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The Exhaustion of the Hemingway Code and the Crisis of Postwar American Identity in Ernest Hemingway's Islands in the Stream [1]

استنفاد الشيفرة الهيمنغو اية وأزمة الهوية الأمريكية بعد الحرب في رو اية «الجزرفي المجرى» لإرنست همنغواي [2]

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Abstract: This article reexamines Ernest Hemingway's posthumously published novel Islands in the Stream (1970) as a literary representation of the instability of postwar American identity. Moving beyond interpretations that treat the novel primarily as a fragmented elegy or an incomplete late work, it investigates how the narrative's three sections—"Bimini," "Cuba," and "At Sea"—stage the transformation of Thomas Hudson's identities as father, artist, and military operative. Drawing on the literature of exhaustion, ontological instability, deconstruction, simulacra, and Andrew Hoberek's account of postwar "agency panic," the study examines the relationship between narrative form, masculine identity, and the ideal of the autonomous, property-owning American subject. It employs qualitative textual analysis and historically informed close reading, focusing on narrative discontinuity, spatial representation, characterization, and recurring symbolic practices. The article also considers the novel's compositional and editorial history, recognizing that posthumous publication complicates categorical claims about Hemingway's final intentions. It argues that the novel's formal and thematic tensions expose the difficulty of sustaining inherited ideals of individual autonomy in a world shaped by grief, social change, and institutional power. In addition, the novel offers readers beyond the United States, including readers in Eastern societies, a literary point of entry into selected American cultural ideals and contradictions—particularly individualism, masculine self-fashioning, work, family, and military duty—without claiming to represent the full diversity of American society.

Keywords: Ernest Hemingway; Islands in the Stream; postwar American identity; agency panic; masculinity; narrative fragmentation.

المستخلص: تتناول هذه الدراسة رواية الجزر في المجرى (1970) لإرنست همنغواي، بوصفها عملاً أدبياً متأخراً يكشف عن أزمة الذات الأمريكية في مرحلة ما بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، من خلال تفكك الهوية الفردية واستنفاد النموذج البطولي المرتبط بما يُعرف بـ«الشيفرة الهيمنغوايية». وتهدف إلى تحليل العلاقة بين البنية السردية المتقطعة والتحولات الوجودية التي يمر بها البطل توماس هدسون، واستجلاء تمثيلات الأبوة والفن والذكورة والاستقلال الفردي في سياق التحولات الاجتماعية والثقافية الأمريكية. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج النوعي التحليلي، من خلال القراءة النصية الدقيقة، والاستعانة بالمقاربات السردية والتفكيكية وما بعد الحداثية، مع توظيف مفهوم «قلق الفاعلية» لتفسير انتقال الشخصية من الاستقلال الفردي إلى الارتهان للأدوار والأنظمة المؤسسية. وتكشف القراءة أن أقسام الرواية الثلاثة، «بيميني» و«كوبا» و«في البحر»، تقدم تحولات متعاقبة في تمثيل الذات، من الفنان والأب إلى الفرد المكلوم، ثم إلى الشخصية التي تختزلها الوظيفة العسكرية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن تفتت السرد لا يمكن تفسيره بمعزل عن تاريخ المخطوط ونشر الرواية بعد وفاة مؤلفها، وأن البنية المتقطعة تتيح، في الوقت نفسه، قراءة نقدية لأفول بعض مرتكزات الهوية الذكورية والفردية الأمريكية، دون اختزال الرواية في تفسير فلسفي واحد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إرنست همنغواي؛ الجزر في المجرى؛ أزمة الهوية؛ الذكورة؛ قلق الفاعلية؛ السرد المتقطع.

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1. Introduction

1.0. Beyond Nostalgia—Hemingway's Late Style as Historical Diagnosis

The critical narrative surrounding Ernest Hemingway's later fiction has often been framed as a story of decline, moving from the formal innovation of his early works toward self-repetition, sentimentality, and diminished artistic control. This tendency has shaped the reception of Islands in the Stream (1970), a posthumously published novel frequently described as fragmented or uneven and often read in the shadow of The Old Man and the Sea (1952). Yet a judgment of decline alone cannot account for the novel's sustained engagement with loss, masculine identity, artistic autonomy, and the changing social conditions of postwar America. Recent reassessments of Hemingway's late career caution against treating his final years as a simple period of creative exhaustion (Wyatt; Thurston).

The novel's publication history requires particular care. Islands in the Stream appeared after Hemingway's death and was assembled from a larger body of manuscript material. Robert E. Fleming's account of Hemingway's late fiction indicates that the writer considered substantial structural changes and a multi-part design; however, evidence of compositional experimentation does not establish that every discontinuity in the published version represents Hemingway's final decision. Michael Thurston's study of the posthumous works emphasizes the editorial complications involved when manuscripts have not received an author's final preparation. This article therefore examines the formal effects of the published text while avoiding categorical claims about the authorial intention behind every gap or transition (Fleming 132; Thurston).

The novel's early reception reveals a critical tension. As Leonard Butts summarizes, Richard B. Hovey viewed Hudson's melancholy as insufficiently explained and therefore questioned the Hemingway Code, whereas Gregory S. Sojka interpreted military duty as a recovery of discipline and existential purpose. These readings identify opposing possibilities—failure and recovery—but may leave insufficiently examined the novel's more complex representation of identity. Rather than deciding that Hudson either abandons or successfully recovers the Code, this study asks how the novel exposes the limits of a model of masculinity grounded in discipline, physical competence, emotional restraint, and self-sufficiency (Butts 453–54).

This question becomes especially significant when the novel is situated within the socioeconomic transformations of postwar America. Andrew Hoberek describes "agency panic" as an anxiety associated with the perceived loss of individual autonomy as the middle class moved away from independent property ownership and toward salaried employment within large organizations. Although Hoberek's principal literary examples are not Hemingway's, the concept offers a productive framework for considering Thomas Hudson, whose life on Bimini appears to embody independence through property, artistic labor, and personal choice. His subsequent displacement invites a reading of how the ideal of the autonomous American subject becomes increasingly difficult to sustain (Hoberek 8–10).

The three sections provide the principal structure for this inquiry. "Bimini" presents Hudson as an artist and father whose identity is connected to home, work, and his sons. "Cuba" depicts the aftermath of loss through memory, social ritual, and uncertain forms of self-presentation. "At Sea" places him in a military environment in which the designation "the Captain" increasingly defines his role. These sections do not necessarily form a simple progression from stability to total disintegration; rather, they present different and sometimes overlapping modes of identity formation. Their juxtaposition reveals the tension between personal agency and the roles through which Hudson attempts to recover purpose (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; McHale 9–10).

The novel also offers a culturally valuable, though necessarily mediated, perspective for readers outside the United States. Through Hudson's life and the social worlds he encounters, readers may explore selected American ideals and tensions involving individualism, property, artistic independence, family responsibility, masculine conduct, work, and military service. The novel should not be treated as a comprehensive ethnographic account or as a transparent representation of all Americans; it is a work of fiction shaped by Hemingway's particular artistic vision and historical position. Its value for intercultural understanding lies precisely in enabling readers to examine both the appeal and the limitations of ideals that have been influential in American cultural self-representation (Hoberek 8–10; Del Gizzo 496–99).

Linda Hutcheon's account of postmodern fiction as a mode that may install familiar conventions while simultaneously exposing their limitations provides a useful, qualified perspective. The novel invokes recognizable elements of the Hemingway Code—discipline, courage, masculine restraint, artistic independence, and endurance—while placing them under pressure. This article does not classify Hemingway straightforwardly as a postmodern writer. It uses "proto-postmodern" as a limited analytical term for selected features that anticipate later concerns with unstable identity, narrative discontinuity, and the weakening of universal explanatory frameworks, while retaining the novel's late-modernist and postwar contexts (Hutcheon 3–4, 13; McHale 9–10).

The central argument is that Islands in the Stream dramatizes the exhaustion of a particular model of autonomous masculine identity rather than merely narrating the private grief of an individual. Hudson's movement from father and artist to bereaved exile and military captain provides a literary means of examining how identity is sustained, disrupted, and reconstructed through social roles and institutional systems. The novel's formal discontinuities intensify this inquiry, although their meaning must be assessed in light of the text's posthumous editorial history. By connecting literary form, postwar social history, and intercultural interpretation, the study offers a historically qualified account of Hemingway's late novel (Hoberek 8–10; Wyatt).

1.1. Statement of the Research Problem

Although Islands in the Stream has attracted critical attention for its treatment of loss, masculinity, artistic identity, and Hemingway's late style, its tripartite structure has not always been examined in sustained relation to the postwar socioeconomic context. In particular, the relationship between Hudson's changing identities and anxieties about individual agency requires further investigation. The novel's representation of artistic independence on Bimini, emotional and social displacement in Cuba, and military function at sea offers an opportunity to examine how the ideal of the autonomous American subject is destabilized. At the same time, its posthumous publication raises a methodological question: to what extent can its fragmentation be interpreted as a deliberate aesthetic strategy rather than as a feature partly shaped by the selection and editing of unfinished manuscript materials? The problem, therefore, is to explain the interaction among narrative form, masculine autonomy, postwar American identity, and the novel's publication history without reducing the text to a single philosophical or biographical explanation (Thurston; Hoberek 8–10).

1. How does the novel's three-part structure represent the transformation of Thomas Hudson's identities as father, artist, and military captain?
2. How do loss, displacement, and institutional service reflect postwar anxieties about individual autonomy and American middle-class identity?
3. How do narrative fragmentation, spatial representation, and recurring symbolic practices contribute to the novel's treatment of ontological instability and the Hemingway Code?

4. How does comparison with The Old Man and the Sea clarify the changing relationship among heroic endurance, personal agency, and meaningful identity?
5. How does the novel's posthumous editorial history qualify interpretations of its fragmented structure as a fully deliberate artistic design?

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between the novel's three-part structure and the changing identities of Thomas Hudson.
2. To analyze the representation of postwar American identity through autonomy, class, masculinity, grief, and institutional dependence.
3. To interpret narrative fragmentation, spatial displacement, and symbolic repetition through selected concepts from literary exhaustion, postmodern theory, deconstruction, and the theory of simulacra.
4. To compare the novel's treatment of heroic endurance and identity with that of The Old Man and the Sea.
5. To situate interpretations of the novel's form within scholarship on Hemingway's late and posthumous fiction and to consider its value for intercultural literary understanding.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The theoretical significance of this study lies in bringing literary criticism into dialogue with postwar social history. By placing Hoberek's account of agency panic alongside theories of literary exhaustion and ontological instability, the article extends a framework developed primarily in relation to other postwar American writers to a late Hemingway novel. This extension does not claim that Hudson represents all Americans; rather, it treats his experience as a literary case through which tensions surrounding autonomy, class identity, and masculine selfhood can be explored. It also approaches the Hemingway Code not as a fixed ethical doctrine but as a cultural and literary construction that the novel both invokes and questions (Hoberek 8–10; Scholes and Comley 3–4).

The literary-historical significance derives from reconsidering Islands in the Stream in relation to Hemingway's late career and the novel's posthumous publication. Recent scholarship challenges reductive accounts of late Hemingway as merely diminished, while research on posthumous works emphasizes the need to distinguish compositional intention from the editorial form in which a text reaches readers. This study consequently seeks a balanced account of formal experimentation and editorial uncertainty (Wyatt; Thurston).

The intercultural significance of the study is that it may help readers in Eastern societies approach aspects of American culture through a complex literary representation rather than through simplified national stereotypes. The novel raises questions about individualism, property, family, work, gender expectations, social privilege, and military duty. Reading these themes critically can promote cultural literacy by showing how ideals are embodied, contested, and sometimes undermined within an American literary text. The novel is not a complete portrait of the United States; its value lies in offering a situated and debatable representation that can be compared with other cultural experiences (Del Gizzo 496–99; Hoberek 8–10).

Methodologically, the study combines close reading with historical contextualization and comparative interpretation. Philosophical concepts are used as interpretive tools whose relevance must be demonstrated through narrative detail, characterization, imagery, and textual organization. The comparison with The Old Man and the Sea clarifies the specific nature of the crisis represented in Islands in the Stream: not simply the loss of a valued object, but the weakening of the roles and structures through which a protagonist understands himself and his world (McHale 9–10).

1.4. Scope and Limitations

The primary corpus is Hemingway's Islands in the Stream, with attention to "Bimini, " "Cuba, " and "At Sea." The Old Man and the Sea is used as a comparative text to examine masculine endurance, personal agency, and loss. The historical discussion focuses on postwar American cultural anxieties involving autonomy, class, and institutional dependence. The article does not claim to provide a comprehensive account of American national identity or to treat Hudson as representative of all postwar Americans (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; Hoberek 8–10).

The study is interpretive and is limited by the editorial history of a novel published after its author's death. Its conclusions concern the meanings and effects produced by the published text, while distinguishing those effects from claims about Hemingway's final intentions. It does not assume that every narrative gap was deliberately retained by the author. The application of philosophical concepts is selective because theories developed in different intellectual contexts cannot be transferred mechanically to Hemingway's fiction (Thurston; McHale 9–10).

1.5. Operational Definitions

- **The Hemingway Code**: **"**the cluster of ethical and behavioral ideals commonly associated with Hemingway's fictional protagonists, including discipline, courage, physical competence, emotional restraint, personal responsibility, and endurance. Here, the Code is treated as a changing literary and cultural construction rather than a fixed doctrine."
- **Postwar American identity**: "the historically situated ideals through which American individuality, social status, masculine authority, and economic autonomy were represented and negotiated after World War II."
- **Agency panic**: "anxiety associated with the perceived loss or restriction of individual autonomy under postwar organizational and socioeconomic change."
- **Narrative fragmentation**: "the organization of a narrative through discontinuities, temporal gaps, shifts in setting, and partially independent narrative units."
- **Literary exhaustion**: "a self-conscious literary condition in which inherited forms and conventions become subjects of reflection, testing, and transformation."
- **Ontological instability**: "uncertainty concerning the nature of the world a character inhabits and the identities or roles through which that character exists within it."
- **Simulacrum**: "a sign or representation that no longer functions simply as a transparent copy of an original reality but participates in producing or replacing the reality it appears to represent."
- **Proto-postmodernism**: "a qualified analytical term for selected features in a late-modernist text that anticipate concerns later associated with postmodern fiction, without classifying the author straightforwardly as a postmodernist."

2. Review of Recent Scholarship

- **Hideo Yanagisawa (2026),** "Hemingway's Checkbook: The Writer's Household Finance Reflected in Islands in the Stream." Yanagisawa studies Hemingway's household financial records from 1946 to 1949 and considers their relationship to the writer's financial circumstances and the autobiographical dimensions of Islands in the Stream. The article brings material and economic evidence into a discussion often dominated by literary myth and masculine identity, offering context for examining artistic independence and economic reality.
- **Michael Thurston (2025),** "Last and Posthumous Works." Thurston examines Hemingway's late and posthumously published works, including Islands in the Stream, and discusses the editorial circumstances surrounding manuscripts

that did not receive the author's final preparation. The chapter is especially important because it complicates claims that the published novel's fragmentation should be treated entirely as Hemingway's finalized aesthetic design.

- **Rajiv N. Aherkar (2025),** "Fragile Masculinity and Unspoken Trauma in the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway and Katherine Mansfield." Aherkar compares selected stories by Hemingway and Mansfield, emphasizing structural silence, emotional suppression, and fragile masculine identity. This approach encourages close attention to Hudson's outward composure and the grief that remains only partially articulated.
- **Muhammad Hamid and Irfan Ali Shah (2025),** "Hegemonic Masculinity, Emotional Suppression, and the Crisis of Male Identity in Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises: A Connellian Reading." Hamid and Shah examine masculine identity, emotional suppression, and war-related experience through a Connellian framework. Although their primary text differs, their focus on masculine ideals and emotional vulnerability provides a comparative context for Hudson's changing identities.
- **Anita Wohlmann (2025),** "A Real Old Man: Aging Masculinity and Late-Life Creativity in Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea." Wohlmann examines aging masculinity, performativity, creativity, and space in The Old Man and the Sea. Her analysis helps frame masculine identity as something enacted and negotiated rather than simply possessed, a perspective useful for comparing Santiago's endurance with Hudson's changing roles.
- **Laura Godfrey (2024),** "'He Did Not Need to Get His Map Out': Spatial Insularity in Hemingway's Early Nick Adams Stories." Godfrey examines spatial insularity in Hemingway's early Nick Adams stories, drawing attention to geographical knowledge, narrative movement, and the boundaries of individual experience. Her spatial approach offers a useful context for examining the contrast between Bimini's relative boundedness and the more dispersed environments of Cuba and the sea.
- **Eileen Martin and Greer Rising (2024),** "Hemingway's Driver in Wartime France: A Matter of Loyalties." Martin and Rising investigate a wartime episode in Hemingway's life through the question of loyalty. Although not a study of Islands in the Stream, it offers historical context for considering the relationship between wartime obligation, personal loyalty, and the military responsibilities represented in "At Sea".
- **Inger-Anne Søfting (2024),** "'Everything Kills Everything Else in Some Way': An Ecocritical Reading of Human–Non-Human Relationships in The Old Man and the Sea." Søfting examines the relationship between Santiago and the nonhuman world, emphasizing the tension between admiration for living creatures and the violence involved in human survival. Although its focus is ecological, the article offers a useful comparative context for the present study's discussion of endurance, mastery, and vulnerability.
- **Diego Carretero-Román (2024),** "The Double Iceberg in Ernest Hemingway's Men without Women: An Implied Crisis of Masculinity." Carretero-Román reads Men without Women as a collection in which narrative silence and formal restraint expose tensions in masculine identity. The study provides a comparative framework for examining the emotional pressures beneath Hudson's outward discipline, while reminding critics to ground interpretations of silence in textual evidence.
- **Rédouane Abouddahab (2023),** "Hemingway's Posthumous Fiction and Nabokov's Lolita: A Cross-Textual Reading." Abouddahab explores intertextual relations between Hemingway's posthumous fiction and Nabokov's Lolita, focusing on structural and ethical differences and the representation of desire. Its contribution is methodological: comparative criticism should identify specific textual correspondences rather than rely on broad thematic resemblance.
- **David Wyatt (2023),** "'Have Sure Tried': Hemingway's Unfaltering Career." Wyatt challenges the familiar view that Hemingway's later career was simply a period of artistic decline. By reconsidering projects from the writer's final fifteen

years, the article emphasizes the continuity of his creative engagement and his sustained concern with personal conduct, family relations, remorse, and self-understanding. It provides a corrective to decline-based readings of late Hemingway and supports a more historically informed assessment of Islands in the Stream (Wyatt).

- **Munir Ahmed Al-Aghberi (2022),** "Psychological Defense Mechanisms in Hemingway's Men Without Women." Al-Aghberi applies psychological concepts to selected stories from Men Without Women, examining anxiety and defensive behavior. The article provides context for considering Hudson's grief and his reliance on routine, conversation, alcohol, and work, although the present study does not reduce these practices to symptoms alone.

2.1. Synthesis and Research Gap

Recent scholarship has expanded Hemingway studies through reassessments of late style and posthumous publication, material and financial history, masculinity, trauma, ecological relations, spatial representation, and intertextuality. These studies show that Hemingway's fiction remains open to new critical approaches, but they also underline the need to specify the contribution of each interpretation rather than treating the application of a new theory as sufficient evidence of originality. The present article brings these strands into dialogue by examining the relationship among the novel's three-part organization, Hudson's changing roles, and postwar anxieties about autonomy (Wyatt; Yanagisawa).

The research gap is therefore defined narrowly. The article does not claim that previous critics have ignored fragmentation, masculinity, or postwar identity in Hemingway. Instead, it seeks to integrate these concerns in a reading of Islands in the Stream that treats the novel's posthumous editorial history as a methodological constraint and its representation of American culture as a situated literary construction. It also makes explicit the value of the novel for intercultural reading, particularly for readers seeking to understand the tensions within influential American ideals rather than accept a generalized national portrait (Hoberek 8–10).

3. Theoretical Framework: Exhaustion, Ontology, and the Simulacrum

The framework combines three related but distinct perspectives: the literature of exhaustion, the shift from epistemological to ontological questions in fiction, and deconstructive and semiotic accounts of representation and identity. These perspectives are situated within the historical framework of postwar agency panic. Literary exhaustion clarifies the novel's engagement with inherited conventions; McHale's distinction helps explain the changing status of Hudson's world; and Derrida and Baudrillard provide focused tools for interpreting substitution, representation, and performed identity. The concepts are not interchangeable explanations, and each is applied only where supported by textual evidence (Stark 1, 9–18; McHale 9–10; Hoberek 8–10).

3.1. Literary Exhaustion: Barth, Stark, and the Crisis of Narrative

John Barth's concept of the "literature of exhaustion" describes a literary condition in which writers confront the apparent exhaustion of established forms and make that condition a subject of artistic reflection. John O. Stark develops this concept through writers who respond to the difficulty of producing original literature after modernism. For Islands in the Stream, the concept is useful not because it automatically classifies the novel as postmodern, but because it allows examination of how the narrative tests conventions associated with the Hemingway Code and the heroic individual (Barth; Stark 1, 9–18).

In the novel, exhaustion extends beyond literary form to the protagonist's capacity to sustain a coherent identity. Hudson's artistic practice, paternal role, and military service provide different frameworks through which he attempts to

maintain purpose. Yet these roles are repeatedly placed under pressure, suggesting that discipline and competence cannot by themselves restore the world that has been lost. Adair's discussion of loss in Hemingway's fiction provides a useful context for reading Hudson's experience as an intensified form of emotional deprivation (Adair 295; Stark 9–18).

The term "Chinese box" may help describe the relationship among the novel's sections, but it should not imply that they are necessarily independent narratives enclosed within a fully controlled authorial design. Their relationship is more cautiously described as a sequence of partially discontinuous narrative worlds linked through Hudson but separated by changes in time, setting, and social function. Fleming's account supports the view that Hemingway considered discontinuity during composition, while the posthumous publication history limits certainty about the final status of the surviving structure (Stark 12–13; Fleming 132; Thurston).

Lyotard's account of postmodernity as "incredulity toward metanarratives" offers a perspective on the novel's treatment of heroic destiny and personal redemption. The Hemingway Code may be understood as a powerful narrative of discipline, courage, and endurance through which individual conduct acquires meaning. In the later novel, however, the three sections do not produce an uncomplicated progression toward redemption. They present different forms of experience—fatherhood and artistic labor, bereavement and social ritual, and military function—that resist synthesis into a single account of recovery. Lyotard's concept is used here as an interpretive analogy, not as evidence that the novel simply illustrates a later philosophical theory (Lyotard xxiv; Hutcheon 3–4).

3.2. The Ontological Shift: McHale and the Instability of Identity

Brian McHale distinguishes the epistemological dominant often associated with modernist fiction from the ontological dominant commonly associated with postmodern fiction. The former foregrounds questions of knowledge and interpretation; the latter emphasizes questions about the nature of worlds and the identities that can exist within them. This distinction helps examine the movement from Bimini to Cuba and then to the sea, without treating the sections as a rigid progression from modernism to postmodernism (McHale 9–10).

In "Bimini, " Hudson's identity appears supported by a relatively stable relationship among home, artistic labor, fatherhood, and physical surroundings. Following the deaths of his sons, the conditions supporting this identity are profoundly altered. In "Cuba, " memory and social routine become increasingly important, while "At Sea" places Hudson within a military structure that defines him through function and command. The transition is thus from one set of social and personal roles to another, each offering a different and increasingly limited basis for self-understanding (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; McHale 9–10).

Spatial representation is central to this process. Elin Käck's discussion of the dispersal of place in Hemingway's fiction demonstrates how geographical locations may acquire meaning through their relationships with other places. This perspective helps clarify the contrast between Bimini, which initially offers Hudson a bounded home, and later environments in which belonging becomes less secure. Space is not merely a backdrop to psychological change; it participates in the construction and destabilization of identity (Käck 99–100).

3.3. Deconstruction: The Supplement and the Problem of Substitution

Derrida's concept of the supplement provides a way to examine how an addition may compensate for an absence while revealing that the supposedly complete original was never entirely self-sufficient. The supplement does not simply restore what has been lost; it occupies a place that exposes the instability of presence and absence. This concept is relevant to Hudson's attempts to maintain continuity through art, memory, and repeated social practices. These activities preserve

fragments of his former identity but also reveal how deeply that identity depends on representations after its original conditions have been disrupted (Derrida 145).

In Bimini, Hudson's artistic work can be read as an attempt to preserve experience through representation. His painting of a wahoo for Andy connects artistic creation with paternal affection and the desire to retain a meaningful moment, yet the painting cannot replace the living relationship from which it emerges. The telegram announcing the boys' deaths transforms the meaning of preceding scenes and exposes the vulnerability of the world Hudson had assumed he could preserve. The supplement is therefore an interpretive tool for understanding representation and loss, not a label for every object in the narrative (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; Derrida 145).

3.4. Simulacra: Baudrillard and the Performance of Identity

Baudrillard's account of simulacra examines the changing relationship between signs, representations, and the realities they appear to represent. The framework is useful for interpreting Hudson's reliance on memory, ritual, and social performance after the loss of his sons. However, the analysis does not assign every scene mechanically to one of three orders. Instead, it asks whether particular representations preserve a connection with lived experience, conceal an absence, or become increasingly self-referential practices through which a role is maintained (Baudrillard 2, 6).

In Cuba, Hudson's visits to the Floridita and his interactions with other patrons may be interpreted as forms of social performance. Drinking, conversation, and routine provide temporary structures through which he continues to inhabit recognizable roles, even when those roles no longer offer emotional stability. His reflections on poverty and suffering reveal a gap between social observation and meaningful action. These scenes do not prove that all his actions are empty simulations; rather, they reveal the tension between outwardly recognizable conduct and an inward experience that conduct cannot fully express (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; Baudrillard 6).

The designation the Captain in At Sea offers another opportunity to examine identity and function. Hudson's military role gives him responsibilities and a framework for action, but it also narrows the range of identities through which he is represented. The role may substitute for identities as father and artist that have been disrupted. Nevertheless, military service should not be assumed to be devoid of ethical meaning. The critical issue is whether the role restores personal agency or provides a temporary structure through which Hudson avoids confronting the complexity of his loss (Baudrillard 2; Butts 454).

3.5. Agency Panic and the Postwar Crisis of the Autonomous Subject

Hoberek's account of postwar agency panic connects the novel's formal and philosophical concerns to the changing status of the American middle class. His analysis identifies anxiety surrounding the decline of independent property ownership and the growing dependence of individuals on large organizations. Hudson's life on Bimini appears to offer an ideal of independence grounded in artistic production, property, and personal choice. His later displacement raises questions about the durability of that ideal and the forms of institutional dependence that may replace it (Hoberek 8–10).

The extension of Hoberek's concept to Hemingway remains interpretive rather than literal. Hudson is not simply a white-collar worker, and his military role cannot be equated without qualification with corporate employment. The comparison concerns constrained agency: an individual who understands himself as autonomous increasingly encounters systems that define the conditions and limits of action. The military environment in "At Sea" is therefore a revealing setting for examining the tension between personal initiative and institutional function (Hoberek 8–10).

3.6. Integrating the Theoretical Perspectives

Literary exhaustion directs attention to the novel's engagement with the conventions of the Hemingway Code; McHale's distinction clarifies the changing relationship between Hudson and the worlds he inhabits; Derrida's supplement illuminates attempts to fill or represent absence; Baudrillard's simulacra help interpret the performance of identity; and Hoberek's agency panic situates these processes within postwar American social history. These concepts do not constitute a single philosophical system. Each is applied only where it explains a demonstrable textual feature, and each interpretation remains open to alternative readings grounded in the novel's language and narrative organization (Stark 9–18; Derrida 145; Hoberek 8–10).

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive design based on close textual analysis and historically informed literary criticism. It does not employ a survey population, statistical sample, questionnaire, or quantitative measurement because its object of inquiry is a literary text rather than a group of human participants. The primary corpus is Islands in the Stream; The Old Man and the Sea serves as a comparative text for examining changes in the representation of masculine endurance, personal agency, and loss. The approach combines narratological attention to structure and focalization with thematic analysis and selective use of philosophical concepts (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; McHale 9–10).

4.2. Corpus and Units of Analysis

The primary corpus is the Scribner edition of Islands in the Stream cited in the original manuscript. The units of analysis are selected passages, scenes, narrative transitions, recurring images, and character interactions that illuminate the research questions. These include Hudson's artistic and paternal identity in "Bimini," his memories and social routines in "Cuba," and his military responsibilities and designation as "the Captain" in "At Sea." Passages are selected purposively because of their relevance, not to produce a statistically representative sample. All page references and quotations must be checked against the exact edition used in the final submission (Hemingway, Islands in the Stream; Fleming 132).

4.3. Analytical Procedures

The analysis proceeds through four stages. First, it examines narrative organization, including transitions among the three sections, temporal discontinuities, changes in setting, and shifts in Hudson's roles. Second, it conducts close readings of selected passages, focusing on diction, imagery, dialogue, narrative perspective, repetition, and the relationship between explicit statements and implied meanings. Third, it interprets these features through the selected theoretical concepts, applying each concept only where textual evidence supports it. Fourth, it situates the interpretations in relation to postwar American social history and relevant Hemingway scholarship (Scholes and Comley 3–4; Hoberek 8–10).

4.4. Comparative Procedure

The comparison with The Old Man and the Sea is thematic and interpretive rather than an attempt to establish a direct causal relationship between the works. It focuses on loss, masculine endurance, the relationship between the protagonist and the natural world, and the possibility of retaining a coherent identity after defeat. Santiago's struggle provides a point of comparison for Hudson's experience, but the analysis recognizes the different narrative structures and

circumstances of the two works. Recent ecocritical and age-critical studies of The Old Man and the Sea are used as contextual scholarship, not as substitutes for direct textual interpretation (Søfting; Wohlmann).

4.5. Interpretive Credibility and Limitations

The credibility of the analysis is supported through close reference to the primary text, consistency between the research questions and selected passages, engagement with scholarly interpretations, and consideration of alternative readings. The study does not treat Hudson's military service as necessarily devoid of ethical significance, nor does it assume that every instance of routine or memory constitutes a simulacrum. It distinguishes between the formal effects of the published novel and claims about authorial intention. This distinction is essential because the posthumous editorial history limits certainty about the extent to which the published structure represents a fully completed authorial design (Thurston; Butts 453–54).

5. Textual Analysis: Deconstruction, Simulacra, and the Crisis of Identity

5.1 Analysis: Deconstruction, Simulacra, and the Ontological Unraveling

The tripartite structure of Islands in the Stream is its central formal principle, a narrative enactment of the "Chinese box" structure John O. Stark identifies in the Literature of Exhaustion (Stark 12). Each section—Bimini, Cuba, and At Sea—functions as a self-contained ontological zone that is built, exhausted, and abandoned. This disjuncture forces a shift from the modernist, epistemological question of The Old Man and the Sea (How can Santiago know and triumph in this world?) to the postmodern, ontological questions that define Hudson's existence: Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it? (McHale 10). The novel thus deconstructs the Hemingway Code into hollow performances and a pure simulacrum. This analysis traces that devolution, demonstrating how formal fragmentation is the primary vehicle for its thematic concerns, a process that enacts a spatial unraveling, moving from a coherent place to a dispersed space, as defined by Elin Käck's concept of the "dispersal of place" (Käck 99), mirroring the psychological disintegration.

5.2 Bimini: Derridean Traces, the Supplement, and the Epistemological Crisis

The Bimini section initially presents a world that seems to be the ultimate fulfillment of the Hemingway ideal: a successful artist, financially independent and physically robust, living authentically with his sons in a pristine, masculine natural environment. It is a potent fantasy of patriarchal and artistic autonomy, a world seemingly built according to the Code. Critically, this world is established as a specific, bounded place in the traditional sense discussed by Käck. Unlike the relational "dispersal of place" she identifies in The Sun Also Rises, where Paris exists in a network of other cities, Bimini is initially rendered as a self-contained idyll, a "distinctive (and bounded) location" (Hubbard qtd. in Käck 100). This coherence of place mirrors the coherence of Hudson's identity as father and artist. The dominant questions here, while tinged with anxiety, are firmly epistemological in the McHaleian sense: How can I be a good father? How can I capture truth in my painting? How can I preserve this moment? His art is a tool for ordering and understanding reality.

However, Hemingway's prose meticulously undermines this apparent wholeness, revealing it as a fragile construct, a performance of integrity already haunted by absence and defined by what Derrida would call the logic of the supplement. The logic of the supplement that structures Hudson's world aligns with a key interpretation of the Iceberg theory. Critic Romeo Giger, as summarized by Bernard Oldsey, argued that Hemingway's technique was fundamentally tied to emotion, suggesting that "Hemingway relies preponderantly on the human emotions; they are the common code enabling the writer to make himself understood... Only through an indirect, implicit appeal to the emotions shared by all

mankind could one hope to communicate the incommunicable" (Oldsey 273). Giger's analysis posits that the hidden seven-eighths of the iceberg is not just factual omission but an emotional and existential void that the reader must co-create. In Islands in the Stream, this void is no longer merely implied but becomes the dominant reality.

Hudson himself is acutely aware of the artificiality of his paradise, describing it as a "carapace of work he had built for his protection, " intuitively understanding that without this disciplined, daily construction of reality, he "may lose it" (Hemingway 190). His entire existence on the island is a bulwark against a void he knows surrounds him. His art, typically considered the ultimate modernist tool for imposing order, is itself revealed as an act of deferral, a classic Derridean supplement. The act of painting is not presented as a pure act of creation but as a substitute, a replacement for something else. When Hudson paints a wahoo for his son Andy: "he painted a canvas of a wahoo... for Andy, who had caught the biggest one" (Hemingway 193). On the surface, this is a father commemorating his son's achievement. But under a Derridean lens, this act exemplifies the concept of the supplement, which "adds only to replace... it intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void" (Derrida 145). The painting is added in-the-place-of the lived experience itself; it is an attempt to fix a fleeting moment of happiness, to fill the void inherent in the passing of time and the impending separation from his children. It does not capture presence but functions as a trace of a presence that is already fading, destined to be lost. The painting is a signifier whose meaning—the preservation of a perfect summer with his sons—is perpetually deferred, becoming a monument to anticipation and loss rather than to the moment itself.

The boys themselves are the central, living traces in this world. Their vibrant, witty discussions are poignant precisely because the reader, and eventually Hudson on a subconscious level, knows their future is absent. Their dialogue is saturated with unconscious foreshadowing that layers the idyll with dramatic irony, transforming their vitality into a sign of its own eventual negation. The idyll is thus consciously performed, a fact underscored by the boys' theatrical, almost scripted farewell: "Goodbye, papa. It certainly was a swell summer... Don't worry about anything. We'll be careful" (Hemingway 193). Their promises are not statements of fact but signifiers whose meaning (safety, a future reunion) is perpetually deferred; they are performative utterances that attempt, and ultimately fail, to fill the void of the impending separation and the anxiety it generates.

The arrival of the telegram is the catastrophic event that collapses this entire epistemological project, revealing the void all the supplements were designed to mask. It is crucial to note that the telegram is not a message that conveys knowledge; it is a pure signifier that annihilates the very framework for knowing. It does not answer questions but destroys the world in which those questions had meaning. Hudson's reaction is tellingly not one of emotional breakdown in any conventional sense—there are no tears, no roars of anguish—but of ontological nullification. He reads the cable and enters a state of pure, blank being, confronting the nothingness that has always undergirded his constructed world: "for the first time he looked straight down the long and perfect perspective of the blankness ahead" (Hemingway 196). His subsequent, seemingly disjointed conversation with his cat Boise is one of the most powerful passages in the novel, and a masterful example of the shift into Lyotardian petits récits: "They'll scratch the hell out of you, Boise, " the man said and stroked the cat's head with the stubble of his chin. "Womens don't like them. It's a shame you don't drink, Boy. You do damned near everything else." (Hemingway 203)

This is the discourse of a consciousness that can no longer process the grand narrative of tragedy, loss, and grief. Instead, it retreats into the small, manageable, and utterly exhausted narrative of caring for a cat. This conversation is a final, desperate supplement for the void left by his children, an attempt to anchor himself in a simple, mundane reality when the larger reality of his life has vaporized. The world of Bimini is not just lost; it is exposed as having always been a construct of supplements destined for exhaustion. Its origin was never a pure, stable presence but was always already constituted by the

potential for this loss, its meaning built on a foundation of absence. The epistemological quest to know and maintain that world is revealed as a futile attempt to fill a void that defines it. The stable place has been annihilated, forcing Hudson into the relational, uncertain space of what comes next.

The Cuba section is a masterful and extended portrayal of a consciousness consciously navigating the hyperreal, a narrative enactment of Hemingway's matured "theory of omission." This technique, as Joseph M. Flora notes, was honed when Hemingway excised the ending of "Big Two-Hearted River, " realizing that a character's deepest motivations and traumas are most powerfully communicated through what is left unsaid, submerged like the bulk of an iceberg (Flora 62-63). In "Cuba, " Thomas Hudson's entire existence becomes an exercise in this principle. His life in Havana is a carefully curated performance of being, where the signs of living systematically replace living itself. This performance extends to the very space he inhabits. Havana, for Hudson, is no longer a specific place with its own dignity, but what Käck would call a node in a relational network of loss. It exists only in relation to the lost world of Bimini. The Floridita bar becomes a simulacrum of a café, a generic site of exile rather than a particular location. This exemplifies Käck's argument that in Hemingway's world, places can become "commodities available for consumption" (Käck 105), and for Hudson, Cuba is a space consumed by the performance of grief, its specific identity dispersed and hollowed out.

5.3 Cuba: Baudrillard's Orders of Simulacra and the Performance of the Hyperreal Exile

The Cuba section is a masterful and extended portrayal of a consciousness consciously navigating the hyperreal, a case study in the slow, deliberate adoption of Jean Baudrillard's orders of simulacra. Having had the framework of his world annihilated, Hudson does not simply grieve; he meticulously constructs a new mode of existence based on layers of simulation, each more hollow than the last. His life in Havana is a carefully curated performance of being, where the signs of living systematically replace living itself. This is the 'agency panic' of the white-collar worker rendered as existential performance: having lost the authentic, property-based autonomy of Bimini, Hudson can only simulate autonomy through the hollow, repetitive rituals of the Floridita. He is no longer an independent artist but a salaried consumer of his own despair, his agency reduced to choosing which scripted conversation to have next.

First Order Simulacra (The Faithful Copy): In the immediate aftermath of the loss, Hudson's mind initially clings to what Baudrillard would classify as first-order simulacra. These are the untouched, pristine memories of his dead sons. They are meticulous, hauntingly vivid mental copies of a reality that no longer exists. He engages in a conscious, almost ritualistic practice of preservation and then abandonment: "Give them up now, he told himself. Just remember how they were and write them off. You have to do it sooner or later. Do it now" (Hemingway 198). This is a crucial moment. He explicitly gives up the epistemological project (Why did this happen? How do I understand this?). Instead, he chooses to preserve their memory as a museum to his loss, a perfect, faithful copy that, by its very fidelity, highlights the absolute depth of the absence it represents. The memory is real, but it is a reality that is gone, making the simulacrum a torture device that reinforces the void.

Second Order Simulacra (The Blurred Copy): Hudson's daily rituals in Havana, centered almost entirely on the Floridita bar, exist firmly in Baudrillard's second order. Here, the line between authentic feeling and performed role is systematically eroded and eventually erased. His interactions are governed by a script, a set of expected behaviors that mask a profound emptiness. His entire drinking session with the prostitute Honest Lil and the unnamed politician is a brilliant set piece of second-order simulation. It is a performance of camaraderie, world-weariness, and political satire that everyone involved recognizes as a game. The conversation has the rhythm of authenticity but the hollow core of a rehearsed play. He confesses the true function of his drinking to himself, revealing its simulated nature: "I drink against poverty, dirt, four-

hundred-year-old dust, the nose-snot of children... It is a hell of a thing to do... I ought to look at it closely and do something about it. Instead you have your drink the way they carried smelling salts in the old days" (Hemingway 246). The alcohol is not used for pleasure or even for forgetfulness; it is a simulacrum of feeling, a second-order sign that "masks and denatures" a reality that is already absent (Baudrillard 6). It is a tool for blurring the lines, for allowing him to play the role of the grieving but stoic artist without ever having to touch the actual raw grief. His conversations with the bartender and other patrons are similarly scripted, a dance of signifiers that have been divorced from their signifieds. He is performing "Thomas Hudson, " and the performance is all that remains.

Third Order Simulacra (The Pure Simulacrum / Hyperreality): The "Cuba" section depicts the final stage of Thomas Hudson's metaphysical unraveling, as he crosses toward a more self-referential pattern of representation of simulacra. His identity solidifies into a condition in which performed routines increasingly shape his experience, where the performed simulation of a life—the rituals of painting, drinking, and socializing—no longer masks a lost reality but actively constitutes the only reality he acknowledges. This hollowed-out existence is the absolute antithesis of the Hemingway Code; the deep feeling that was once channeled into disciplined action has been eradicated, leaving only a sterile, mechanical discipline. Hudson no longer mourns his past but has fully assimilated into a closed circuit of empty signs. This condition perfectly illustrates Baudrillard's thesis that "It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard 2). The profound truth of his sons' deaths is not forgotten but has been systematically replaced by the hyperreal, self-referential code of his daily routine, a simulation that requires no external validation and admits no internal depth.

This descent into the hyperreal is, as scholar Debra A. Moddelmog's work on Hemingway's latent anxieties might suggest, a direct consequence of the failure of the heterosexual, paternal role that defined him in Bimini. The character becomes "a contradictory body in which the old and the new coexist" (Moddelmog 85). The old is the exhausted shell of the Code—the stoic, productive artist going through the motions. The new is the void of a self that can no longer perform that role authentically. His existence in Havana is therefore a performance of exhaustion itself, a Baudrillardian simulation of a life where the signs of living (drinking, painting, conversing) have completely replaced living itself. He has become a walking, talking supplement, filling the void of his identity with the signs of having an identity. The spatial dispersal is complete; he is nowhere, defined only by a network of empty rituals.

Hudson's existence in Havana is a performance of exhaustion, a Baudrillardian simulation where the signs of living replace living itself. This mirrors what Suzanne Del Gizzo identifies in Hemingway's own life as a complex repudiation of identity that created "a space of critique from which he reconsidered not only his public image, but also arguably Western notions of essential, unified selfhood."[1] In Cuba, Hudson enacts a similar, subdued repudiation; the disciplined artist of Bimini is gone, replaced by a man performing the hollowed-out rituals of Papa as a desperate supplement for a voided self. Spatially dispersed and defined by empty signs, he prefigures his final, functional erasure as the Captain.

5.4 At Sea: The Exhausted Function and the Logic of the Final Supplement

In At Sea, the Baudrillardian simulation finds its logical, terrifying conclusion, and its mechanism is one of pure Derridean supplementation. Hudson's identity, already hollowed out in Cuba, is completely emptied and then re-engineered by the pure, functional code of warfare. This final transformation can be read as the ultimate failure of the fiction as self-analysis" that Burwell identifies as the mode of Hemingway's late work (Comley 455). If the artist's reflexive project is to analyze and reconstitute the self, Hudson's retreat into the functional shell of "the Captain" represents an analytical dead end—a surrender to a simulacrum of purpose when the creative process of self-creation has been exhausted. The

narrative's abrupt end is not just a Lyotardian rejection of heroic metanarratives but also the logical terminus of a self-analysis that finds no viable self to sustain. The grieving artist of Cuba is gone; he is now exclusively the Captain, a title that signifies not authority or individuality, but pure function. He becomes a replaceable node in a military apparatus, his individuality increasingly mediated by his role. This is the final, logical endpoint of 'agency panic': a total surrender of the burdensome, failing autonomous self to the clean, functional logic of an organization. If he can no longer be an independent 'property-owner' of his own identity, he will become a salaried employee of the state, exchanging all remnants of personal agency for the simple, unambiguous directives of a military code.

The mission itself is the ultimate pure simulacrum: a complex, deadly game of signs that has completely replaced any tangible, personal cause. The narrative gives comparatively little explicit ideological explanation for the mission. They are hunting "Germans"—an enemy represented through the operational categories of military discourse within a military code. The war has no context; it is a self-referential game. Hudson operates purely within a logic of the supplement. His role as "the Captain" is a possible example of what Derrida defines: it "adds only to replace... it intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void" (Derrida 145). This new, functional identity is added in-the-place-of a self that has been voided by loss; it is a purposeful, technical shell that attempts to fill an existential void with action whose personal meaning remains uncertain. If he can no longer be a father or artist, he can still be an efficient function. It is the last and most hollow simulacrum of the Hemingway Code: grace under pressure stripped of all personal meaning, reduced to a sterile, operational directive.

His internal monologue throughout this section reveals this transformation in excruciating detail. His reflections are often rendered through technical and operational details, leaving the mission's ideological and emotional dimensions comparatively underdeveloped. Instead, his consciousness is consumed by a sterile, technical precision. Upon finding the horrifying scene of a burned village and corpses, his response is not horror, rage, or pity, but operational detachment: "'All right, ' said Thomas Hudson. 'I'll buy you a drink.'... He went below and buckled on his revolver" (Hemingway 334). The horror is registered only as a procedural step within the mission's code. His thoughts are exclusively on the mechanics of the hunt, never its morality or human cost: "The man on the flying bridge studied the shore... 'I know this cut. It's about eight times as deep as it looks.' He looked down into the green water and saw the size of the shadow of his ship on the bottom" (Hemingway 331). His mind operates like a navigational computer, processing data, calculating trajectories, and assessing threats. He relates to his mission not as a quest for justice but as a technical problem within the closed system of the military code, the ultimate third-order simulacrum.

This final transformation is the ultimate negation of the complex, desiring, human self. Hudson doesn't just become a soldier; he becomes "the Captain, " a pure signifier within a system of signs. It can be read as the final, desperate refuge for a failed masculine identity, a last-ditch effort to find a coherent sense of self, even if that self is purely functional and ultimately self-destructive. As Moddelmog argues, it is the final flight from the unbearable complexity of desire and grief into the stark, binary, and simple world of a mission. This reading fundamentally challenges interpretations like Gregory S. Sojka's, which, as Leonard Butts recounts, argues that by entering the war, Hudson "regains all important discipline from the 'duty' he performs for his country, " thereby achieving "existential salvation" (Butts 454). On the contrary, this analysis contends that Hudson's assimilation into the military code is not a redemption of discipline but its final, hollow simulation. He does not regain a coherent self through duty; his identity is entirely hollowed out and replaced by the functional code of warfare. The "therapy" Sojka identifies is not a return to the Code but a final, desperate supplement for a voided self, a Baudrillardian simulation of purpose that is the antithesis of meaningful, existential action.

He operates on a logic of pure Derridean supplementation: the role of "Captain" is added to fill the void left by the loss of father and artist, a final, desperate supplement that is action whose personal meaning remains uncertain.

The narrative's conclusion is the antithesis of a heroic, meaningful death. The language is flat, technical, and impersonal. The narrative refuses all consolation, redemption, or closure. It simply stops, mid-action, enacting a profound Lyotardian incredulity toward the grand narrative of heroic sacrifice. This conclusion can be read as the exhaustion of what Earl Rovit identifies as Hemingway's iconic role as America's "Last Frontiersman, " our "Huckleberry Finn grown up, still escaping 'civilization'" (Rovit 617). Thomas Hudson's final mission is a hollow parody of frontier heroism. There is no wilderness to conquer, only an abstract enemy in a hyperreal war; no individual triumph, only a functional role in a military system. The story does not end; it exhausts itself. The simulation simply ceases, revealing a profound absence that the supplemental function of "the Captain" was only temporarily filling. The spatial journey is over; he is adrift in a non-place, a purely functional space with no coordinates.

5. 5 Intertextuality: The Sea and the Stream - From Tragic Trace to Nullifying Simulacrum

Placing Islands in the Stream alongside The Old Man and the Sea reveals a crucial diptych that maps a shift in the representation of agency and identity across Hemingway's late fiction, a movement from the realm of the tragic trace to the nullifying simulacrum.

The Old Man and the Sea operates firmly within the realm of the Derridean trace and a modernist epistemological crisis. Santiago's marlin is a magnificent presence—"Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother"—whose meaning is utterly deferred and erased by the sharks (Hemingway 92). The physical proof of his struggle is systematically dismantled, and the final stage of this deconstruction is the tourists' complete misrecognition of the skeletal remains, mistaking it for a shark. The tragedy is that of différance: meaning is perpetually postponed. Yet, the struggle to create meaning—to know and affirm one's place in a natural order through skill, endurance, and love—is presented as inherently noble and tragic. The world, though harsh and unfair, is real and meaningful; the loss is of a specific, hard-won meaning within that world. As McHale would argue, the dominant question is epistemological: "How can I know and triumph in this world?" Santiago's answer is to endure and to know his place in the natural world, even in defeat.

Islands in the Stream charts a far more radical and terrifying stage: the Baudrillardian simulacrum. The loss is not of a single, prized meaning but of the structures through which he has understood his identity. Hudson doesn't just lose his sons; he loses the very ground of being—the roles of father, artist, lover—from which such a loss could have meaning. He doesn't fight a noble beast in a personal, tragic struggle against a natural order; he hunts empty signs ("Germans") in a hyperreal war governed by an artificial, military code. The struggle is not for meaning but is a replacement for meaning, a simulation of purpose. The movement from the Sea to the Stream is thus a movement from the deconstruction of meaning within a world to the dissolution of the world itself into a state of pure simulation. Santiago's world, though stripped of his prize, remains intact and real. Hudson's worlds (Bimini, Cuba, At Sea) are revealed as contingent constructs that can be successively exited and abandoned. The former foregrounds endurance within a recognizable natural and social order; the latter examines a more unstable relationship between identity, loss, and institutional function. The Old Man and the Sea asks what happens when a hero is robbed of his proof. Islands in the Stream asks what happens when the very concept of the hero, and the reality he inhabits, has been exhausted.

6. Discussion

The analysis suggests that the three sections of Islands in the Stream should be understood as distinct but related configurations of identity. "Bimini" associates Hudson's self-understanding with artistic labor, property, and fatherhood; "Cuba" foregrounds the difficulty of living with loss through memory and social routine; and "At Sea" places him within a military structure that gives him a clear operational role while narrowing the identities through which he is represented. This reading supports the argument that the novel interrogates the stability of autonomous masculinity, but it does not require the conclusion that Hudson's later actions are wholly meaningless or that military duty has no ethical dimension (Hoberek 8–10; Butts 453–54).

The novel's cultural significance for readers beyond the United States emerges from this ambivalence. It presents recognizable ideals associated with American self-representation—individual initiative, self-reliance, property, artistic independence, masculine composure, and duty—while showing the pressures and contradictions that complicate them. Such a reading can contribute to intercultural understanding by encouraging readers in Eastern societies to distinguish between cultural ideals, literary representations, and the diversity of actual American experience. The text should therefore be approached as a situated literary interpretation of American life, not as a definitive national portrait (Del Gizzo 496–99; Hoberek 8–10).

The study also qualifies the relationship between form and intention. The published novel's discontinuities are interpretively significant because they shape the reader's experience of time, place, and identity. Yet their significance does not prove that the surviving structure is identical to Hemingway's final design. The editorial history must remain part of the interpretation, and future research may further clarify the relationship between manuscript evidence, editorial decisions, and the published text (Fleming 132).

7. Conclusion

Islands in the Stream offers a complex representation of the pressures placed on autonomous identity in the postwar world. Through the movement from Bimini to Cuba and then to the sea, the novel examines the changing roles through which Thomas Hudson attempts to sustain a sense of purpose as father, artist, and military captain. Its formal discontinuities intensify this inquiry, although the posthumous publication history prevents a categorical attribution of every structural feature to Hemingway's final authorial intention. The novel can therefore be read as a late-modernist work that anticipates selected concerns later associated with postmodern fiction, particularly the instability of identity and the limits of coherent narrative closure (McHale 9–10; Thurston).

The article's principal contribution is to connect the novel's representation of masculine identity with postwar anxieties about individual agency and the changing social position of the autonomous subject. It also argues that the novel can support intercultural literary understanding: readers in Eastern societies may use it to examine influential American ideals and the contradictions within them, especially individualism, family responsibility, work, property, gender expectations, and military duty. Such understanding must remain critical and comparative, recognizing that one fictional work cannot stand for the whole of American culture. The novel's value lies in opening questions about American cultural self-representation rather than closing them with a single national definition (Hoberek 8–10; Del Gizzo 496–99).

Further research may compare the novel's representation of American identity with other postwar narratives, examine its treatment of Cuban and Caribbean spaces in greater historical detail, and investigate the manuscript and editorial history through archival evidence. Such work would deepen the relationship among literary form, transnational cultural representation, and the historical conditions of Hemingway's late fiction (Thurston; Herlihy-Mera 221–40).

8. Recommendations and Suggestions

8.1. Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Reconsider Hemingway's late fiction beyond biographical readings, with particular attention to the relationship between narrative form, identity, and postwar American cultural change.
2. Examine the three sections of *Islands in the Stream* as interconnected yet distinct representations of identity, focusing on the transitions from artistic and paternal independence to social displacement and military function.
3. Integrate socioeconomic and historical contexts into interpretations of the Hemingway Code, particularly the tensions between individual autonomy, property ownership, and institutional dependence.
4. Adopt a historically cautious approach when interpreting the novel's fragmentation, distinguishing the effects of the published text from assumptions about Hemingway's final authorial intentions.
5. Promote the novel's intercultural study and teaching, especially among readers in Eastern societies, as a literary introduction to selected American ideals and tensions involving individualism, masculinity, family, work, and military duty.
6. Encourage comparative and interdisciplinary criticism that connects Hemingway's literary representations with postwar American history, cultural studies, and changing concepts of masculinity and personal agency.

8.2. Suggestions for Future Research

The study also suggests the following complementary research directions:

1) Conduct a comparative study of the representation of individual autonomy and postwar American identity in *Islands in the Stream* and selected postwar American novels.
2) Investigate the representation of Cuba and the Caribbean in Hemingway's late fiction, with particular emphasis on cultural encounter, spatial identity, and American perceptions of the region.
3) Examine the manuscript, compositional, and editorial history of *Islands in the Stream* through archival evidence to clarify how its posthumous publication shaped the novel's narrative structure and interpretation.

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