The image conjured within most minds at the mention of Ernest Hemingway is that of a stereotypical “man’s man.” The biographical information of Hemingway most readily discussed is what has bolstered this view, highlighting his bouts with alcoholism, the multiple wives he shuffled through, and his large interest in exotic trophy hunting. However, if we begin to take a look at Hemingway’s award winning novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*, through a combination of critical lenses, new points of discussion surrounding Hemingway’s ideal form of masculinity are revealed. Posthumously published materials have provided further enlightenment, as numerous scholars have already begun to point out the gender-bending sexual fantasies described in correspondence between Hemingway and his last wife. Keeping this information in mind and using elements of psychological criticism and biographical information, *The Old Man and the Sea* becomes a map into the tumultuous subconscious of the author, especially surrounding the topic of gender identity.

When beginning to examine the text itself, it is easy to note the overabundance of symbology and allegorical meaning. Under the tenets of psychological criticism, the text can become a potential representation of the author’s subconscious. Although Hemingway often downplayed the idea of subtextual meaning within the story, Jungian and Freudian psychological analysis both start to unveil interesting threads of thought. These threads of thought tend to shift focus as you progress through the story, leaving us with the impression of not only a fishing journey, but a journey of one’s inner identity. In reading the first third of the story, it is apparent that a common theme of alienation begins to appear.

In the book *Texts and Contexts*, which serves as a college reader-type introduction to literary analysis within the realms of critical theory, it’s author Steven Lynn defines the Freudian
concept of displacement as “Shifting an emotion from it’s real target to a another one” (202). It goes on to mention that this shift usually happens downward within the hierarchical order established by the author, from a more imposing topic to a safer topic of focus (202). Throughout the first third of the story, the protagonist Santiago continually refers to his body as being “strange” and “old” (Old Man, 8-15) yet never pauses to develop thoughts centered around the concept of no longer seeing one’s body as familiar. Instead, our author has Santiago focusing on an organ of his body that despite his age, is remaining rather resilient. As though they could bypass the concept of mortality, “his eyes...were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undeafeated” (8). Continuing on, Santiago reflects back, noting “All my life the early sun has hurt my eyes, he thought. Yet they are still good” (29). The protagonist focuses on an element of their body that they can still be proud of, still recognized as something that has worked on the level that has always been expected throughout Santiago’s life.

This act of displacement, when framed within the biographical information of the author, offers a different explanation rather simply fear or mistrust of old age. In an article revisiting the biographical history of the author, Mauricio D. Aguilera Linde offers up the fact that Ernest’s mother Grace Hemingway was so determined to present both of her children as twins that she often dressed Ernest in “pink gingham dresses and flower ornamented hats-during the boy’s first months” and that it wasn’t until first grade that “the long hair or the Dutch-boy haircut his mother adored - was abandoned” (6). This blurring of static gender perception in Ernest’s upbringing doesn’t cease with appearances. Grace, “the sensitive artist, the opera singer,” was “firm, strong, daring, and domineering” while Ed, Ernest’s father the “natural-born hunter, woodsman, and sportsman brought up in the manly tradition of Teddy Roosevelt” was “nervous, weak, cowardly and insecure” (6). As Hemingway grew to see “his mother as the root of evil, he
associated Grace’s world with a destructive, emasculating power” thus resulting in the author choosing to “assert his masculinity through the resurrection of the father’s image” (6). Therefore, the idea of displacement as an attempt to distance oneself from a newfound unfamiliarity with one’s body, can be traced back to Hemingway’s early home life that challenged all pre-conceived notion of static gender. As Hemingway grew older, it was becoming more and more apparent that he was starting to openly acknowledge the fluidity of gender, even seeing elements of various points of the spectrum within himself. Santiago becomes a vessel for Hemingway to explore the ideas of alienation of his own perceived gender through psychological displacement.

As the novella continues on, there are other themes within the story that have the potential to open up new discussions surrounding Hemingway’s masculine identity. In the second third of the story, after Santiago has captured the great fish, we are able to witness a shift in the demeanor of the protagonist. As Santiago’s body begins to fail him, it is noted that when his hand cramps he “looked at it in disgust” (Old Man, 52). He begins to speak openly to his own hand with disdain, and focuses on memories of the past in which his strength was unmatched (64-65). Reflecting on the twenty-four hour arm wrestling match instead of addressing the fact that his once incredibly resilient body is faltering could be seen as a form of denial or repression. However, since Santiago is the only character whose dialog we are exposed to in this section, it could be argued that this is a form of projection.

The Freudian concept of projection is defined in Text and Contexts as “Denying thoughts and feelings by attributing them to someone else” (Lynn, 202). Using the same biographical context looked at in the previous section, Santiago’s masochistic drive and then anger with his body when it begins to fail could be seen as Hemingway’s projection of his own internal hatred of the masculine. This is not a unique example, as Fred Ashe, a Hemingway scholar at
Birmingham-Southern College, points out Hemingway’s subtextual disdain for masculinity in the story *Islands in the Stream*.

The posthumously published *Islands in the Stream* is the only widely accepted autobiographical work of Ernest Hemingway. In the text, the character Andrew has been pointed out to be the representation of Hemingway’s real life son Gregory. Gregory Hemingway was often “boasted about” by his father, especially in regards to his “athletic prowess” (Ashe, 2). This is reflected within the story *Islands in the Stream* as Andrew “embodies what we know about the young Gregory in a number of ways” (2). Ashe goes on to state that “Both the fictional boy and his biographical model show early promise as masculine successors to their hard-drinking, womanizing fathers” (6). But when taking a closer look at the story, it should be noted that Hemingway writes the story with an antagonism towards the character Andrew. It is stated that in regards to Andrew, “He started out mean” (*Islands*, 10). Ashe points out that “Before he ever appears in the novel, we are given a description that includes eight separate references to the perhaps eight-year old boy as a “devil,” as harboring a “dark side,” as “bad,” or as “wicked.” (6). Hemingway’s commentary appears to be leaning into resentment against his son who so closely resembles the stereotypical masculine identity that Hemingway is so well-known for.

Looking further into the biography of Gregory Hemingway, arguments posited within this analysis are bolstered by the fact that he was later arrested in 1951 for cross-dressing (Ashe, 3). Gregory was so similar to his father, yet according to Ashe, Ernest “could not admit consciously that he might have shared attraction to transvestic behavior” (14). Ernest had been struggling with his own gender identity for much of his life, yet had felt stuck within the macho portrayal that he had restricted himself in, and could only express his views on gender through the subtextual visions of his characters. Santiago from *The Old Man and the Sea* comes to be a
projection of Hemingway’s internal anger against masculinity. His seeming desire to endure the most intense trials possible and the disdain that he has for his masculine body as it ages begin to represent the author’s growing subconscious animosity towards the very identity that encapsulates how most would describe Hemingway.

One particular section of The Old Man and the Sea that fuels the widely held analysis of Hemingway seeing the natural world as feminine and thus needing to dominate it, can be viewed under a completely different context in light of this biographical information. To continue the psychological analysis of these specific events in the text, Carl Jung’s archetype theories can serve as insights into the symbolism Hemingway relied so heavily on throughout the work. In regards to Santiago’s perception of the ocean, Hemingway writes that “He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her” (Old Man, 26). Although the subsequent events of the work may play in favor of the dominant argument, a Jungian perspective has the potential to tell a very different story.

As Santiago expresses his view of the feminine ocean, Hemingway scholars Greg Stephens and Janice Cools point out Santiago is actually identifying with the feminized ocean in this particular moment. The article “Out Too Far...” by both Stephens and Cools, published in the Hemingway Review, brings up the fact that when Santiago compares his view of the feminine ocean with the younger fishermen who see the ocean as “el mar which is masculine” (Old Man, 26), Santiago chooses an approach that is identified as “feminized” (Stephens, 5). His rejection of motors, buoys, and actively choosing to not view the ocean as an enemy aligns Santiago within his own vision of femininity. In the very next paragraph after Santiago has effectively feminized the ocean, the protagonist tells us that he lets “the current do a third of the work,” indicating to the reader that the relationship between Santiago and the ocean is much
more collaborative (26). This dynamic that serves a specifically female dominant role subverts the widely accepted patriarchal approach adopted by most in relation to this text.

Using Jung’s archetypes to take a further look into the psychology behind these narrative choices, it’s very easy to identify the ocean as the “mother” archetype. According to Dr. C. George Boeree’s online textbook, the mother archetype represents the nurturing support that allows us to grow from children into adults (“Carl Jung”). Instead of looking at the ocean as providing literal food support for Santiago, we can look at it as providing an expression for the gender fluidity felt subconsciously from the author. Although Santiago fits within the wise old man archetype, his interaction with the ocean allows him to express his inner feminine side, the side of which he actually identifies the strongest. The manifestation of the conflict that Hemingway experienced internally surrounding his gender identity comes later in his interaction with the great marlin.

After the fish that Santiago has hooked has exhausted itself, it swims near enough to the boat for the protagonist to deal a fatal blow with a fishing spear. It’s hard to ignore the immediate phallic connotation in the segment of which Santiago “lifted the harpoon as high as he could, and drove it down with all his strength” (Old man, 87). Santiago is able to feel “the iron go in” and drive it further, pushing his weight into it (87). At the outset, this culmination of the long struggle to simply keep the fish hooked expresses a phallic dominance over what has previously been identified as the feminine ocean. But there are other potential explanations for the symbols that Hemingway has used here, and Jung is once again able to provide a further subtextual meaning to this climactic moment.

Starting with an analyzation of the phallic spear, Dr. Boeree’s text states that Jung believed the phallus to be an ancient symbol, not necessarily immediately associated with sexual
drive or penis envy. Phallic images were most directly correlated to the concept of “mana” or “spiritual energy,” used and displayed during harvest season in hopes of increasing crop yield (“Carl Jung”). If we choose to look at the spear as a culmination of Santiago’s spiritual energy, the concept of dominance radically shifts outside of the sexual realm. Jung’s “shadow” archetype fits the great marlin on multiple levels, being that not only does it actually rise from the dark depths of the ocean, but represents the prehuman model of thinking that places survival as its top priority (“Carl Jung”). If this “monster” is the animalistic essence of Santiago, and the great marlin itself is a product of the feminized ocean, there is reason to associate the great marlin as a tangible element of Hemingway’s projected femininity. The act of driving the culminating spiritual energy through the masculine phallic image, into the hidden feminine aspect of the author’s true desire becomes a symbolic representation of Hemingway’s internal conflict of gender identity. However, as the story continues on we see that this symbolic act becomes representative of Hemingway’s own inability to remove his desires of feminine expression.

At the end of the novella, readers are able to see that Santiago has been ultimately defeated by the ocean. Driven almost to the point of death, the protagonist returns back to his village with no product to sell, and only the bones to tell the story. The ocean, refusing to let the tangible product of femininity be taken back to land and butchered by the predominantly male fisherman, has reclaimed the flesh of the marlin. In the final few pages of the book, Manolin comes in to comfort Santiago. Mentally and physically shaken by the events, Santiago only replies by telling the boy that “They beat me, Manolin,” the sharks that consumed the marlin “truly beat me” (Old Man, 114). Processing this scene with the concept of the ocean symbolizing the feminine desires and expressions of Santiago, the first open acknowledgement of submission appears to be laid out for the reader.
Manolin replies with “He didn’t beat you. Not the fish” (114). The italicized “He” that appears in that line is obviously a reference to the biological sex of the marlin that Santiago has been battling with for days. However, in relation to all of the other points drawn previously, it can be seen how additional meanings are able to spiral out of that particular line. Especially as Santiago replies “No. Truly. It was afterwards” (114). The protagonist recognizes that the victory over the marlin was only a very temporary victory, just as if one was battling deep psychological desires and manifestations and may have had a temporary breakthrough. The vastness and strength of those desires within an individual, when paralleled with an ocean, can only go championed for so long. Hemingway is positing that all must secede to the natural world, and our inherent natural desires. In this specific text these natural desires represent Hemingway’s projected battle with his feminine self, the end of the novella symbolizing his acceptance of his own feminine desires.

The stories and letters written by Hemingway that were composed after the publication of The Old Man and the Sea and published posthumously have had a profound effect on Hemingway scholarship. These revelations into his personal life create the ability to go back and offer new forms of critique, potentially opening up entire new visions within the text. No longer is Hemingway seen as a bastion of stereotypical masculinity. His identity is as complicated as all other people in the world, fluidly shifting throughout the gender spectrum. We can see that Hemingway’s desire to embody the proclaimed perfect man was the outside representation of his own inner struggle with gender identity. Exploring the depths of this award-winning text reveal the complicated and often contradictory mentality that Hemingway had to internalize throughout his life, perhaps leading to the mental instability that would be his ultimate demise. Regardless, Ernest Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea remains an incredibly relevant text that continues
to be subject to new elements of critique since its publication, whether focusing on the allegorical story or the author himself.
Works Cited

Ashe, Fred. "A Very Attractive Devil: Gregory Hemingway In Islands In The Stream."


