Although this representation is much more subtle, it provides a glimpse of marital constraint in a more traditional sense.

Not Mere Misogyny

Although it would be tempting to dismiss Hemingway’s representations of women in *SAR* as misogynistic (which is a popular thing to do, it seems), the message is much more complex than that. In “Cat in the Rain,” a short-story by Hemingway, bondage and entrapment are conveyed from the viewpoint of married woman. While her husband sits in his chair inattentively reading, “American wife,” as she is referred to in the story, states:
'I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel,' she said. 'I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.' 'Yeah?' George said from the bed. 'And I want to eat at the table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want some new clothes.' 'Oh, shut up and get something to read,' George said. His wife was looking out of the window. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees. 'Anyway, I want a cat,' she said, 'I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat.' (131)

On the surface, this may appear to be a misogynistic representation of “American wife.” She is constantly nagging her husband, and he dismisses her wants and complaints as mere trifles; however, the story is told from American wife’s point-of-view; it is she that “can’t have long hair or any fun” as a result of her marriage, not her husband. In this way, this story is sympathetic to the plight of women and the entrapment/bondage that marriage presents them. So, it seems, the entrapment of marriage extends beyond SAR, and beyond the male perspective, and is manifested in the story of “Cat in the Rain,” and the female character of “American wife.”

In addition to refuting attempts at the derailment and dismissal of Hemingway’s writing, “Cat in the Rain” may provide some insight as to why these representations are so consistent throughout his fiction. In his article,
“Hemingway’s ‘Cat in the Rain’: A Reproof of the Self,” John V. McDermott argues:

In the opening paragraph the woman’s vision is as myopic as her husbands; both cannot see beyond themselves. Neither is as sensitive as the ‘Italians [who] came from a long way off to look up at the war monument... made of bronze [that] glistened in the rain’ (Ernest Hemingway, *The Complete Stories of Ernest Hemingway* [NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987]: 129). The Italians’ emotional memory of the selfless war dead contrasts sharply with the blasé attitude of the two Americans. (1) Instead of focusing on the selfish and brutish nature of just the husband in “Cat in the Rain,” McDermott condemns both husband and wife for their self-indulgence and indifference. McDermott reveals the conceited nature of the two Americans by pointing out the contrast that exists between them and the Italians who came so far to see a remnant of “the selfless war.” I would argue that McDermott is right; throughout the story, both characters seem to be only concerned with their own happiness and not each other’s. The husband spends the entire story reading and advising his wife to do the same, while the wife devotes most of her time towards thinking about and demanding the things that she wants. McDermott states:

That George the husband is cast in an unfavorable light is beyond question. In his egotism he cannot recognize his spouse
as a person; though his cold treatment of her elicits the reader’s sympathy, it does not mitigate the idea that her main priority is pleasing herself. Hemingway counters the idea that the story is primarily a ‘sympathetic portrayal of the woman’s point of view’ (Beegal 155) by interjecting the expressionistic element of ‘repetitive passages [that] are...as striking as the repeated lines and planes and masses of Cezanne or Picasso or Van Gogh, placed as they are on the canvas with extreme care with the conscious intention of arousing emotion in the viewer’ (Raymond S. Nelson, Hemingway: Expressionist Artist [Ames: The Iowa State UP, 1979]: 66). This is obvious when one considers the wife’s incessant litany of ‘I want... and I want’ (CS 131), which prompts not sympathy for but rather agitation at her un-abashed concern for herself. (1)

McDermott does a good job of placing guilt on both parties involved in the story, and provides a framework through which the relationships in Hemingway’s fiction can be examined. Similar to SAR, the characters in “Cat in the Rain” are self-absorbed and self-indulgent. The wife’s repetition of “I want...I want” becomes increasingly apparent and troubling when looked at closely. Instead of focusing on doing things together and bettering their relationship, they pursue their own independent desires, which pulls them farther and farther away from each other. As I will uncover further when
discussing other works, this theme of selfishness may just be the glue that holds everything together.

Marriage Equals Emasculation

In Hemingway's short story, "The Three-Day Blow," marriage is discussed in a way that parallels Jake and Cohn's views at points in SAR. During an afternoon session of whiskey drinking and cigar smoking, Nick and Bill, two young men in their early twenties, or so, discuss their philosophy regarding matrimony and its effect on men.

'Once a man's married he's absolutely bitched,' Bill went on.

'He hasn't got anything more. Nothing. Not a damn thing. He's done for. You've seen the guys that get married.' Nick said nothing. 'You can tell them,' Bill said. 'They got this sort of fat married look. They're done for.' (90)

Although Bill leaves a great deal of the depiction of married men up for interpretation, he makes one thing perfectly clear: "Once a man is married he's absolutely bitched... He's done for." It just so happens that Bill gives this not so eloquent (but developmentally appropriate) description of married men after Nick discusses his recent break-up with his girlfriend, Marge. The implication behind the conversation, then, is that if Nick had not
broken-up with Marge, he more than likely would have married her, rendering him "bitched" and "done for." Although it would be easy to dismiss this conversation as the insignificant banter of two young and half inebriated boys, the parallel between what is said here and in *SAR* is too significant to neglect. Besides the seemingly obvious theme of marriage induced bondage and constraint produced by the words of Bill, a parallel exists between the bachelor attitude of Cohn and these two boys. As discussed earlier, Cohn expresses his desire to visit the wildly exotic lands of South America after reading and rereading *The Purple Land*. According to Jake's characterization, Cohn seeks the mysterious and romantic caress of the Amazonian women that inhabit the story. One need only ask: what is Cohn fleeing from, and what is he fleeing to? Marriage is often referred to as a domestic relationship, from which Cohn is attempting to escape with Frances. It can be argued, then, that Cohn seeks the exotic rather than the domestic in terms of relationships and sexuality; in fact, at one point in the novel, Cohn relates that he would prefer to have a different mistress every night of the week. The similar attitudes of Cohn, Bill, and Nick regarding marriage should not be ignored. There is something to be said about the perpetual stigma relentlessly attached to monogamy and matrimony in *SAR* and the short-stories of Hemingway.

*Real Life Considerations*
In “Pip-Pip to Hemingway in Something from Marge,” by Mathew Nickel, some light is shed on the characters and dynamics in “The Three-Day Blow.” Nickel argues that, in classic Hemingway fashion, the characters in “The Three-Day Blow” are representative of real people and events. This comes as no surprise considering the fact that Hemingway always sought to recreate life as realistically as possible.

You see I’m trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not to just depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience the thing. You can’t do this without putting in the bad and ugly as well as what is beautiful. Because if it is all beautiful you can’t believe in it. Things aren’t that way. It is only by showing both sides—3 dimensions and if possible 4 that you write the way I want to. (Selected Letters 153)

Following the words of Hemingway himself, Nickel suggests that Nick and Marge, from “The Three-Day Blow,” are representative of Hemingway and his lover from Petoskey, Michigan (Marge Bump). Main states:

Marge also revealed why Ernest disliked her mother. Years after the publication of the stories, Marge's mother told her that ‘Ernest had spoken to her privately about possible marriage’ to Marge. Marge's mother told him that her daughter was too young to marry, that she needed to attend college first, and that
she would not be inheriting her grandmother’s money (16). ‘He needed money in order to write,’ said Marge, ‘and [he] thought I would be the person who might provide it’ (16). This account adds an interesting twist not only to Hemingway’s possible feelings for Marge but also to Bill’s scathing implications about Marge’s social standing in ‘The Three-Day Blow.’ (118)

Although Main provides an incredibly convincing argument that Nick and Marge are representative of Hemingway and Bump, the events and dynamics in the story are different from what actually ensued. In the story just before “The Three-Day Blow,” (“The End of Something”), the breakup scene between Nick and Marge (Hemingway and Bump) is depicted.

‘You don’t have to talk silly,’ Marjorie said. ‘What’s really the matter?’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Of course you know.’ ‘No I don’t.’ ‘Go on and say it.’ Nick looked at the moon, coming up over the hills. ‘It isn’t fun anymore.’ He was afraid to look at Marjorie. Then he looked at her. She sat there with her back toward him. He looked at her back. ‘It isn’t fun anymore. Not any of it.’ She didn’t say anything. He went on. ‘I feel as though everything was gone to hell inside of me. I don’t know, Marge. I don’t know what to say.’ (81)

According to Nickel’s depiction, Hemingway was the one who got turned down by Marge and her mother. From the letters that Nickel displays, it
appears as if Marge wants nothing to do with Hemingway, and that she sees him as a brother/friend. The question begs, why would Hemingway depict a story with real events, people, and places, but skew the events slightly so that he was the party in control? Although Bump's statements could be false, it is not likely. In *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway*, there are epistles to prove that around the time of the events depicted in "The End of Something," and "The Three-Day Blow," Hemingway had been cut off from financial assistance by his mother and father. Hemingway’s parents famously disapproved of his writing because they saw it as focusing on the dark and negative sides of life; therefore, without the financial backing of his parents, Hemingway needed a way to fund his writing career. Pragmatically, Marge would be a wise investment because of the money she would likely inherit from her parents and grandparents. Unfortunately for Hemingway, Marge and her mother declined his advances. With the information provided by Nickel, it can be argued that, like many of the characters in his stories: Cohn, Frances, and Mrs. Macomber, perhaps Hemingway saw marriage as a means to an end, not a genuine commitment and connection with another person.

According to Stephen E. Henrichon in “Ernest Hemingway’s Mistresses and Wives: Exploring their Impact of His Female Characters,” Ernest’s lifelong assertion of masculine power grew out of his emotional need to exorcise the painful memory of his mother
asserting her superiority over his father, and that his personal difficulties with women, even his submissive heroines, originated with his determination never to knuckle under, as his father had done. (2)

Henrichon’s theory is interesting when used to interpret Hemingway’s stories. Virtually every married man in Hemingway’s tales is the subordinate in the relationship, rendering him “bitched,” in the words of Bill from “The Three-Day Blow.” Cohn from SAR is “taken in hand by Frances,” Macomber from “The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber” is at the nadir of his masculinity, and Nick from “The Three-Day Blow,” of course, breaks up with Marge to avoid being emasculated. Henrichon provides a compelling theory concerning Hemingway’s views on marriage. If Hemingway grew up in a household with an insecure father, and an overly domineering mother, maybe that was the view of marriage that he formed as an adult; it would explain why all of his characters seem to marry out of necessity and have virtually no genuine connections.

As Henrichon relates it, Hemingway could find no comfort or stability in relationships because of the domineering nature of his mother. He had to live with the fear of turning into an emasculated version of himself, or, his father. Similar to Hemingway, Jake in SAR has no way of finding happiness with the woman he supposedly loves. Although I would argue that Jake does not genuinely love Brett, he outwardly claims to. The reason Jake has no
shot at love is because he is impotent; Brett’s entire life revolves around sex; why would she marry a man that cannot give her that? Henrichon reveals the outlet that Hemingway found that replaced genuine relationships in his life in the following quotation:

Trapped in his dysfunctional world, Hemingway found solace in nature, which became the mistress he could never tame. Wild and unpredictable she becomes his lifelong companion and their relationship plays out in Hemingway’s texts. With her lakes, streams, forests, and animals she provides stability to his life by providing an escape mechanism from his reality. In a strange form of ménage à trois, Hemingway judges the other women in his life by how they interact with nature. For example, Kert suggests that “Jane [Mason] was a perfect fishing partner. She was beautiful to look at, she was amusing, and she handled the rod expertly. She never got seasick and could help with the cooking. It was an ideal setup and Ernest relished it” (Kert 243). However, Kert does not mention that Jane is a sequel to Marjorie, a character from Hemingway’s 1925 short story “The End of Something.” Hemingway describes Marjorie as “intent on the rod all the time they trolled, even when she talked. She loved to fish. She loved to fish with Nick... Marjorie chased with her hands in the bucket, finally caught a perch, cut its head off
and skinned it” (The Short Stories 105). As “Marjorie rowed the boat out over the channel-bank, holding the line in her teeth, and looking toward Nick, who stood on the shore holding the rod and letting the line run out from the reel,” she seems perfect (106). Eventually, Jane and Marjorie suffer the same fate when they are summarily dumped. However, this example illustrates the strong connection between reality and fiction for a chronicler like Hemingway, and shows that it is possible to extrapolate in both directions when making comparisons between Hemingway’s fact and fiction. (7)

As Henrichon states, Hemingway found solace from his inability to form genuine relationships with women through his kinship with nature. He suggests that Hemingway allowed nature to distract him from his emotional deficits and searched for natural qualities in the women he pursued; however, Hemingway’s emotional crippling always seemed to supersede any temporary solace he could find with a woman, and eventually he left them. Jake in *SAR* is eerily similar to Henrichon’s psychoanalytic description of Hemingway. Instead of being emotionally crippled by his mother, Jake is physically crippled by his injury. His battle wound renders him impotent and unable to physically express his love to a woman. Besides the physical aspect of the injury, in a symbolic sense (if Henrichon’s depiction is correct), Hemingway was emotionally impotent, as is Jake. Because of his injury, Jake
is unable to maintain a normal relationship with a woman; he cannot have children, sex, or anything that would resemble a traditional monogamous relationship.

_Solace in Nature_

Due to Jake’s inability to maintain a normal and healthy relationship, he attempts to find solace in nature, as did Hemingway. Jake and Bill decide to go up fishing on the Irati River, which is surrounded by picturesque little country scenes. In fact, the way Hemingway writes it, it appears almost Edenic. In _The Letters of Ernest Hemingway_, Hemingway relates that his visit to this area was not so pleasant; a logging company had begun to tear down a big section of the forest where he had planned to take his fishing trip. Despite this fact, a pastoral and picturesque scene envelopes the entire day with Jake and Bill. The tone and images in the writing shift dramatically during this scene in the novel. At other points, there always seems to be this feeling of impending doom and a presence of disheartening ulterior motives; however, this depiction is incredibly peaceful.

‘Say,’ he called up against the noise of the damn. ‘How about putting the wine in that spring up the road?’ ‘Alright,’ I shouted. Bill waved his hand and started down the stream. I found the two wine-bottles in the pack, and carried them up the road to where the water of a spring flowed out of an iron pipe. There
was a board over the spring and I lifted it and, knocking the
corks firmly into the bottles, lowered them down into the water.
It was so cold my hand and my wrist felt numb. I put back the
slab of wood, and hoped nobody would find the wine. I got my
rod that was leaning against the tree, took the bait-can and
landing-net, and walked out onto the damn. It was built to
provide a head of water for driving logs. The gate was up, and I
sat on one of the squared timbers and watched the smooth
apron of water before the river tumbled into the falls. In the
white water at the foot of the damn it was deep. As I baited up,
a trout shot up out of the white water into the falls and was
carried down. Before I could finish baiting, another trout jumped
at the falls, making the same lovely arc and disappearing into
the water that was thundering down. I put on a good-sized
sinker and dropped into the white water close to the edge of the
timbers of the damn. I did not feel the first trout strike. When I
started to pull up I felt that I had one and brought him, fighting
and bending the rod almost double, out of the boiling water at
the foot of the falls, and swung him up onto the damn. He was a
good trout, and I banged his head against the timber so that he
quivered out straight, and then slipped him into my bag. While I
had him on, several trout had jumped at the falls. As soon as I
baited up and dropped in again I hooked another and brought him in the same way. In a little while I had six. They were all about the same size. I laid them out, side by side, all their heads pointing the same way, and looked at them. They were beautifully colored and firm and hard from the cold water. It was a hot day, so I slit them all and shucked out the insides, gills and all, and tossed them over across the river. I took the trout ashore, washed them in the cold, smoothly heavy water above the damn, and then picked up some ferns and packed them all in the bag, three trout on a layer of ferns, then another layer of ferns, then three more trout, and then covered them with ferns.

(124)

The juxtaposition of the crisp and cool water and the hot day, in this instance, produces a calming and relaxed mood; additionally, the success that Jake has with fishing evokes a sense of elation. At times, one can go hours without catching a single fish; however, Jake manages to catch six in a matter of what seems like minutes. This unusual string of good luck, no doubt, produces a sense of accomplishment and elation in Jake... one that he is lacking amongst his friends and Brett in the city. Although Jake, after wrapping his catch in ferns and storing them away, starts to read a book by AEW Mason, a book that could potentially bring his mind back to Brett (it is a story about a woman who waits 25 years for her lover to return), Jake
spends his time enjoying Bill’s company and the nature surrounding him. They drink the chilled wine and fall asleep next to the water’s edge—both content with the day’s catch. This scene evokes a very peaceful and fulfilling experience. Of course, as with Hemingway, reality is waiting for them both upon their return to Pamplona.

*A Not So Peaceful Retreat*

Similar to the scenario in “The Three-Day Blow,” but in a much more extreme manner, marriage is critiqued in “The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber.” While on safari in the heart of Africa, Francis Macomber and his wife hire a hunting guide named Wilson. Wilson is a ruggedly handsome and fearsomely independent man, which, of course, draws Mrs. Macomber to him. At this point in the story, Francis and Mrs. Macomber appear to have an unhappy marriage that stems from Francis’s lack of courage and agency. On the second night of the safari, Mrs. Macomber openly sleeps with Wilson, and Francis reacts with bitter passivity towards him (Wilson). There is no great confrontation, or even a passionate word exchanged between Wilson and Francis Macomber about him adulterating with Macomber’s wife. Macomber’s lack of agency and bravado seems to permeate through most of the story, especially on the hunting expeditions.

‘Can’t we send beaters?’ Wilson looked at him appraisingly. ‘Of course we can, he said. But it would be a touch murderous. You
see, we know the lion’s wounded. You can drive an unwounded lion—he’ll move on ahead of a noise—but a wounded lion’s going to charge. You can’t see him until you’re right on him. He’ll make himself perfectly flat in cover you wouldn’t think would hide a hair. You can’t very well send boys in there to that sort of show. Somebody bound to get mauled.’ ‘What about the gun-bearers?’ ‘Oh, they’ll go with us. It’s their shauri. You see, they signed on for it. They don’t look too happy though, do they?’ ‘I don’t want to go in there,’ said Macomber. It was out before he knew he’d said it. ‘Neither do I,’ said Wilson cheerily. ‘Really no choice though.’ Then, as an afterthought, he glanced at Macomber and saw suddenly how he was trembling and the pitiful look on his face. (15)

This conversation comes shortly after Macomber has shot a male lion three times without making a kill-shot. During the pursuit of the wounded animal, Macomber seems to be overwhelmed with fear and trepidation for what is about to come. When they stumble upon the animals resting place, which they believe to be in a thick grass-patch, Macomber’s fear gets the best of him; the lion charges, and Macomber tucks tail and runs back to the car with his wife, leaving Wilson to finish him off. The shame that Macomber feels after this incident leaves him quite distraught, and virtually without solace. The worst part is that he lost control of his fear in front of Wilson, his wife,
and the other guides on the safari, rendering him a coward in the eyes of everyone.

Considering Macomber’s cowardly display with the lion, it might seem that Mrs. Macomber should want to see him redeem himself by reestablishing his masculinity; however, her behavior suggests otherwise. After an adventurous buffalo hunt, one in which Macomber and Wilson bring down three large bulls, both men feel pretty fulfilled.

‘All right,’ Wilson said. ‘Nice work. That’s three’. Macomber felt a drunken elation. ‘How many times did you shoot?’ He asked.

‘Just three,’ Wilson said. ‘You killed the first bull. The biggest one. I helped you finish the other two. Afraid they might have got into cover. You had them killed. I was just mopping up a little. You shot damn well.’ ‘Let’s go to the car,’ said Macomber.

‘I want a drink.’ (23)

From this interaction, it is evident that both men are happy with their performance, and that Macomber has won back his respect in the eyes of Wilson; however, his wife is another story altogether.

‘It’s given me a dreadful headache. I didn’t know you were allowed to shoot them from cars though.’ ‘No one shot from cars,’ said Wilson coldly. ‘I mean chase them from cars. Wouldn’t ordinarily,’ Wilson said. ‘Seemed sporting enough to me though while we were doing it. Taking more chance driving that way
across the plain full of holes and one thing and another than hunting on foot. Buffalo could have charged us each time we shot if he liked. Gave him every chance. Wouldn’t mention it to any one though. It’s illegal if that’s what you mean.’ ‘It seemed very unfair to me,’ Margot said, ‘chasing those big helpless things in a motor car.’ (23)

It seems odd that Margot should openly criticize her husband’s buffalo hunt when, in comparison to the lion excursion, he was notably triumphant; nonetheless, she does her best to belittle it, stating that it was “very unfair,” and that the bulls were “big helpless things” being chased in a motor car; in fact, Margot, once she notices her husband’s improved swagger, does her best to sabotage his confidence.

‘He says the first bull got up and went into the bush,’ Wilson said with no expression in his voice. ‘Oh, said Macomber blankly.’

‘Then it’s going to be just like the lion,’ said Margot, full of anticipation. ‘It’s not going to be a damned bit like the lion,’ Wilson told her. ‘Did you want another drink,’ Macomber? (24)

Although it is odd, it appears as though Wilson is defending Macomber; it is almost as if he wants Macomber to be more confident. I say it is odd, because this is the same man that slept with Macomber’s wife... One would typically assume that such an act places Wilson in the ultimate position to
emasculate and antagonize Macomber. The effect of Wilson’s support and the elation that Macomber experiences as a result of the hunt are significant.

Macomber felt a wild unreasonable happiness that he had never known before. ‘By God, that was a chase,’ he said. ‘I’ve never felt any such feeling. Wasn’t it marvelous, Margot?’ ‘I hated it.’ ‘Why?’ ‘I hated it,’ she said bitterly. ‘I loathed it.’ ‘You know I don’t think I’d ever be afraid of anything again,’ Macomber said to Wilson. ‘Something happened in me after we first saw the buff and started after him like a damn bursting. It was pure excitement.’ ‘Cleans out your liver,’ said Wilson. ‘Damn funny things happen to people.’ (25)

From Macomber’s statements, there is no doubt that he has reached some sort of an epiphany in regards to self-confidence, and this fact deeply troubles Margot.

Although it would seem that Macomber ought to react strongly to his wife’s negative attitude, his exaltation of spirit and bravado are the only things he is concerned with; however, in the final moments of the buffalo hunt, the tension between Margot and Wilson becomes palpable. “From the far corner of the seat Margot Macomber looked at the two of them. There was no change in Wilson. She saw Wilson as she had seen him the day before when she had first realized what his great talent was. But she saw a change in Francis Macomber now” (26). Wilson reflects on the “change” that
Margot sees; he attributes it to a lack of fear, an excitement for things to come. It is curious that Margot ought to see Macomber’s lack of fear and excitement about the future as ominous forebodings, but, as Wilson suggests, “She’s worried about it already” (26). Now, all that needs to be determined is what “it” is that Margot is worried about. This is revealed after Wilson’s ponderings are disrupted by a charging bull. It turns out that the first bull Macomber shot was only wounded and now charged straight at him. Macomber fired and fired, but hit slightly high each time, chipping the bull’s horns with every round. Finally, when the bull is about to gore Macomber, Margot fires a single shot directly into the back of Macomber’s scull. Although it would be difficult to determine if Margot purposefully killed Macomber (a strong case could be made for this point, because she failed to fire at the bull even once during its advance), Wilson certainly insinuates it.

‘That was a pretty thing to do,’ he said in a toneless voice. ‘He would have left you too.’ ‘Stop it,’ she said. ‘Of course it’s an accident,’ he said. ‘There will be a certain amount of unpleasantness but I will have some photographs taken that will be very useful at the inquest. There’s the testimony of the gun-bearers and the driver too. You’re perfectly alright’. ‘Stop it,’ she said. ‘There’s a hell of a lot to be done,’ he said. ‘And I’ll have to send a truck off to the lake to wireless for a plane to take the three of us into Nairobi. Why didn’t you poison him? That’s what
they do in England.’ ‘Stop it. Stop it. Stop it,’ the woman cried.

Wilson looked at her with his flat blue eyes. ‘I’m through now,’ he said. ‘I was a little angry. I’d begun to like your husband.’ ‘Oh please stop it,’ she said. ‘Please stop it.’ ‘That’s better,’ Wilson said. ‘Please is much better. Now I’ll stop.’ (28)

In this passage, Wilson uncovers Margot’s fears about Macomber’s change in attitude. ‘He would have left you too.’

Margot’s Culpability

To neglect an exploration of Margot’s culpability in regards to the killing of her husband would be to overlook the intricate and definite legal nuances that Hemingway carefully constructs throughout the story; further, while it is tempting to solely focus on the motivation behind Margot’s action, Kenneth K. Brandit and Alicia Mischa Renfroe, in their article: “Intent and Culpability: A Legal Review of the shooting in ‘The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber’”—assert that the consequences are paramount in achieving an accurate interpretation of the events.

In the context of the gun-bearers, shauri suggests both a problem to be solved and an obligation to solve it. The gun-bearers agreed to the hunt and will uphold their end of the bargain, regardless. In essence, the lion is their problem, too. A similar logic informs Wilson’s reaction; as he explains it, there is
‘really no choice’ but to pursue the lion (CSS 15). In this instance, both Wilson and the gun-bearers expect that individuals act with regard to the consequences of their actions and make their choices accordingly. This emphasis on intentional choices contrasts sharply with Macomber's logic, both in his decision to run from the lion and in his suggestion that they leave the lion wounded and suffering in the brush. (2)

Brandit and Renfroe preclude this argument with a thorough description of the legal and political dynamics of Kenya at the time of Hemingway's visit. They explain that Kenya's legal codes, as a result of British Colonialization, were torn three ways in terms of legality; technically, residents were bound by the rulings of the British Empire, and their de jure policies reflected this fact. In reality, however, the de facto—or law of the land—was written by the actions, customs, and traditions of the natives and British settlers. Brandit and Renfroe discuss the “shauri,” which Hemingway references throughout his story. The shauri is the de facto laws/norms that the natives of Kenya live by; this law is primarily concerned with the consequences of an action, not the intent behind it. The saying goes, some of the worst things imaginable have been done with the best intentions, a truism that would be endorsed by the shauri. As related in the quote above, the gun-bearers, Wilson, and Macomber have engaged a lion in a hunt. Since they have done so, and actually shot the animal, they have no choice but to see the hunt through to
its end. These men, including Wilson, readily accept the consequences of their actions, because it is their law/custom, or "shauri."

Given the fact that Hemingway works to incorporate the values and beliefs of the shauri throughout the story, and since Margot will be tried in the area for the incident, it makes sense to interpret her culpability based upon the principles of the shauri, as Brandit and Renfroe relate.

A bullet, of course, does not always go exactly where the shooter aims, or where she thinks she is aiming. When Macomber shoots at the charging buffalo, he aims at the nostrils, but hits the bull's horns each time. It is also obvious that the surface area of her husband's body is less than that of the bull buffalo's, and even being directly behind Macomber, she could, conceivably, hit the buffalo without hitting her husband. Yet nothing in the text suggests that Margot is sympathetic to the presence of her husband in the bullets trajectory, even though his body, albeit narrower, is between her and her target. With Macomber clearly discernible by Margot in her direct line of fire, it would be difficult for her to claim that the shooting was, in the legal sense, accidental. Though Hemingway does not depict the shooting as intentional, her actions do suggest recklessness or negligence; moreover, the law at the time does not require that her specific experience, intelligence, or hunting ability be
considered. Even if we evaluate her conduct based on a subjective standard of reasonableness, Margot should be able to comprehend the imprudence of firing. (3)

As communicated by the quote above, Brandit and Renfroe find Margot to be absolutely culpable, given the context and circumstances in which she shoots her husband. They make a compelling and logically grounded argument: how could Margot have possibly hoped to shoot the bull with Macomber directly in her line of fire? Further, I would ask, why does she wait until the bull is virtually goring Macomber to fire? It would seem that the only prudent thing for Margot to do in the instance is count on Wilson to deliver the fatal blow from the Bull’s flank, as he did with the lion and the stray bull earlier in the story. Besides Macomber, Wilson is the only person with any real chance of killing the bull and saving Macomber’s life.

Given the framework that Brandit and Renfroe establish—which I think is well supported by the legal, political, and cultural condition of Kenya at the point in time when Hemingway visits—Margot’s culpability is hard to deny. Although Brandit and Renfroe’s conviction of Margot based on the shauri does not require an examination of Margot’s motivation behind her actions, it is crucial, for arguments sake, to examine this element of the story as well. Though Margot and Francis’s marriage is, I would argue, anything but pleasant, it is something for her to fall back on. At least the way Wilson and the narrator present it, Margot relied on Macomber’s fears
and insecurities to keep him devoted to her. In this way, she could live with
the prestige, comfort, and social status that marriage to Macomber entailed,
but be free to pursue pleasures that would ordinarily render her
dispossessed; she fed off of Macomber’s low self-esteem and used it to her
advantage. To this effect, Margot is not much different from Frances in SAR.
As previously noted, Cohn left Princeton with a “painful self-consciousness,”
and Frances married him to gain in economic and social status. Although
Margot more directly preys on Macomber’s insecurities, the relational
dynamics are arguably the same. Just like in the relationship of Cohn and
Frances, Macomber and Margot’s relationship in “The Short Happy Life of
Francis Macomber” is fueled by necessity and self-concern, not genuine
attraction or feeling. While the scenario in the latter is much more
sensational and fatal, the dynamics reveal the same elements of marital
constraint.

*Extending the Metaphor*

While the significance of Hemingway’s pessimistic representations of
marriage cannot be denied, there is a broader context in which the
constraining factors of matrimony ought to be discussed. As previously
stated, marriage (like religion) is an institution governed by a certain set of
rules, customs, and norms; similarly, modern society functions under, at
times, incredibly ridged and confining constructs. It makes sense that
marriage, religion, and society operate under similar conditions and norms because of the derivational realities of one to the next: first came society, then came religion, and finally, marriage. In order to perform an adequate discussion of the extension from marriage to modern society, I will draw on one of Hemingway’s literary influences: Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau arguably influenced Hemingway’s views on modern society, which is undoubtedly linked to his treatment and representations of marriage in SAR and his short-stories.

In SAR, metropolitan life is represented in an incredibly shallow and unfulfilling way. Brett, Jake, Cohn, Bill, and Mike barhop throughout virtually the entire length of the novel and eat every meal out on the town with a bottle of wine or a mixed drink. This, in combination with the constrained relationships that permeate throughout the story, produces a less than satisfactory representation of life within the confines of modern/urban society. The interactions between actual characters/characters and their environment lacks substance, authenticity, and meaning. While Jake and his friends believe that this is natural to all “expatriates,” there is more to this representation than any stereotypical hypothesis can refute.

There seems to be a lack of agency, autonomy, and appropriately, self-reliance in the characters in SAR; however, instead of an oppressive government undermining their desires for the collective good of the nation, the confinement appears to be self-inflicted, and merely exacerbated by the
physical realities of their immediate milieu. The phenomena of self-induced oppression is discussed in Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience.” Thoreau communicates that people will naturally oppress themselves to fit in with the overall scheme of society; however, he stresses that we must fight this tendency and be “men first, and subjects afterward” (12); this is a philosophy that none of the characters in SAR appear to subscribe to. Seemingly, in an attempt to conform to the norms and customs of society, the main characters in SAR actively seek-out monogamous relationships with the most inappropriate contenders and at the most inopportune times. For example, Jake seeks Brett’s committed companionship despite the fact that she is a nymphomaniac and he is impotent. By the same token, Brett Ashley gets engaged to Mike even though she sleeps with virtually every able and willing man in her path. The list of characters that pursue marriage in the face of futility goes on, and has been discussed previously. From all of this, one thing seems certain: to the characters in SAR, conforming to social norms takes precedence over individual autonomy, happiness, and fulfillment.
Conclusion

The constraining and condescending nature of relationships in SAR and Hemingway’s short stories is consistent throughout the collection examined. Hemingway repeatedly represents monogamous relationships as entities that derive out of necessity, and as things which produce discontent on both ends of the marital gender divide. However binding and self-depreciating the relationship, the character always seems to yearn for matrimony. As previously argued, the need to conform to societal norms seems to be the force driving Jake, Brett, Cohn, Frances, and Mike to seek such relationships in SAR. Similarly, Francis, Margot, Bill, Nick, and Marjorie all appear to be drawn by the same self-depreciating force. Whether these representations occur because of the domestic relations of Hemingway’s childhood home, or because of their relationship to the confinement of modern society in general, is a matter of interpretation. From the evidence evaluated, I would argue that these representations are likely subconscious manifestations of both. The connection between Hemingway’s early years and his representations of marriage in the literature that he created cannot be denied; similarly, the relationship between the institutions of marital constraint and the bondage of modern society are strikingly similar. When Thoreau’s idea of self-imposed oppression is taken into consideration, the relational dynamics in SAR and Hemingway’s short stories makes perfect
sense. In order to conform to the norms of society, people stifle their deep
seated wants and desires for the good of whole. As a result, we are left with
a scenario in which all of society's members are engaged in a practice of
collective constraint, which (as readers see in SAR) does not fare so well in
the face of temptation.
Works Cited


