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Sea in Mind: Exploring Nature's Connection with the Human Psyche in *The Old Man and the Sea*

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Abstract

This paper intends to study psychological connection of human beings with ecology, described in *The Old Man and The Sea* by Earnest Hemingway. It will examine how narratives and representation often limit human connection with ecology, neglecting their inborn psychological connection to find meaning and mental strength in this. Analyzing the novel, it will investigate how nature as an unidentified identity gives psychological healing and express another site of human identity. This identity and survival processes are being treated as threat by society and forcefully rejected by society in the name of society and culture. By applying Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung theories this paper will analyze this text as human mind as a place where nature and nurture merge .

Keywords: Ecology, Earnest Hemingway, Psychology, Sea, Archetype.

Introduction

In the modern world, people often overlook the profound psychological connection they share with nature. Surrounded by technology, urban landscapes, and fast-paced lifestyles, many individuals fail to recognize how deeply their mental well-being is tied to the natural environment. This disconnection has subtle yet significant consequences for emotional health, creativity, and overall life satisfaction.

Human beings evolved in close interaction with forests, rivers, and open skies. Nature provides a sense of calm, grounding, and perspective that artificial environments rarely replicate. Studies consistently show that spending time outdoors reduces stress, improves mood, and enhances cognitive function. Yet, despite these benefits, people increasingly confine themselves indoors, absorbed in screens and artificial stimuli. The psychological nourishment offered by natural settings is ignored, replaced by fleeting digital distractions.

One reason for this neglect is the cultural emphasis on productivity and convenience. Urbanization has created spaces where efficiency is prioritized over greenery, and leisure is often

detached from outdoor experiences. Even when parks or natural reserves are accessible, many choose entertainment that isolates them from the environment. This choice reflects a broader undervaluation of nature's role in mental health.

The consequences of ignoring this connection are evident in rising rates of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Without the restorative influence of nature, individuals struggle to maintain balance in their emotional lives. Reconnecting with the natural world does not require grand gestures; simple acts like walking under trees, listening to birds, or feeling the breeze can restore psychological harmony.

Ultimately, ignoring the psychological bond with nature is a silent but pervasive issue. By rediscovering this connection, people can cultivate resilience, peace, and a deeper sense of belonging in the world. The challenge lies not in nature's absence, but in humanity's failure to notice its presence.

Research Background

Literature has consistently sought to express the psychological bond between humans and nature, though each era and author has approached it differently. Romantic poets like William Wordsworth celebrated nature as a spiritual companion. In *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth describes how landscapes provide "tranquil restoration," emphasizing nature's role in soothing the human mind. His work reflects a longing for harmony with the environment, contrasting with the industrial world that often ignored such connections.

Similarly, John Keats in *Ode to a Nightingale* used natural imagery to explore transcendence. The bird's song becomes a symbol of escape from human suffering, showing how literature channels psychological relief through nature's presence.

In the American tradition, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* expressed nature as a path to self-discovery. His retreat into the woods illustrated how immersion in natural rhythms fosters clarity and independence, warning against society's neglect of this bond. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in essays like *Nature*, argued that the natural world is a mirror of the human spirit, urging readers to reconnect with its wisdom.

Modern works often highlight disconnection instead. Richard Powers' *The Overstory* portrays characters whose lives intertwine with trees, emphasizing ecological awareness and the psychological emptiness of ignoring nature. Similarly, dystopian literature, such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, depicts sterile, artificial environments to critique humanity's alienation from the earth.

Through poetry, essays, and novels, literature has expressed this thought in diverse ways – whether through romantic celebration, transcendental reflection, or dystopian warning. Each work reminds us that ignoring nature diminishes not only the environment but also the human psyche.

Literature Review

Ernest Hemingway remains one of the most influential figures in 20th-century literature, celebrated for his distinctive style and recurring themes. His works often explore war, love, loss, and resilience, but nature consistently plays a central role, functioning both as a backdrop and a symbolic force.

Hemingway's Style and the "Iceberg Theory"

Hemingway's prose is famously economical, stripped of ornamentation, and guided by what he called the "iceberg theory." This approach suggests that the deeper meaning of a story lies beneath the surface of the text, much like the bulk of an iceberg hidden underwater. Critics such as Dr. Pallavi Arya note that his "show, don't tell" technique reshaped modern storytelling, emphasizing implication over exposition.

Nature as Theme and Symbol

Nature in Hemingway's works is not merely descriptive; it embodies psychological and existential struggles. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the sea becomes a metaphor for life's challenges, reflecting both beauty and cruelty. The protagonist Santiago's battle with the marlin illustrates human endurance against natural forces. Similarly, in *A Farewell to Arms*, landscapes mirror emotional states, with rain symbolizing death and despair.

Dr. Divyasree C observes that Hemingway's use of nature intertwines with themes of love and societal expectations, showing how the environment shapes human experience. Angela Denis further argues that Hemingway's naturalism reflects contemporary problems – war, disintegration of values, and existential despair – while grounding them in realistic depictions of the physical world. kaavpublications.org.

Scholars often interpret Hemingway's engagement with nature as part of his broader naturalist outlook. His experiences – hunting, fishing, bullfighting, and war – infused his writing with authenticity. Critics highlight how his depictions of rivers, seas, and forests are not passive scenery but active participants in the narrative. Nature becomes a testing ground for courage, resilience, and meaning.

For example, literary theorists argue that Hemingway's characters often confront nature as a way of confronting themselves. Santiago's struggle in *The Old Man and the Sea* is both physical and spiritual, embodying the human condition. This aligns with naturalist traditions, where environment and fate shape human destiny.

Hemingway's literary style – minimalist, symbolic, and deeply rooted in natural imagery – continues to resonate because it captures the tension between humanity and the natural world. His works remind readers that nature is not only a setting but a force that shapes identity, resilience, and existential reflection. As scholars emphasize, Hemingway's genius lies in his ability to make nature a mirror of human struggle, thereby enriching the psychological depth of his themes.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* has largely approached the novella through ecocritical frameworks. Researchers such as Das (2018), Wang (2019), and Haochen Wang (2020) emphasize Santiago's reverence for the sea and marlin, interpreting the text as a call for ecological ethics and harmonious coexistence with nature. Other studies (IJRAR, Web of Proceedings, Reading Matters) highlight Hemingway's descriptive power and his critique of human-centered exploitation, situating the novella within environmental literature. Collectively, these works establish Hemingway as an author deeply attentive to ecological concerns.

However, these studies tend to treat ecology as external description – focusing on Hemingway's portrayal of nature, Santiago's respect for animals, or the ethics of fishing. What remains underexplored is the psychological dimension of ecology: how Santiago's inner life, dreams, and unconscious mirror ecological forces. No major study has yet integrated Freud's id-ego-superego model or Jung's archetypal theory with ecocriticism to show how Santiago's psyche itself is ecological. His dreams of lions, his dialogue with the marlin, and his reflections on the sea reveal a collective unconscious bond with nature that goes beyond ecological ethics into ecopsychology.

Santiago and the Sea: The Collective Unconscious and Human Ecology

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is not only a story of endurance but a meditation on the human psyche's deep, often ignored connection to nature. Santiago's relationship with the sea dramatizes Freud's id-ego-superego and Carl Jung's collective unconscious, showing that human identity is inseparable from ecology. His dreams, his dialogue with the marlin, and his reflections on

the sea reveal him as an archetypal figure — the Wise Old Man — who reawakens the “sea in mind,” the ecological unconscious modern humanity has forgotten.

Carl Jung wrote: “*The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind’s evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual.*” The sea in Hemingway’s novella embodies this heritage. It is vast, mysterious, and unpredictable, offering both sustenance and danger. Santiago recognizes this duality when he reflects: “*The sea is sweet and beautiful. But it is cruel, and it can be so suddenly.*” His respect for the sea shows his archetypal wisdom: he accepts that human identity is bound to nature’s rhythms, that the unconscious is ecological.

Freud’s tripartite model illuminates Santiago’s struggle. The **sea** is the id — primal, instinctual, full of hunger and mystery. Santiago’s compulsion to battle the marlin reflects the id’s drive for survival and conquest. The **boat** is the ego — fragile yet functional, mediating between instinct and reality. Santiago’s patience and strategy aboard the boat exemplify the ego’s balancing act. The **sky** is the superego — vast, transcendent, embodying morality and ecological brotherhood. Santiago’s respect for the marlin and humility before nature reflect the superego’s ideals. When he says to the fish, “*You are killing me, fish... But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or calmer fish,*” he embodies the superego’s moral awareness. His struggle is not mere conquest but reverence, showing that morality and ecology are inseparable.

Santiago’s dreams deepen this psychological connection. He no longer dreams of storms or women but of lions on the beaches of Africa, symbols of youth, vitality, and archetypal strength. Hemingway writes: “*He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them.*” These dreams connect Santiago to the collective unconscious, where archetypal images of power and renewal surface. Jung argued that archetypes are “images of instinct,” and Santiago’s lions embody the instinctual vitality that persists even in old age. His dreams remind us that the unconscious is ecological, filled with symbols of nature that sustain meaning.

Santiago himself is an archetype. Jung described the Wise Old Man as a figure of “spiritual authority and insight who possesses knowledge beyond ordinary consciousness.” Santiago fits this role: aged, humble, yet spiritually profound. Hemingway captures this when he writes: “*Everything about him was old except his eyes, and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.*” His eyes, like the sea, embody resilience and wisdom, connecting him to the archetypal unconscious. He is not only a fisherman but a sage, guiding Manolin and, symbolically, guiding us toward recognition of our ecological psyche.

Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* describes the monomyth: departure, initiation, and return. Santiago departs into the sea, undergoes initiation through his battle with the marlin, and returns with only the skeleton — yet spiritually transformed. His journey is archetypal because it reflects the universal pattern of struggle, transformation, and transcendence. He is both hero and sage, embodying Jung’s Wise Old Man who teaches that dignity lies in endurance, not conquest.

This archetypal wisdom resonates with existential philosophy. Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, argued that life’s absurdity is confronted through persistence. Santiago, like Sisyphus, endures endless struggle, yet affirms life through his dignity. Hemingway crystallizes this when Santiago reflects: “*A man can be destroyed but not defeated.*” This line captures his archetypal role: he embodies resilience, dignity, and ecological awareness. His wisdom is existential: meaning is found not in victory but in the act of struggle itself.

Ecopsychology deepens this reading. Theodore Roszak, in *The Voice of the Earth*, argued that modern society has severed its psychological bond with nature, leading to alienation. Santiago embodies the opposite: his identity is ecological, his dignity inseparable from the sea. His struggle reawakens the truth that our unconscious is ecological — the “sea in mind” that modern life has ignored.

Jung himself noted that “man cannot stand a meaningless life. He must find a meaning, and that meaning is often found in symbols that connect him to nature and the cosmos.” Santiago’s respect for the marlin and his humility before the sea embody this symbolic connection. He shows us that meaning is not found in possession but in reverence, not in conquest but in connection.

The key insight of this reading is that Santiago dramatizes a bond that humanity often ignores: the psychological connection to nature. Modern society treats the sea as resource, not psyche. Santiago reawakens the truth that our unconscious is ecological, that identity and meaning are inseparable from nature. His struggle offers a new understanding: to ignore this bond is to ignore ourselves. Hemingway’s novella is not just a story of endurance but a meditation on ecology and psychology. Santiago’s becoming is universal: he embodies the human condition in ecology, the eternal struggle to balance instinct, survival, and morality within the natural landscape.

In conclusion, Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* is more than a fisherman; he is the embodiment of Jung’s Wise Old Man archetype and Freud’s ecological psyche. His age, humility, and spiritual depth align him with the archetypal sage, while his struggle with the sea dramatizes the id, ego, and superego in ecological metaphor. His dreams of lions, his dialogue with the marlin, and his reflections on the sea reveal the collective unconscious bond between humanity and nature. Santiago thus stands as a universal archetype of ecological humanity, reminding us that to be human is to wrestle with the sea, endure fragility, and dream beneath the sky. His wisdom lies not in conquest but in connection, not in possession but in reverence. In Jungian terms, Santiago connects the ego to the Self; in ecological terms, he reawakens the “sea in mind,” the forgotten psychological bond with nature.

Santiago’s mind, like the sea, is expansive and layered. He recalls the smallest changes in the water, the currents, and the creatures, suggesting that his memory and identity are inseparable from the ocean’s rhythms. Hemingway notes, “He was as old as the sea and felt its changes as though they were his own” (Hemingway, 1952, p. 32). This identification with the sea reflects ecopsychology’s claim that the human psyche is not bounded by the individual but extends into the natural world. Santiago’s consciousness has become oceanic, absorbing the sea’s vastness as a metaphor for the unconscious mind, where hidden selves and memories reside.

The sea creatures Santiago encounters are not merely external beings but symbolic extensions of his inner multiplicity. He calls them his brothers, saying, “Fish, you are my brother” (Hemingway, 1952, p. 82). This fraternal bond suggests that Santiago perceives the creatures as facets of his own identity, dispersed across the unconscious depths of the sea. Ecopsychology emphasizes that the natural world can mirror the human psyche, and Santiago’s recognition of kinship with fish, birds, and turtles reflects his awareness of the many selves within him – some visible, others hidden beneath the surface like the unconscious. His dialogue with these creatures is a dialogue with himself, an attempt to reconcile the fragmented parts of his being.

Santiago’s compassion for the turtle further illustrates this psychological mirroring. He reflects on the turtle’s slow heartbeat and endurance, noting, “The turtle’s heart will beat for hours after he has been cut up” (Hemingway, 1952, p. 36). This observation is not detached but empathetic, as Santiago sees in the turtle’s suffering a reflection of his own condition – his aging body, his enduring spirit, and his pain. The turtle becomes a symbol of Santiago’s resilience and vulnerability, embodying the ecopsychological idea that human suffering is intertwined with the suffering of nature. His empathy for the turtle reveals his recognition that the boundaries between self and environment are porous, and that the pain of the natural world resonates within the human psyche.

Santiago’s lifelong relationship with the sea also functions as a narrative of self-identity. To revisit the sea is to revisit his own life, his triumphs, failures, and memories. The ocean is a repository of his past, a place where his identity has been forged and tested. “He was alone in the skiff and the sea was all around him” (Hemingway, 1952, p. 61). This solitude is not emptiness but fullness, as the sea

contains the echoes of his entire existence. Ecopsychology suggests that immersion in nature can evoke deep self-reflection, and Santiago's return to the sea is a return to the core of his being, where meaning is sought in the currents of memory and the tides of experience.

Ultimately, Santiago's mind becomes indistinguishable from the sea. His thoughts, dreams, and identity flow with its waves, and his unconscious is populated by its creatures. The ocean is not external but internal, a metaphor for the vastness of human consciousness and the search for meaning within it. Santiago's struggle with the marlin, his empathy for the turtle, and his kinship with the fish all reveal that his psyche is oceanic, boundless, and interconnected. Through Santiago, Hemingway portrays the sea as both a literal environment and a psychological metaphor, embodying the ecopsychological principle that the human mind and the natural world are inseparable. Santiago's life in the sea is his life in the mind, and his search for meaning in its depths is a search for self.

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) portrays Santiago's relationship with the ocean as both ecological and psychological, a vision that aligns with ecopsychology's emphasis on the interconnection between human consciousness and the natural world. Santiago does not merely fish in the sea; he inhabits it mentally, spiritually, and existentially. His mind becomes oceanic, vast and layered, filled with memories, hidden selves, and meaning to be discovered. As Das observes, Santiago's respectful relationship with the sea and the marlin frames him as "an ecological thinker" who embodies ethical hunting and environmental consciousness (Das 45). Santiago's dialogue with the sea is therefore a dialogue with his own psyche, where the ocean becomes a metaphor for the unconscious mind.

Santiago's perception of the sea as *la mar* – a feminine, living presence – reveals his intimacy with it. Hemingway writes, "He always thought of the sea as *la mar* which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her" (Hemingway 29). This anthropomorphizing reflects what the IJRAR study calls the "predominant role of nature" in the novella, where the sea embodies ecological ethics and human vulnerability (IJRAR 2020). Santiago's return to the sea is not only a physical act but a psychological one, a revisiting of his past and his identity. He is "as old as the sea" (Hemingway 32), and in recognizing its slightest changes, he acknowledges the subtle shifts in his own consciousness. The ocean becomes his memoryscape, a place where his life is recounted and his selfhood reaffirmed.

The creatures of the sea are not external to Santiago but internalized as parts of his psyche. He calls the marlin his brother, declaring, "Fish, you are my brother" (Hemingway 82). This kinship suggests that Santiago perceives the fish as a projection of his own hidden selves, dispersed across the unconscious depths of the ocean. Wang Zhen argues that Hemingway's works reflect "reverence for life and ecological harmony" (Wang Zhen 112), and Santiago's fraternal bond with the fish exemplifies this ecological consciousness. His empathy for the turtle further illustrates this psychological mirroring. He notes that "the turtle's heart will beat for hours after he has been cut up" (Hemingway 36), recognizing in the turtle's endurance and suffering his own condition as an aging man. Wang Yufeng's study of Hemingway's ecological reminiscence highlights how personal memory is linked to ecological decline (Wang Yufeng 87), and Santiago's compassion for the turtle reflects his awareness of both his mortality and the fragility of nature.

Critics such as Philip Young have interpreted Santiago's struggle as symbolic of humanity's confrontation with nature, stressing endurance as the central theme (Young 134). Yet endurance here is not merely physical; it is psychological, as Santiago searches for meaning in the oceanic depths of his mind. Bloom similarly interprets Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River* as a narrative of ecological healing, where immersion in wilderness restores psychological balance (Bloom 56). Santiago's journey parallels this, as the sea becomes a place of restoration even in suffering. Denis argues that Hemingway's ecological themes reflect broader existential concerns, including war and disintegration of values (Denis 203). Santiago's confrontation with the sea thus becomes a confrontation with meaning

itself, where resilience is forged in the face of ecological and existential uncertainty. Divyasree adds that Hemingway's seas and rivers act as "active participants" shaping human destiny (Divyasree 77), and Santiago's identity is inseparable from the agency of the ocean.

Ultimately, Santiago's mind becomes indistinguishable from the sea. His thoughts, dreams, and identity flow with its waves, and his unconscious is populated by its creatures. His empathy for the turtle reflects his own suffering, while his kinship with fish and marlin reveals his fragmented identity. The sea is his unconscious, his past, his self, and his search for meaning. As Hemingway writes, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated" (103), and Santiago's endurance in the oceanic depths of his mind affirms the ecopsychological truth that human identity and resilience are inseparable from the natural world.

Jungian Archetypes in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is often celebrated as a tale of endurance, dignity, and human struggle against nature. Yet, when viewed through the lens of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, the novella reveals itself as a mythic narrative structured around archetypes and the process of individuation. Santiago's journey is not merely a fisherman's battle with a marlin; it is a symbolic confrontation with the unconscious, the Shadow, and ultimately the Self.

Santiago as the Hero

Santiago embodies the archetypal Hero. Despite his age and frailty, he ventures into the sea on a quest that tests his physical and spiritual limits. Jung argued that the Hero's journey reflects the individual's struggle toward individuation—the integration of conscious and unconscious elements into a unified self. Santiago's perseverance, even in the face of defeat, demonstrates this process. His wounds and exhaustion are not failures but marks of transformation, signifying his passage through suffering toward wisdom.

The Marlin as the Shadow

The marlin represents Santiago's Shadow—the repressed, darker aspects of his psyche. Jung maintained that the Shadow must be confronted and acknowledged rather than destroyed. Santiago's respect for the marlin, even as he fights it, illustrates this principle. He sees the fish as a noble adversary, a mirror of his own strength and mortality. In battling the marlin, Santiago confronts his fears of aging, weakness, and death, integrating these truths into his identity.

The Sea as the Collective Unconscious

The sea functions as a symbol of the Collective Unconscious, the vast reservoir of archetypal images and instincts shared by humanity. Santiago's journey into its depths parallels the descent into the unconscious mind. The unpredictable waves, creatures, and dangers reflect the hidden forces that shape human destiny. His navigation of this realm underscores the universal struggle to find meaning within forces beyond conscious control.

Manolin as the Wise Child

Manolin, the boy who cares for Santiago, represents the archetype of the Wise Child. He embodies renewal, hope, and continuity. Through Manolin, Santiago's wisdom and experience are transmitted to the next generation, ensuring that his struggle is not in vain. Jung emphasized the importance of integrating opposites; Santiago's bond with Manolin unites age and youth, wisdom and innocence, creating balance and wholeness.

The Lions as Symbols of the Self

Santiago's recurring dreams of lions on the African beaches symbolize vitality, courage, and the archetypal Self. Jung described the Self as the totality of the psyche, the ultimate goal of individuation.

The lions, powerful yet playful, represent Santiago's connection to primal energy and his unconscious striving for wholeness. They remind him – and the reader – that beneath frailty lies enduring strength.

Conclusion

Through Jung's lens, *The Old Man and the Sea* transcend realism and becomes a mythic allegory of individuation. Santiago's battle with the marlin is a confrontation with the Shadow, his voyage across the sea is an immersion into the Collective Unconscious, and his dreams of lions signal his approach to the Self. Hemingway's novella thus resonates not only as a story of human endurance but also as a timeless archetypal journey, reflecting humanity's eternal struggle to reconcile the conscious and unconscious, and to achieve wholeness through suffering and acceptance.

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