Bullfights, Big Game and the Sea: The Mechanisms of Hemingway's Masculine Persona and His Portrayals of Manhood

KAREN DELLINGER 德凱恩
National Taiwan University, 2020
Literary Analysis

No literary name immediately evokes such a palpable aura of masculinity as Ernest Hemingway. From the sparse syntax of his almost telegraphic prose to the countless images of "Papa Hemingway" crouching before a backdrop of rugged terrain, hunting rifle in hand, Hemingway's legacy is commonly considered one of both literary and personal virility that sometimes borders on sheer machismo. Yet the essence of Hemingway's legacy lies not in his masculine persona but in the masterful literary craftsmanship it is interwoven with. Rather than leaving behind a body of work whose sole attribute is its fixation on virility, he utilizes his persona to create portrayals of manhood that are as complex and nuanced as they are vividly, unmistakably masculine. This essay aims to explore the social and cultural factors behind Hemingway's masculine persona and in turn analyze his portrayals of masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. In addition, it will address the correlation between Hemingway's popular, albeit sometimes controversial, image and his status as a celebrated writer of fiction.

A striking aspect of Hemingway's life and times is the perpetual proximity of war, which is accordingly manifested in much of his work—not merely in portrayals of it per se, but also in the substance of the characters and stories themselves. Both World Wars left behind a masculinity that was, in effect, emasculated: battered, traumatized, and desperately craving reassurance of its own potency. The damage—both physical and psychological—wrought by years of violence and conflict resulted in a frantic urge to reconstruct and reassert masculine identity, which in turn led to further anxiety and self-consciousness. Such anxiety to reconstruct (or fabricate?) an ideal masculinity was an essential element of the society and culture that Hemingway inhabited, imbibed, and in turn poured libation to, through both his work and the persona he adopted.

Trauma and mutilation of the body, in particular, opened gateways to psychological trauma and anxiety that would continue to influence the very manner in which men sought to cope with the wake of war. This was especially the case after World War I, in which the sheer destructive capacity of machine-oriented warfare delivered an unprecedented blow to both soldiers and the general public.

> Studies of social experiences and medical representations of wounds expose the entwined failure of reconstruction and masculinity... [Suzannah] Biernoff argues that extreme suffering...undercut[s] fantasies about heroic warfare and the capacity of military masculinity to withstand modern technological warfare. (Carden-Coyne 4-5)

Rather than rendering its hapless recipients glorified and "twice-the-manned" (as traditional masculine stereotypes might dictate), severe physical trauma sustained in the war instead stripped a male generation of its former self-regard.

This effect of physical injury on the psychological and emotional fabric of masculinity is a crucial, though subtly played out, element in Hemingway's 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Jake Barnes, rendered sexually impotent by his injuries in the Great War, is the epitome of his generation's anxious, quietly devastated, incessantly self-conscious manhood. This is illustrated in his complex attitude toward love, sexuality, and his relationship with Brett Ashley: though he is the only man in the story who can offer Brett genuine affection, her insatiable sexual appetite overrides her love for him and prevents her from fully committing to their relationship. While she does indeed love Jake, even confessing at one point that she "simply turn[s] all to jelly" at his touch (Hemingway 22), Brett refuses to commit to a romantic relationship that has no hope of being consummated; despite maintaining a strong, true bond of emotional intimacy with him, she ultimately abandons any possibility of their relationship's further development, as can be seen in her decision to "[go] back to Mike" (Hemingway 215) and her regretful but hopelessly final remark "[W]e could have had such a damned good time together" (218). Though it can't be said that Jake fails to win her, it certainly appears that he fails to possess her.

It would seem, then, that *The Sun Also Rises* is Hemingway's illustration of failed masculinity. Coupled with his reticent, introverted nature, Jake Barnes' impotence (the key cause of his failure to ostensibly claim and possess the woman he desires) appears to irrevocably unman him; deprived of "the male equipment that (supposedly) establishes a masculine self" (Strychacz 78) (i.e. the healthy function of his genitals), he is confined to the sphere of a semi-outsider who can

only participate in masculine sexual activity by witnessing the romantic trysts and pursuits of his friends. He confesses early in the novel that he has "a rotten habit of picturing the bedroom scenes of [his] friends" (Hemingway 11); it is evident that his bitterness at his own impotence has "transformed his friends' acts into theater" and that the only means of alleviating his frustration is "a habit of voyeurism that appears to be at once a product of and compensation for his inability to participate in his own bedroom scenes" (Strychacz 78). In Chapter 4, he tersely articulates his vexation as he contemplates his reflection in his bedside mirror ("Of all the ways to be wounded") and, with his customary bitterness, attempts to wave it away with a nonchalant "I suppose it was funny" (Hemingway 26). Rather than redeeming him from his plight, his passionate feelings for Brett serve only to increase his misery; his silent, despairing struggle is evident as he lies in bed contemplating his ardent but hopeless love:

> My head started to work. The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded.... I never used to realize it, I guess. I try and play it along and just not make trouble for people. Probably I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England. I suppose she only wanted what she couldn't have.... I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it, and I started to think about Brett and all the rest of it went away. I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in sort of smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. (Hemingway 27)

From a superficial perspective, Jake Barnes lacks everything the stereotypically masculine identity requires. Unlike his brash, womanizing male companions, he is vulnerable, painfully insecure, and only clings to his self-esteem through a feeble show of stoicism; he is certainly a far cry from the paragon of aggressive sexual prowess and overbearing physical presence that "Papa Hemingway" is commonly considered to champion.

However, a closer analysis reveals that this is not Hemingway's true intention in his treatment of this character. Hemingway does not present a sketch of failed masculinity only to further promote one of "successful" masculinity; he does not intend Jake Barnes to serve as a negative contrast to true manhood.

Rather, he uses Jake to present an alternative ideal of masculinity that, while unconventional at first glance, is not totally contradictory to the stereotypes he subtly undermines.

Ironically, Jake's self-consciousness, insecurity, and his impotence itself do not truly unman him. "On the contrary, Jake, as odd as it sounds, exemplifies the condition of manhood" (Strychacz 80); because he is such an apt representation of his generation's collective masculine anxiety, he is nothing short of a "real man." Far from lamenting the misfortunes of a marginalized "other," Jake's story is both a product of and an elegy to the troubled masculinity of his age; his decidedly "unmacho" struggles are precisely what define him as a quintessential man of post-World War I Western society. Furthermore, the very absence of physical consummation in his relationship with Brett represents an alternative type of power and dominance. Though she unabashedly reaps sexual satisfaction from any man who is willing to offer it (and thus appears to be the more dominant, appetite-driven "man" in the relationship), Brett continually, repeatedly, almost faithfully returns to Jake for emotional satisfaction and support; in fact, he is the man she entreats to help her after her brief affair with Romero comes to a foreseeably unhappy end (Gorton 2). The fact that their relationship (which curiously oscillates between a love affair and a friendship) remains so persistent and present throughout the novel despite the absence of physical consummation is a testament to the hold that Jake has on her. Regardless of the couple's involuntary abstinence, their relationship persists because of the potency of Brett's attraction to Jake; though he cannot claim Brett in the traditionally masculine act of sexual conquest, in a sense he is master of her precisely because he does not need to buy her affection with sexual favors. What Jake lacks in physical and sexual possession of Brett he makes up for in emotional possession that is almost spiritual, as she comes to depend on him as on a source of stability and psychological nourishment when she is overwhelmed by the consequences of her own tumultuous love life. Nina Schwartz supports this interpretation by arguing that Hemingway depicts the apparently emasculated Jake "to inscribe the promise of a particular kind of redemption" and quoting Leon F. Seltzer's

statement that Jake's impotence "describes, paradoxically, not man's deficiency but his amazing potentiality" (49). Thus, Hemingway neither truly bolsters stereotypical masculine ideals of the dominant, possessive male lover nor fully rejects them. Instead, he uses an unlikely figure—Jake Barnes, the traumatized, castrated World War I veteran-turned-journalist—to simultaneously dismantle and reconstruct these ideals, presenting a portrayal of manhood that is at once unconventional enough to be intriguing and underlyingly familiar enough to resonate with attentive readers.

If World War I birthed a masculinity characterized by insecurity and disillusionment, World War II forcibly thrust this masculinity into its prime, pushing its sense of unsettling self-consciousness to extremes and forcing it to adopt an increasingly exaggerated presence in order to cope. This phenomenon was boosted not only by the horror and magnitude of World War II itself, but also the bubbling developments in contemporary society and culture. Despite the marked presence of war and destruction, the twentieth century was also an era of exhilarating advancements in mass culture and entertainment. The advent of popular literature, Hollywood, and celebrity culture flourished to a peak mid-century and played a crucial part in crafting society's perception of masculinity (and likewise femininity); gender stereotypes simultaneously fed and were fed by the circulation of increasingly vivid, popularized images. Propelled by the devastation of another large-scale bloodbath, mass media (particularly visual media and popular literature) helped create a template of masculinity that sought to vehemently (over)compensate for the battering it had received.

A quintessential representation of this hounded masculinity's coping mechanism is the men's pulp magazine of the 1950s, in which Hemingway himself was frequently featured as a macho icon. Colorful, sensational, and often scandalously risqué, pulps provided men with much more than temporary recreation. With their (luridly illustrated) depictions of muscular beefcakes combatting monstrous beasts, heroically "rescuing" (i.e. claiming) voluptuous, helplessly submissive damsels or escaping the clutches of smoldering femmes fatales, pulp literature "capture[d] in amber the tensions, concerns, traumas, and

fashions of a historic moment"; they served as essential "fantasies of masculinity" that "bolster[ed] men's adequacy in the quickly shifting time after the war" (Earle 5). Through its exaggerated portrayals of a manhood that asserted itself by combatting, conquering, and claiming, this inexpensive, widely accessible reading material both reflected and reinforced the era's stereotypes of masculinity.

With its central theme of man versus nature and its detailed depiction of a lone man's battle with an unrelenting opponent, Hemingway's 1952 novel *The Old Man and the Sea* might seem to echo the masculine adventure story of grueling combat against brutal foes. Like the popularized image of a stranded hero fighting for survival on a crocodile-infested island, the titular old man Santiago demonstrates strength, resilience, and endurance—quintessential virtues of the ideal man—in his three-day-long pursuit of the marlin. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Santiago himself heavily associates the success of his endeavor with his manhood as "[the] narrative is caught up in the language of traditional gender orthodoxy" (Bopp). He is driven onward in his quest by the desire to "show [the fish] what sort of man [he is]" (Hemingway 47) and to prove his masculinity:

> "I'll kill him though," he said. "In all his greatness and his glory." Although it is unjust, he thought. But I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures.... The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it. (Hemingway 49)

For the old man, his exploit on the sea is evidently far more than a challenge to his craft as fisherman; it is a challenge to his identity itself. The marlin is not merely Santiago's prey but a contestant that poses a direct threat to his masculine identity.

Moreover, the extent of Santiago's self-consciousness and anxiety regarding his manhood is subtly revealed in the gendered characterization of the marlin. Throughout the book, the marlin is uniformly assigned male pronouns....

> Seemingly unconsciously, the language of masculinity is projected onto a character whose actual sex is unknown. It must be that the novel designates the fish as masculine based only on the threat its strength presents to the old man's masculinity. (Bopp)

It might thus appear that Hemingway's most famed work of fiction is a literary tribute to the more lowbrow portrayals of high-stakes masculine combat that contemporary men would identify with. Santiago's nautical equivalent of a bullfight seems to illustrate the same type of masculine anxiety and identity crisis that post-war mainstream culture provided catharsis for.

Once more, however, Hemingway's portrayal of manhood harbors multiple dimensions that, while rooted in stereotypical expectations, are reworked and transformed into something unique. Ultimately, Santiago's narrative of masculine attainment is not one of conquest and victory over nature, but one of transcendence through submission. His pursuit of the marlin is not colored with the predatory attitude of aggression that the G.I. Joe-esque heroes of pulp adventures display; he does not view the marlin as merely a senseless beast that must be destroyed in order for his identity to be asserted. Rather, Santiago's journey on the sea takes on a spiritual quality that is manifested in his attitude toward both the marlin and himself. Though courageous and steadfast in his resolution to kill the fish, Santiago speaks of it with a reverence that borders on devotion. Rather than pitting himself against the fish, which he describes as "more noble and more able" (Hemingway 47), "he aligns himself with the fish... [and] calls it his brother" (Bopp):

> I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it.... He is a great fish and I must convince him, he thought. ...There are three things that are brothers: the fish and my two hands. It [his injured hand] must uncramp. It is unworthy of it to be cramped.... I wish I could show him what sort of man I am. But then he would see the cramped hand. Let him think I am more man than I am and I will be so. I wish I was the fish, he thought, with everything he has against only my will and my intelligence. (Hemingway 44-48)

Paradoxically, this sentiment of reverent affection is precisely what spurs the old man's resolution to kill the fish. He is driven not by the desire to simply destroy his opponent but to match him, to somehow ascend to an equal level of adequacy and worth. Thus, Santiago aims not to prove his masculinity by eliminating his rival but by assimilating with it ("I wish I was the fish"); he

identifies so strongly with the fish because it "becomes a manifestation of the masculinity the old man hopes to obtain" (Bopp). The marlin's threat to his masculine identity must be resolved by "convincing" the great fish that he is "more man than [he is]," in the hope that in turn "[he] will be so" (Hemingway 48). Though "[t]here is no one worthy of eating [the fish] from the manner of his behavior and his great dignity" (Hemingway 57), killing it is Santiago's way of "convincing" it of his manly worth, almost as if to gain its approval.

This elevation and deification of the fish turns *The Old Man and the Sea*'s apparent hunter-versus-hunted narrative into something akin to the chronicle of a pilgrimage. The spiritual undertones of the story reach a climax when Santiago at last succeeds in killing the marlin. The fish's death is depicted as a form of (literal) ascension, and the moment of its death is, ironically, also the moment of its supreme display of beauty and splendor:

> Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty. He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff. Then he fell into the water with a crash that sent spray over the old man and over all of the skiff. (Hemingway 72).

Having ascended in both literal height and degree of majesty, the fish performs a final act of "[sending] spray over the old man" upon its descent, which powerfully evokes the image of baptism. This may be interpreted as the fish's sanction of Santiago's success—and thus his manhood. Though it is the old man who harpoons the fish and ostensibly conquers it, in truth it is the fish who "hang[s] in the air above the old man" and deigns to grant him the assertion of successful masculinity he seeks. Santiago's climactic act of conquest is in fact one of submissive reception and gratitude.

The nature of Santiago's apparently successful catch is further challenged and complicated in the latter part of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Though he succeeds in obtaining the marlin, he is bereft of the chance to enjoy the fruits of his toil. The marlin's body is preyed upon by bloodthirsty sharks, and Santiago is forced to return home with a piteously maimed "half-fish." The mutilation is such that the trophy is barely distinguishable as its once-magnificent self, even being mistaken

for the remains of a shark by a casually ignorant tourist (Hemingway 99). It would seem that this brutal stripping away (both literal and figurative) of the marlin's glory utterly negates the honor and worth Santiago has received in his preceding battle with fatigue and pain. Santiago himself, upon seeing the sorry fate of his esteemed prey-turned-rival-turned-brother, is disheartened and feels a pang of regret for the whole endeavor:

> It was too good to last, he thought. ...It might as well have been a dream, he thought. ...I wish it had been a dream now and that I had never hooked the fish and was alone in bed on the newspapers.... 'You're tired, old man,' he said. 'You're tired inside.'... 'Half-fish,' he said. 'Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both....' (Hemingway 78-89)

Hemingway seems to have constructed an archetype of pious ascension to worthy manhood, only to tear it down and drown it in nauseating nihilism.

However, this apparent failure is precisely what gives the old man's quest for masculinity its powerful symbolic significance. The loss of the material trophy contrasts starkly with the spiritual ascension he achieves through his journey and highlights it; his success does not truly diminish but transcends its physical manifestation, echoing his declaration that "[a] man can be destroyed but not defeated" (Hemingway 80). Moreover, the sharks' consumption of the marlin causes Santiago's "success" itself to take on a more profound, albeit counterintuitive, definition. Though dismayed at the damage done to his hard-earned prize, Santiago remarks that the sharks are "built to feed on all the fishes in the sea, that were so fast and strong and well-armed that they had no other enemy" (Hemingway 78); just as he recognizes that "[he was] born to be a fisherman" and "the fish was born to be a fish" (81), he acknowledges that all things serve an established purpose in the cycle of nature and life itself. Through pursuing the fish, killing it, and eventually losing it, the old man is fulfilling his destined purpose, just as the fish fulfills its purpose in being caught and the sharks fulfill theirs in preying on bleeding flesh. This hierarchy of unlikely yet inevitable harmony indicates the presence of divinity, or as William Faulkner terms it in his review of *The Old Man and the Sea*, "something somewhere that made them all":

> This time, he discovered God, a Creator. Until now, his men and women had made themselves, shaped themselves out of their own clay; their victories and defeats were at the hands of each other, just to prove to themselves or one another how tough they could be. But this time, he wrote about pity: about something somewhere that made them all: the old man who had to catch the fish and then lose it, the fish that had to be caught and then lost, the sharks which had to rob the old man of his fish; made them all and loved them all and pitied them all. (Faulkner 55)

Thus, Hemingway's masterpiece portrays a manhood that is successful not because it ostensibly comes out on top, but because it nobly, exquisitely, heartbreakingly illustrates a

> fable of an attitude toward the order of Creation, toward the arrangement of providentially assigned roles within that order, and toward the necessity for submission, courtesy, and mutual respect between creatures disposed within that arrangement to its all-sustaining operation—a transcendent sense of "pity" contained in pattern, parts, and their interaction. (Bradford 159)

The flip side of Santiago's weary-hearted statement that "everything kills everything else in some way" and that fishing "kills [him] exactly as it keeps [him] alive" (Hemingway 82) is that everything gives everything else life, according to a divinely established order. It is only through apparent loss and submission that Santiago transcends the secular dimension of "successful" masculinity. Though the old man himself feels he has been beaten, he has in fact succeeded in embodying the supreme truth of manhood—and of life itself.

One would expect such remarkable aesthetic and ideological complexity, conveyed with prose that is at once refreshingly declarative and starkly lyrical, to warrant waves of awestruck fascination. Certainly, readers and critics have not neglected to acknowledge the greatness of Hemingway's literary craft; a particularly apt description of his deceptively simple style is Ford Madox Ford's:

> Hemingway's words strike you, each one, as if they were pebbles fetched fresh from a brook. They live and shine, each in its place. So one of his pages has the effect of a brook-bottom into which you look down through the flowing water. The words form a tessellation, each in order beside the other. (133)

Yet, as is often the case with celebrated personages, "[h]is renown reaches beyond the works he is known for, as his larger-than-life persona is remembered even by those who have not read the novels that gained him recognition"(Fischel). His aura of "he-man" machismo and magazine-cover charisma seems to dominate our impression of him far more than the sophistication of his fiction; even those who can distinguish his knack for presenting narratives in deceptively simple prose often overlook his implicit eloquence and dimensional depth, instead only recognizing his terse efficiency. Both Hemingway's life and literary work are typically labeled "hard-boiled" (a term that originated in World War I army camps), i.e., "unfeeling, callous, coldhearted, cynical, rough, obdurate, unemotional, without sentiment" (Hallengren), and many still believe this is why Hemingway perfectly embodies the weathered, war-toughened essence of twentieth century manhood. Inseparable from the mystique of his "glamorous and adventurous lifestyle" (Fischel), Hemingway tends to captivate our imaginations with "the pose of [his] tough, charismatically overbearing personality" (Strychacz 2) even more than he does with the deft brilliance of his prose.

Though Hemingway himself has wryly remarked that "If you have a success you have it for the wrong reasons," it would seem he has no one to blame but himself. As Strychacz's description indicates, Hemingway's masculine persona is—to a considerable extent—a pose. While his extensive experience in war and reputed fondness for "macho" activities (including, but not limited to, boxing, fishing, big-game hunting and bullfight-spectating) were certainly not false, they were deliberately exaggerated and put on display for the benefit of his audience. As befitted the literary celebrity that he was, Hemingway "[played] an active role in cultivating his celebrity and a particular image of himself"; through both his writing and his life, he purposely "[gave] readers a view of a dramatic life of war and adventured ... [that he] made sure was observed by the public" (Fischel). Seizing upon the fact that his life and career coincided with the rise of contemporary celebrity culture,

> Hemingway made himself a literary star using the mechanisms of

> modern Hollywood.... [He] worked with PR representatives, with publishers sending pictures to the press showing the author skiing in Europe or with a large catch from a day of fishing. Hemingway complained of invasion of privacy and interference with his work while simultaneously making himself readily available to journalists and photographers, as well as socializing with gossip columnists. (Fischel)

The twentieth century's upsurge of visual mass media vigorously facilitated the creation and maintenance of a public persona, leading to Hemingway's dual status as "both serious author and public figure, sensitive artist and masculine ideal" (Earle 4). Even those who didn't read Hemingway (or perhaps especially those) found themselves instinctively mesmerized by the images of "pinup Papa" (Earle 61) plastered on tabloid covers and smiling gruffly from the pages of newspapers.

> This complementary relationship between fame, photography, and persona that explains Hemingway's great popularity also reflects the general dynamic of celebrity culture, that often ghoulish fascination of ours with public personalities.... The many articles on Hemingway...are perfect examples of popular legend making, and, considering Hemingway's often scandalous reputation, it is important to reembed them in their original visual surroundings. ...This image of Hemingway as he-man has proven resilient, continually seductive in the popular media. (Earle 62)

This resilient seduction of our attention and imagination is, without question, as much the work of Ernest Hemingway himself as it is a reflection of contemporary obsession with the visual and sensory (in preference to the literary). In order to maintain popularity and relevance, Hemingway purposely, self-consciously crafted and sold an image of impenetrable machismo that was at once overbearing and appealing. Therein lies the palpable glamor of virility that, though instrumental in spreading Hemingway's appeal to a wide range of audiences outside the literati, is commonly criticized for overshadowing his contribution to literature.

Criticism of Hemingway's perceived hypermasculinity extends far beyond its effect on his writing career. Based as much on his troubled, infidelity-strewn private life as the seemingly negative portrayals of women in his work and his

exaggerated masculine persona, accusations of sexism and misogyny have been irrevocably woven into our perception of both Hemingway the writer and Hemingway the man. While he is frequently championed as his era's ideal of manhood, his (public) masculine persona can also be interpreted as an embodiment of postwar America's "troubling masculinity"; "like the pulp magazines in which it is solidified, it is both fascinating and problematic" (Earle 4). The popular image he crafted for himself seems to unabashedly cater to the "misogyny [that stemmed] in part from the wholesale trauma of the Second World War," which promoted "hypermasculine performance" and "fantasies of male dominance" (Earle 9) while encouraging the objectification of women as sexual playthings and pleasure slaves. Moreover, Hemingway's portrayals of women are commonly criticized for subtextual sexism. Brett Ashley, for example, is depicted as a voracious, destructive "modern woman" that inevitably causes the emotional downfall of all men she crosses paths with. Throughout *The Sun Also Rises*, it seems that her primary vice is her headstrong independence and refusal to be possessed. While this quality would be deemed admirable and exceptional from a feministic viewpoint, Hemingway seems to portray it as a ravenous cyclone of destruction. For a legion of readers, casual and scholarly alike, Papa Hemingway is not an ideal "real man" at all but a living, breathing illustration of toxic masculinity. Interestingly, however, criticism along these lines tends to coarsely blur the divide between Hemingway's public image and his fictional characterizations; it is often taken for granted that his female characters are intended as counterparts to his aggressive macho public presence, which is in itself a problematic assumption. A more detailed examination of his depictions of women and gendered relationships would reveal not a few redeeming—if not outright debunking—qualities. However pulpishly sexist Hemingway the pinup poster boy may have been, Hemingway the fiction writer was by no means so carelessly conventional.

Furthermore, and perhaps most damningly, there is the criticism of Hemingway's alleged hypocrisy. Those who acknowledge Hemingway's extremely deliberate, self-conscious attitude toward his public image (i.e., those who would claim to not be fooled by this image) may point out the disparity between this

exaggerated persona and Hemingway's professed appreciation of truth. For a man who claimed the essence of great writing lies in "[writing] the truest sentence that you know," the tremendous effort he put into crafting a semi-artificial image would seem blatantly contradictory. But such accusers forget that, without the celebrity and renown Hemingway established through his public performance of masculinity, the brilliance of his fiction might not have reached the high level of (well-deserved) fame it has; however profoundly, movingly truthful his work was, the majority of society might not be aware of its existence had Hemingway not maintained a socially relevant status through ensuring his own widespread popularity. Though knowledge of Hemingway the macho celebrity outdoorsman in no way guarantees understanding of Hemingway the brilliant writer, it certainly opens gateways. Because of the unquestionable, uncompromising quality of his work, superficial fascination with his persona has a better chance of prompting study and appreciation of his masterfully constructed fiction. The personal "fiction" of masculinity that Hemingway sustained only overshadows the quality of his literary fiction insofar as we let it; should a reader desire to delve beneath this exterior of machismo, the rewarding discovery of Hemingway's truth awaits none the worse for its layers of celebrity-oriented packaging.

Moreover, the existence of Hemingway's hypermasculine pose itself is actually a far more complex phenomenon than the average publicity stunt could ever aspire to be. Besides serving the pragmatic (some would say sordid) purpose of celebrity-making, Hemingway's persona reflects a dimension of culture and society that is as fundamentally influential and present as it can be subtle and elusive. Though "Hemingway biographies are packed with...instances of his commitment to evidencing some sign of authentic manhood—and with similarly irritable accusations of adolescent posturing" (Strychacz 5), this act of presenting a certain version of masculinity is in fact a crucial factor in society's collective understanding of masculinity—and gender identity in general. Contrary to the assumption that true manhood is "self-contained, self-possessed, and antagonistic to self-display" (Strychacz 5), the establishment of a masculine (or feminine) identity is frequently a matter of presentation, ostensible accomplishment, and

enactment that relies on the reception and interpretation of others—namely, an "audience" that takes the form of both individual peers and collective society. Our perception of gender is, more often than otherwise, precisely that—a matter of perception and interpretation that strongly parallels a theatrical performance. While the personas we assume are by no means false per se, they are (to varying extents) acts that appeal to the evaluation and sanction of others. Just as theatrical acts rely on culturally coded signals and formulas to take effect, our expression of gender identity is largely interwoven with cultural and social establishments. Thus, Hemingway's masculine public persona is "susceptible to a different analysis that reads [it] as staged actions activating codes both theatrical and cultural—that reads [it], in short, as acts of genuine theater" (Strychacz 5).

> In this sense, one's temptation to criticize Hemingway for swaggering like an adolescent might yield to a more deliberate assessment of the entire structure of the dramatic scene, which now speaks to a powerful collusion between actor and audience and an intense dependence on preexisting codes about how men should perform for other men. ...[I]t reveals a theater of manhood-on-display in which the audience's interpretive and evaluatory responses crucially affect its dramatic significance. ...[M]anhood-fashioning must be read as complex social practices configured within a theatrical structure, and at which claims on manhood must be seen to be overtly rhetorical. (Strychacz 6)

At heart, his deliberate display of exaggerated masculinity is not purely a fabricated gimmick but a hyper-distilled model of human society, which is itself far more prone to theatrical representation than some of us would like to admit. By interpreting Hemingway's public pose as its own form of living rhetoric, we find that it is not Hemingway who coerces us into his theater of masculine display but we who have fashioned and inhabited this theater all along without being aware of it. While his over-the-top performance of swaggering macho bravado was indeed designed as a borderline-burlesque poster for his work, it has simultaneously served as a canny illuminator of cultural consciousness.

As discussed in the textual analyses of *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, the greatest testament to Hemingway's genius is his ability to transform seemingly intuitive, two-dimensional stereotypes of masculinity into

intricate, unique portrayals that both challenge our assumptions and resonate with our consciousness. It might even be argued that, ironically, the nuanced complexity of Hemingway's compelling "manhoods" depends precisely on the exaggerated sketches of manhood we would expect from mainstream society—and that Hemingway seems to embody at first glance, which adds yet another dimension to his ever-enigmatic representation of masculinity. Thus, we may conclude our assessment of Ernest Hemingway the writer with the acknowledgment that he undoubtedly deserves his status as a celebrated champion of modern fiction.

When it comes to our assessment of Ernest Hemingway the person, however, we must remember that "one can and must distinguish between Hemingway the man and Hemingway the artist" (Strychacz 4, citing Trilling). Whatever criticism Hemingway has merited, be it for sexism, hypocrisy, or the myriad other flaws that literature's most sensational minimalist has been charged with, we must remember:

> Hemingway the "artist" is conscious, Hemingway the "man" is self-conscious; the "artist" has a kind of innocence, the "man" a kind of naivety; the "artist" is disinterested, the "man" has a dull personal axe to grind; the "artist" has a perfect medium and tells the truth even if it be only his truth, but the "man" fumbles at communication and falsifies. (Trilling 52)

It must be understood that what Hemingway achieves within his "perfect medium" of fiction cannot be expected to translate neatly into the other areas of his life; it is only natural that his efforts to maintain a certain image might falter in effectiveness or occasionally even backfire and lead to misinterpretation. Though it is astute to recognize the shortcomings of Hemingway's masculine persona and question the authenticity of the "real" manhood he seems to promote, it would be presumptuous to assume his public image accurately reflects his genuine ideals and values. Those who instinctively label him hypocritical or misogynistic are wrongly assuming that Hemingway the man equals the persona he presents before audiences; in projecting this harsh judgment onto his character as a whole, they forget the dullness of their own personal axes, which—like any

other human being—they grind with an inevitable self-consciousness. However many times we think we catch Ernest Hemingway "fumbling at communication and falsifying," we should find it in our hearts—and brains—to forgive him. After all, toxically masculine or not, he is only exasperatingly, irresistibly, forgivably human.

Works Cited

Bopp, Leonard. "'Show Him What A Man Can Do:' Language of Gender and Attempted Re-masculinization in *The Old Man and the Sea*." *Philosophy for the Many*, 14 Oct. 2016, sites.williams.edu/engl-209-fall16/uncategorized/show-him-what-a-man-can-do-language-of-gender-and-attempted-re-masculinization-in-the-old-man-and-the-sea/. Accessed 3 June 2019.

Bradford, M. E. "On The Importance Of Discovering God: Faulkner And Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea*." *The Mississippi Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 3, Mississippi State University, 1967, pp. 158-162.

Carden-Coyne, Ana. "Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World War: A Centenary Reflection." *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique: French Journal of British Studies* (Online), 15 Jan. 2015, journals.openedition.org/rfcb/305. Accessed 15 May 2019.

Faulkner, William. "Review of *The Old Man and the Sea*, by Ernest Hemingway." *Shenandoah*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1952, p.55.

Ford, Ford Madox. *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford*. Edited by Frank MacShane, University of Nebraska Press, 1964.

Fischel, Sarah. "The Celebrated Hemingway: Talent and Fame." *Fameology*, 21 Feb. 2014, fameology.net/2012/02/21/the-celebrated-hemingway-talent-and-fame/. Accessed 5 June 2019.

Gorton, Cassandra. "Wounded Masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises*." *Academia*, 5 June 2016, academia.edu/26529964/Wounded_Masculinity_in_The_Sun_Also_Rises?auto=download. Accessed 16 May 2019.

Hallengren, Andres. *Nobel Laureates in Search of Identity and Integrity: Voices of Different Cultures*. World Scientific, 2005.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. 1926. Vintage, Random House, 2000.

---. *The Old Man and the Sea*. 1952. Vintage, Random House, 2000.

Schwartz, Nina. "Lovers' Discourse in *The Sun Also Rises*: A Cock and Bull Story." *Criticism*, vol. 26, no. 1, Wayne State University Press, 1984, pp. 49-69.

Strychacz, Thomas. *Hemingway's Theaters of Masculinity*. Louisiana State University Press, 2003.

Trilling, Lionel. "Hemingway and His Critics." *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1939, pp. 52-60.