

Hemingway's Islands in the Stream:

The Artist's Dilemma

by

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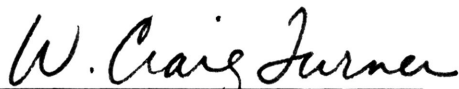
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Abstract. Although Islands in the Stream is a flawed novel and has received very little serious critical attention, it is valuable because Hemingway makes two important artistic statements in it. First, through the character of Thomas Hudson, Hemingway questions the decision to devote himself to art. Hudson affirms his devotion to art in Book I and discovers that art is in his heart, in his head, and in every part of him. Hemingway, however, moves beyond affirming his devotion to art towards searching for the fundamental source of artistic vision. Islands in the Stream is a searching novel, and in it, Thomas Hudson searches for renewed artistic vision. He achieves this renewed vision after he comes to terms with five elements: 1) an ability to accept death, 2) an ability to care about mankind, 3) an ability to find meaning in the words "honor" and "duty," 4) an ability to remember, and most important, 5) an ability to give and receive love. Thus, in Islands in the Stream, Hemingway seems to suggest that without love, there is no art. Consequently, it appears that for Hemingway, love is the fundamental source of artistic vision.

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Ernest Hemingway intended Islands in the Stream to be one book in a trilogy that would emerge as his definitive masterpiece. He spoke highly of the book while writing it, but began to express doubts about the novel as the publication date approached. He told Charles Scribner that he needed to get more perspective on it, and filed the manuscript away in a Cuban bank vault.¹ Apparently, he never worked on the novel again. It is interesting to note that Hemingway had not published anything in ten years when he began writing ITS in 1946. People began suggesting that Hemingway was finished as a writer, for he had already published three best sellers: The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms, and For Whom the Bell Tolls. As a result of that sort of gossip, Hemingway attempted to prove with ITS that he was not burned-out. Ironically, he did not prove anything with ITS, for he never chose to publish the novel. It is important to realize that Hemingway never completed nor polished ITS; moreover, the novel that we are reading is one with which Hemingway was never satisfied.

ITS is a valuable novel, however, because it focuses on the artist and reveals the fears, anguish, and guilt associated with the artistic struggle to create. In the sense that ITS is blatantly autobiographical, we can assume that the artist Thomas Hudson is fairly representative of Ernest Hemingway.² Hence, through this autobiographical study of a middle-aged painter, we can attempt to peer into Hemingway's soul. Moreover, we can Format and style in this paper follow PMLA specifications.

recognize the fears, guilt, and anguish that plagued Hemingway as he strove to create. Finally, on a broader scale, we can study Hemingway's concepts of honor, duty, love, and death, and try to understand how these concepts affect the artist's perception of their role in the creation of art.

When ITS was published posthumously in 1970 John Aldridge wrote:

Knowing that this may well be the last new Hemingway novel we will ever see, one approaches it with a mixture of wariness, awe, and considerable anxiety, hoping that through some charity of the gods it will turn out to be very good, but knowing also the chances against the novel's being other than very bad.³

Generally, Aldridge's fears were well founded, and most critics were disappointed with ITS. Carlos Baker accuses Hemingway of using his past not for inspiration, but to subconsciously justify his own actions.⁴ Furthermore, according to Baker the novel lacks supporting symbolic structure: "Narrative progression was now linear rather than cubic, and depth was sacrificed to surface."⁵ Baker, however, does note that ITS is a searching book. He suggests that Thomas Hudson's military order in Book III, to "continue searching carefully westward," is also a moral directive.⁶ Baker, then, suggests that Hudson and Hemingway are both searching for something. Unfortunately, many critics feel that one of the weaknesses of the novel is that we are never sure if either one finds what he is searching for. John Updike writes that love and death are fused complements in Hemingway's universe, "yet he never formulated the laws that bind them, never achieved the step of irony away from himself."⁷ Similarly, Edmund Wilson notes that in ITS Hemingway is "making an effort to deal candidly with the discords of his own personality--his fears, which he has tried to suppress, his

mistakes, which he has tried to justify, the pangs of bad conscience, which he has brazened out. This effort is not entirely successful; hence, I imagine, his putting the manuscript away." Clearly, neither Updike nor Wilson feels that Hemingway resolves his problems or elucidates any "truths."

John Aldridge's criticism represents a typical view of the consensus reaction to the novel:

The simple fact is that, unlike his predecessors, he no longer believes in life and no longer enjoys life. By the time he is faced with his own certain death, he is carrying nothing but grief over the death of his three sons, the failure of his marriages, and all the emotions he is no longer able to feel. Nothing motivates him to take action except a vague stubborn sense of duty. . . . Consequently, Hudson confronts his death like an automaton. He has gone through the motions and put on a good show, but he has had nothing to lose from the start. Hence, his actions have had no meaning. When he dies, he will be ready to die, not for the cause, not in order to save the girl he loves, but because he is tired to death of life. There is sadness in this, but no real tragedy, because there is no sense of missed possibility, no conceivable alternative to dying.⁹

Aldridge believes that Hudson's life has had no meaning and that dying for him is just a great relief. In essence, Aldridge implies that Hudson does not uphold the tenets of the code because he does not face adversity with strength, dignity, and courage. Therefore, Aldridge, representing a consensus view, dismisses the novel as being unimportant and a failure.

Granted, ITS is a flawed novel-- it is not unified, tight, or polished. It is somewhat self-pitying and self-serving: Hemingway tends to whine, "Look how hard it is to be an artist." Certainly, Hemingway does not elucidate any basic "truths" or "answers," as many critics have noted. Upon closer study, however, it appears that in ITS Hemingway does have more to say than he has been given credit for. If we look closely, I believe that we can find some meaning in Hudson's life and in his search.

In ITS, Hemingway makes two very important artistic statements. First, through the character of Thomas Hudson Hemingway questions his own devotion to art and then explores the traditional artistic dilemma: isolation versus experience. Hudson early, at the end of Book I, affirms his devotion to art. He encourages Roger Davis to write a true book, and also reveals that even though his commitment to art means long, hard, lonely work, it is a commitment he is willing to make. But Hemingway moves beyond just having Hudson affirm his devotion to art. Hemingway makes his second artistic statement by seeking the primary element that is the source of the artist's vision. In Book I, for example, Hudson believes that "any writer of talent should be able to write a good novel if he were honest."¹⁰ Hemingway realizes, however, that there is more to creating art than just talent, and in ITS he searches for those elements that comprise the artist's creative vision. Hemingway strips Hudson of everything that has given his life meaning, and then sends a mentally, physically, and spiritually bankrupt Thomas Hudson out to sea. At sea, Hudson pursues those elements that will bring meaning into his life and renew his lost vision.

At the beginning of the novel, Hemingway establishes Hudson as a serious and successful artist. Hudson lives alone on his island and has chosen to work seriously and with discipline:

He had known how to paint for a long time and he believed he learned more every year. But learning how to settle down and how to paint with discipline had been hard for him because there had been a time in his life when he had not been disciplined. He had never been truly irresponsible; but he had been undisciplined, selfish, and ruthless. He knew this now, not only because many women had told it to him; but because he had finally discovered it for himself. Then he had resolved that he would be selfish only for his painting, ruthless only for his work, and that he would discipline himself and accept the discipline (p. 8).

Here, Hudson has made the decision to devote himself to art. We are to understand that he has not always been a disciplined artist, but that he has discipline now. In addition, we learn that Hudson is not devoted to art for personal gain, but for personal satisfaction, for Hudson asserts that he has never cared about success. "What he cared about was painting and his children. . ." (p. 8).

When his children come to visit, however, Hudson questions his resolution to devote himself to art with such discipline. Hudson suggests that loneliness and discipline are integral elements of his art, and he never even considers the possibility of living with his sons while still continuing to paint. In this way, Hemingway sets up a dilemma for Hudson: either Hudson can be a serious artist who is lonely, or he can pursue other pleasures and forsake art. As the novel opens, Hudson has made his decision; he has chosen to devote himself to art. Until the boys come to visit, Hudson accepts the life that he has built for himself: "He had been able

to replace almost everything except the children with work and the steady normal working life he had built on the island. He believed he had made something there that would last and that would hold him" (p. 7). But when his children come to visit, Hudson's resolution is tested. He discovers that "he had always loved his children but he had never realized how much he loved them and how bad it was that he did not live with them" (p. 96). Consequently, Hudson begins to question his decision to devote himself to art, particularly when he discovers that some of the skills he has developed as an artist are detrimental to his relationship with his sons.

As an artist, Hudson has cultivated certain analytical skills that are necessary for his craft. Unfortunately, these same skills tend to estrange Hudson from his sons. For example, one evening after David has battled the swordfish and lost, Hudson recalls the day "from beginning to end. . . ." (p. 143). He thinks about each of his sons and ends up criticizing Andrew's behavior:

Then he had not liked the way Andrew had behaved, although he knew Andrew was Andrew and a little boy and that it was unfair to judge him. He had done nothing bad and he had really behaved very well. But there was something about him that you could not trust.

What a miserable, selfish way to be thinking about people that you love, he thought. Why don't you remember the day and not analyze it and tear it to pieces?" (p. 143).

Hudson berates himself for analyzing the day so critically. He wishes that he could remember the day simply as an exciting adventure without the complexity and intensity of the artist's insight; he feels sorry for

himself because he cannot enjoy the simple beauty of the day without the artist in him coming alive, going to work, and analyzing the situation.

Hemingway contrasts the complexity of Hudson's artistic life with the simplicity of Eddy's life. Eddy is a wonderful cook who drinks, brawls, and gets beat up, but who is happy. He leads a simple, physical, unartistic life, and philosophizes, " 'I never been lonesome in my life. . . . I'm happy and I got here what makes me happier' " (p. 94). Eddy has the simple satisfaction of recognizing that he is happy and knowing how to stay that way. Hudson envies Eddy's happiness and wishes that he could achieve that kind of happiness. Nevertheless, he also realizes why Eddy is happy: " 'You see Eddy's happy because he does something well and does it every day' " (p. 161). Hudson recognizes that Eddy is happy because he has achieved his own simple form of self-realization. Eddy has found his *métier*, and he is able to excel at it every day. Hudson is an artist, and, no matter how much he fantasizes about forsaking his art, he realizes that he cannot be truly happy unless he pursues his craft every day.

Hudson's alter-ego is Roger Davis, who, as Irving Howe writes, "can be taken as a double of Hemingway's inferior side."¹¹ Roger is a failure as an artist and as a man, and he is ashamed of himself. Davis reveals the anguish of the artist who forsakes his art and does not create. He tried to be a painter, but found that he just did not possess enough talent to be successful. He turns to writing, but gets caught in the Hollywood trap of writing formulized, sensational trash: he is a writer who has prostituted himself.

In addition to having prostituted his art, Roger also has buried a secret guilt that he needs to exorcise through writing. One evening as they are talking, Roger tells Hudson this secret guilt that he has carried

around since his childhood. When he was twelve, Roger reveals, he and his brother went canoeing. The canoe overturned, and his brother drowned. Roger tells Hudson that he has never gotten over the guilt of surviving while his brother drowned, and he recognizes, " 'sooner or later I have to tell it' " (p. 76). At this point, Roger resolves to quit writing junk and " 'go some place and write a good straight novel as well as I can write it' " (p. 76). Davis then questions Hudson about writing and Hudson divulges some of his artistic philosophy:

"Do you truly think I could write a novel that would be any good?"

"You never will if you don't try. You told me a hell of a good novel tonight if you wanted to write it. Just start with the canoe--"

"And end it how?"

"Make it up after the canoe."

"Hell," Roger said. "I'm so corrupted that if I put in a canoe it would have a beautiful Indian girl in it . . . "

"No," said Thomas Hudson. "You could just make the canoe and the cold lake and your kid brother--"

"David Davis. Eleven."

"And afterwards. And then make up from there to the end."

"I don't like the end," Roger said.

"I don't think any of us do, really," Thomas Hudson said.

"But there's always an end" (p. 77).

This scene reflects something of Hemingway's philosophy of writing as well as affirms the artist's obsession with pursuing his art. No matter

how much the artist prostitutes himself, as Roger has done, and no matter how much an artist wishes he could renounce his art and live a simpler life, as Thomas Hudson wishes, the artist is compelled to create in order to be true to himself, Hemingway seems to say. He also indicates that the artist can use his craft as a means of eradicating sorrow and guilt, for he has Hudson urge Davis to purge his sorrow by writing. Hemingway himself used writing as a purgative "to get rid of it," as he says.¹² Similarly, Hudson's advice to Roger to "just start with the canoe" is also very suggestive of Hemingway's "one true sentence" philosophy.¹³ Moreover, Roger serves as the personification of one of Hemingway's greatest fears--the fear of running out of inspiration. Roger is reduced to writing by formula, but Hemingway-as-Hudson urges him to write with discipline and use his work to purge his guilt. Hemingway upholds his code by having Hudson remind Davis that "there's always an end." The end is inevitable, according to Hemingway, and the writer's duty is to accept adversity and grow strong in the weak places. There is a catch, however. The artist may have the gift of being able to create, but it is a gift that must be cultivated. Hudson reflects on Roger's resolution to begin writing anew:

How could he think that wasting his talent and writing to order and following a formula that made money could fit him to write well and truly? Everything that a painter did or that a writer wrote was part of his training and preparation for what he was to do. Roger had thrown away and abused and spent his talent. But perhaps he had enough animal strength and detached intelligence so that he could make another start. Any writer of talent should be able to write one good

novel if he were honest, Thomas Hudson thought. But all the time that he should be training for it Roger had been mis-using his talent and how could you know if his talent still was there? To say nothing of his *métier*, he thought. How can anyone think that you can neglect and despise, or have contempt for craftsmanship, however feigned the contempt may be, and then expect it to be at the service of your hands and of your brain when the time comes when you must have it. There is no substitute for it, Thomas Hudson thought. There is no substitute for talent either and you don't have to keep them in a chalice. The one is inside you. It is in your heart and in your head and in every part of you. So is the other, he thought. It is not just a set of tools that you have learned to work with (p. 103).

The artist has something inside him that he must release. The artist is born with talent, but he must cultivate craftsmanship, and in order to cultivate craftsmanship, the artist must possess self-discipline and be willing to work alone. Thomas Hudson has disciplined himself and learned to live with his loneliness. Often he wishes that things could be different and that he were not compelled to live the life of the artist. At times, he even feels that art is a burden. But ultimately, Hudson recognizes that artistic talent "is in your heart and in your head and in every part of you." True artists who forsake or pervert their art can never achieve self-satisfaction because they do not fulfill their need to work well every day and excel. Thus, Hemingway intimates that the true artist can never be happy unless he devotes himself to art. Roger Davis sells out and suffers

for it. Unfortunately, Hemingway also portrays the artist's life as being hard, lonely, and unenviable. The artist's dilemma, then, actually appears to be a paradox: he cannot seem to win if he devotes himself to the lonely world of art, and he cannot win if he denies his own self-realization and forsakes or prostitutes art. This paradox is one of the problems that Hemingway never seems to resolve in ITS. Nevertheless, at the end of Book I, Hudson appears to affirm his commitment to art. He accepts the fact that he will be lonely when his boys leave, and gives no indication that he will not continue his lonely but ultimately satisfying existence as an artist.

Yet many critics have been disturbed by the turn of events in ITS because it appears that in spite of all his moralizing and preaching, Hudson does forsake his art, for after the news of the death of his sons, Hudson never paints again. Primarily, critics have been perplexed as to Hemingway's purpose in having Hudson's sons die. Christopher Ricks states: "Thomas Hudson's three sons are slaughtered for the cruellest of markets: not commercialized sentimentality, but authorial escape. They are thrown off the sled so that Thomas Hudson--alias Ernest Hemingway--may get away. . . ." ¹⁴ Along the same lines, Malcolm Cowley proposes that "the sons seem a kind of blood sacrifice to the demands of fiction." ¹⁵ I believe, however, that Hemingway eliminates Hudson's sons for an artistic purpose. He is moving beyond just studying the artist's commitment to art; he is probing for a deeper truth: he is searching for the fundamental source of artistic inspiration. By having Hudson's sons die, Hemingway deprives Hudson of what he values most, and consequently Hudson's life loses meaning. Furthermore, by eliminating Hudson's sons, Hemingway symbolically strips Hudson of his art, for Hudson's sons are perhaps his greatest artistic creation. Hudson creates each of them in the most inspiring act of all, the act of making

love with someone he truly loved. Here, Hemingway seems to allude to a relationship between art and love, for in killing off his sons, Hemingway not only deprives Hudson of his art, but also deprives him of love.

Hudson's sons are the result of and recipients of Hudson's love. Conversely, the sons return Hudson's love and appear to be the major source of love in Hudson's life. In addition, Hudson relies on their love to give meaning to his life. In Book I, for example, Hudson realizes that his sons will be leaving soon. He has remorse about the way his life has developed, but he does not dwell on the past. Instead he says, "But that was over now and the boys were here and they loved him and he loved them. . . . They would go away at the end of their stay and he would have the loneliness again. But it would only be a stage on the way until they came back" (p. 97). Hudson counts on the presence of his sons to preserve the balance in his life. But with the death of his sons, Hudson loses this balance, for he loses love. In one sense, he loses the physical embodiment of the love he and his wives shared. In another sense, he loses his sons' love for him. Finally, he also loses the opportunity to give his love to them. Hence, with the loss of his sons and the subsequent loss of love, Hudson's life loses meaning and he is no longer able to create. Hudson turns away from his art, for he has lost his artistic vision.

After losing his sons and then, consequently, his artistic vision, Hudson also loses five other elements that serve to balance and bring meaning into his life: 1) his ability to accept death as inevitable, 2) his ability to care about and consider himself a member of humanity, 3) his ability to find meaning in the words "honor" and "duty," 4) his ability to be at peace with himself and his memories, and most important, 5) his ability to give and receive love. In effect, Hemingway strips

Hudson of his humanity and then sends him to sea to begin a symbolic search to regain meaning in his life, and through his search, Hemingway attempts to have Hudson discover the element that is the source of the artist's creative vision. Hudson leaves his island and goes to sea to do his duty. At sea, he undergoes a slow healing process and eventually comes to terms with these five elements he has lost that will enable him to regain his artistic vision.

From the death of his sons until the end of the novel, Hudson moves towards reconciling himself with his sorrow. His first reaction is to claim that death is the only true solution to sorrow:

He thought that on the ship he could come to terms with his sorrow, not knowing, yet, that there are no terms to be made with sorrow. It can be cured by death and it can be blunted or anesthetized by various things. Time is supposed to cure it, too. But if it is cured by anything less than death, the chances are that it was not true sorrow (p. 197).

Hudson then blunts his sorrow temporarily by drinking. Ultimately, however, he locks up his memory and devotes himself to work, for, he "knew the drinking would destroy the capacity for producing satisfying work and he had built his life on work for so long now that he kept that as the one thing that he must not lose" (p. 197). Hudson cannot paint any longer, but he recognizes that he must work. Thus, he resolves: "Get it straight. Your boy you lose. Love you lose. Honor has been gone for a long time. Duty you do" (p. 326). Hudson goes to sea to "do his duty," and at sea, as a result of doing his duty, Hudson moves towards regaining his artistic vision by coming to terms with the five elements he has lost.

First, Hudson must accept the fact that life is tough and death is capricious if he is ever to regain balance and meaning in his life. In an intriguing scene, Hudson begins to accept the capriciousness of death. Hudson is on an island inspecting the remains of a massacre. He has been collecting bullets and is on his way back to the boat when he meets a land crab heading in to feed on the corpses. Hudson looks at the crab, draws his gun, and says to it, " 'You still have a chance Nobody blames you. You're having your pleasure and doing your duty' " (p. 336). The crab does not move and Hudson shoots it. The significance of this passage is that Hudson begins to recognize that death is capricious--it can come to anyone at any time. The crab thought he was heading in for a meal, but instead, Hudson shot him, commenting afterwards, "Poor old crab, he thought. All he was practicing was his trade. But he ought to have shuffled along" (p. 336). The crab was in the wrong place at the wrong time, through no fault of his own, and arbitrarily was killed. Similarly, Hudson's sons were killed just as capriciously. That's life--that's just the way it is. Everybody suffers in this world. Willie chastises Hudson: " 'You,' Willie said. 'Flogging yourself to death up there because your kid is dead. Don't you know everybody's kids die?' " (p. 366). Hudson must accept this fact if he is ever to regain the balance in his life. When Hudson does accept the capriciousness of death, he begins to respond to life, and consequently, he begins to respond to art. After he shoots the crab, he sits on the beach and looks at the driftwood and the surf and thinks, "I would like to paint this" (p. 337). Hence, once Hudson begins to understand the capriciousness of death, he regains a bit of his artistic inspiration--he sees beauty and wishes he could paint it.

The second step Hudson must take in order to regain his artistic inspiration is to restore his unity with humanity. Hudson has ceased to care about anything, including his shipmates. He has separated himself from mankind. But Hudson begins to regain his unity with mankind during a violent rainstorm. There has not been rain in over fifty days, and the torrential release of rain seems to symbolize a great emotional breakthrough for Hudson. The rain is also symbolic of a purifying or baptismal force. During the storm, Hudson begins to commune with humanity--his shipmates--and they are all purified together in the rain:

On the stern they were all bathing naked. They soaped themselves and stood on one foot and another, bending against the lashing rain as they soaped and then leaning back into it. They were really all brown, but they looked white in the strange light. Thomas Hudson thought of the canvas of the bathers by Cézanne and then he thought he would like to have Eakins paint it. Then he thought that he should be painting it himself with the ship against the roaring white of the surf that came through the driving gray outside with the black of the new squall coming out and the sun breaking through momentarily to make the driving rain silver and to shine on the bathers in the stern (pp. 382-383).

As a result of bathing in the rain, Hudson's shipmates are purified. After watching them bathe, Hudson returns to the boat and calls it "home" (p. 383). In this way, Hudson seems to accept his shipmates as his family and therefore regains his own sense of unity with mankind. When Hudson can then appreciate and even be inspired by humanity, he regains another portion

of his artistic vision. He moves from wishing he could paint towards recognizing that he should be painting.

In addition to acceptance of the capriciousness of death and reunion with humanity, the third element that Hudson must regain is insight into the meaning of the words "honor" and "duty." Hudson purportedly goes to sea "to do his duty," but early, it becomes apparent that the words "honor" and "duty" no longer have any meaning for him. As he begins the chase, Hudson perceives that life is futile and believes that chasing Germans is futile, too. Hudson has ceased to care about anything:

Then why don't you care about anything? he asked himself. Why don't you think of them as murderers and have righteous feelings that you should have? Why do you just pound and pound on after it like a riderless horse that is still in the race? Because we are all murderers, he told himself. We all are on both sides, if we are any good, and no good will come of any of it (p. 356).

Hudson, at this point, cannot see the deeper meaning of his actions because he does not believe in his cause. He sees his actions as just plain murder. His lack of commitment to his cause is quite disturbing when compared with Robert Jordan's devotion to his cause in For Whom the Bell Tolls. Robert Jordan, who fights Fascists in the Spanish Civil War, believes in his cause and perceives that an ultimate good will result from the war. He recognizes that the artist or writer cannot exist under fascism; therefore, Jordan fights to promote a cause that is higher than himself. He altruistically sacrifices his life because he perceives it to be his duty--a duty to fight for freedom. Hudson, however, cannot see a higher cause because

he no longer understands the meaning of the words "honor" and "duty."

At sea, then, Hudson must rediscover the meaning of "duty." As commander of the boat, Hudson's duty is to capture or destroy the German submarine crew. He also has another duty, however. This duty is to protect his crew. Ara tries to explain this duty to Hudson:

"Tom," Ara said. "All a man has is pride. Sometimes you have it so much it is a sin. We have all done things for pride that we knew were impossible. We didn't care. But a man must implement his pride with intelligence and care. Now that you have ceased to be careful of yourself I must ask you to be, please. For us and for the ship" (p. 358).

Ara recognizes that Hudson does not care about anything any longer and reminds him that even though he does not care about himself, he still has a responsibility to his boat and crew. Hudson tries to heed Ara's plea, and slowly, he begins to realize that duty does have meaning. As he works with his men, he begins to recognize that each man has a certain dignity, and that this dignity is most apparent when, as he does his duty, he faces death. The dying German whom Hudson takes prisoner is a man who faces his death with dignity and who subsequently demonstrates for Hudson the meaning of the word "honor." Hudson offers the German morphine in exchange for information, but the German refuses to talk and refuses the morphine as well. The German dies with honor, dignity, and courage, and Hudson admires him for dying so honorably.

Once Hudson finds meaning in the word "honor," he is then ready to search for meaning in the word "duty." Hudson, however, never really understands duty until Willie demonstrates just what it is to do one's duty.

Willie conceives of soldiering as his job, and he does what he does simply because it is required of him--it is his duty. After Peters is killed on the turtle boat, Willie assesses the situation and decides that someone must go into the key and try to flush out the enemy. Willie realizes that he could be killed, but he goes in anyway because it is his job. As Willie gets into the dinghy to go explore the key, Henry says, " 'It was very gallant of Willie to go in, don't you think?' 'He never even heard of the word,' Thomas Hudson said. 'He just conceived it to be his duty' " (p. 431). Willie does a job because he conceives it to be his duty, and he knowingly confronts death. The German soldier faces death with honor, but he really does not have any choice but to accept his death. Willie, in contrast, chooses to do his duty even if it means dying, and at that point, Hudson realizes that duty does have meaning for Willie. As Hudson and Henry watch Willie leave, Henry says that he is sorry that he and Willie have not been friends, and he vows that he will be friends with Willie "from now on" (p. 431). " 'We're all going to do a lot of things from now on,' Thomas Hudson said. 'I wish from now on would start' " (p. 431). Hudson indicates that he wants to proceed with his life. He has started to regain the balance that has been missing from his life, for he has accepted the capriciousness of death, reunited with humanity, and come to understand the meaning of the words "honor" and "duty." Still, Hudson must recapture two other missing elements before he can totally regain balance and meaning in his life.

The fourth element that Hudson must regain in order to restore his artistic vision is the use of his memory, for memory seems to serve as a source of creative nourishment for the artist.¹⁶ After his sons die, Hudson locks up his memory; his philosophy is "if you don't think about it, it doesn't exist" (p. 258). The memories, however, are still there,

and even though he has locked them up during the day, they come back to haunt him at night. Hudson cannot sleep because when he sleeps he unleashes his memories and consequently suffers from nightmares:

He slept and he dreamed that the cabin was burned and someone had killed his fawn that had grown into a young buck. Someone had killed his dog and he found him by a tree and he woke sweating.

I guess dreams aren't the solution, he said to himself.

I might as well take it the same as always without any hope of anaesthetics (p. 384).

Dreams do not solve anything for Hudson. The only way Hudson will solve his problem is to deal with reality. Hudson needs to confront his sorrow, deal with it, and then use his memory to bring him the comfort of the happy times. Book I is filled with happy reminiscences and nostalgia. Hudson and his sons remember the happy memories of Paris; moreover, Hudson uses these memories of Paris to remind him how hard he worked when Tom was a baby, and how good it felt to work hard and work well. When Hudson goes to sea, however, he vows not to drink and not to think about any of the things he has loved and lost. His plan is to work himself until he is so exhausted that he can sleep. In Cuba, however, he takes a break from his self-persecution. He tells himself, "There is no way for you to get what you need and you will never have what you want again. But there are various palliative measures you should take. Go ahead. Take one" (p. 282). So, Hudson drinks. The drinks serve to unlock Hudson's memory, and he begins thinking about love and happy times. But drinking and remembering by themselves do not solve anything for Hudson. Consequently, at the end

of Book II, Hudson convinces himself that the only thing for him to do is strengthen his self-discipline and go to work.

Hudson begins his experience at sea by punishing himself. He refuses to drink, represses his memories, and drives himself unmercifully by steering for eighteen hours unassisted. Hudson is driving himself towards a mental and physical collapse; however, Hudson does not collapse, for during this time at sea, Hudson has slowly undergone a healing and learning process. After his experience on the turtle boat, Hudson is finally ready to stop persecuting himself. He has faced Peters' death, realized how much every member of his crew means to him, and come to recognize the meaning of the word "duty" through Willie's actions. Now, Hudson is ready to make peace with himself. He begins by taking a drink:

He thought how he had promised himself that he would not drink this trip, not even the cool one in the evening, so that he would not think of anything but work. He thought how he had planned to drive himself so he would sleep completely exhausted. But he made no excuses for this drink nor for the broken promise (p. 445).

Hudson, then, takes a drink that serves to unlock his memory and starts to think about Tom and the happy times he had with his son. He lets himself reminisce and surprisingly discovers that it does not hurt as bad as it used to. He tells himself:

Go ahead and drink the rest of your drink and think about something good. Tom's dead and it's all right to think about him. You'll never get over it. But you're solid

on it now. Remember some good happy times. You had plenty (p. 447).

So, Hudson indulges himself. He thinks about Tom and realizes that he can do it. He has come to accept the fact that death is final and inevitable and that the happy memories are there to comfort him. Thus, Hudson has made peace with his memories, and consequently, he has reached a turning point in his life. He has come full circle in Book III, for he has developed from a self-persecuting man whose life had no meaning into a man who has come to terms with his sorrow. In addition, Hudson has regained meaning in his life and he wishes "from now on would start." At this point, Hudson is a man with a future.

Unfortunately, Hudson never gets to see "from now on," for he is shot and critically wounded in the German ambush. Wounded, Hudson lays on the deck of his boat and tells himself:

Think about after the war and when you will paint again. There are so many good ones to paint and if you paint as well as you really can and keep out of all other things and do that, it is the true thing. You can paint the sea better than anyone now if you will do it and not get mixed up in other things. Hang on good now to how you truly want to do it. You must hold hard to life to do it (p. 464).

Hudson wants to live; moreover, he realizes as he faces death that he can paint the sea better than anyone now because he has experienced life, encountered death, and searched for truth. Hudson has regained his vision because he has come to terms with death and sorrow, reunited with humanity,

found meaning in the words "honor" and "duty," and allowed himself to come to terms with his memory. Most important, Hudson has inconspicuously regained the fifth and most important element that has been lacking in his life: love. Slowly, Hudson has been moving towards finding love, and in the final passage he confronts this love:

"Tommy," Willie said. "I love you, you son of a bitch, and don't die."

Thomas Hudson looked at him without moving his head.

"Try and understand if it isn't too hard."

Thomas Hudson looked at him. He felt very far away now and there were no problems at all. . . . He looked up and there was the sky that he had always loved and he looked across the great lagoon that he was quite sure, now, he would never paint and he eased his position a little to lessen the pain. . . .

"I think I understand, Willie," he said.

"Oh shit," Willie said. "You never understand anybody that loves you" (p. 466).

As he faces death, Hudson regains his artistic vision and simultaneously rediscovers love. Love, then, appears to be the fundamental source of artistic creation, for Hudson loses his vision when he loses love as a result of the death of his sons, and only regains his vision when he is able to accept and try to understand Willie's love.

The irony of Hudson's search is that he never really completely loses love. As he dies, he looks at the sky and realizes he has always loved it. Furthermore, Hudson's friends love him, only Hudson does not understand

or accept their love. Hudson tells Willie that he thinks he understands about love, but Willie retorts, "You never understand anybody that loves you." Hence, Hemingway seems to say that love is not something that a person can understand. Rather, it is just there and man can only attempt to experience it. The irony here is that Hudson searches for love when it is to be found right there in his boat. Moreover, Hudson searches for something that ultimately he can never understand. I do not believe, however, that Hudson should be condemned for searching. Hudson loses his artistic inspiration when his sons die. He goes to sea to do his duty, and as a consequence of doing that duty he regains his vision. At sea, Hudson must come to terms with his sorrow, face death, learn to care about his men, and also learn to care about himself in order to carry out his mission. Through his work at sea, Hudson comes to understand what duty really means, and consequently discovers his duty to himself. Hudson finally realizes that he wants to live and paint again.

Hudson accepts love at the end of the novel and is ready to return to art. Unfortunately, Hudson's time has run out. In an obscure passage at the beginning of the novel, Hemingway has an unfamiliar character intone: " 'Man is persecuted,' Uncle Edward said aloud as he walked on. 'Man has his robe of dignity plucked at and destroyed. Oh, Good Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do' " (p. 13). Thus, Hemingway seems to suggest that Hudson, as all men are, is persecuted. His children are capriciously taken from him, his marriages do not work out, and his artistic vision is destroyed. Life is tough, but Hudson does not give up. He does his duty and searches for answers, and by searching Hudson finds love and regains his vision. That Hudson dies before he is able to paint again does not matter. What does matter is that Hudson endures his sorrow and

eventually overcomes it by doing his duty and by searching. Hudson dies reaching out to art. Moreover, he dies a persecuted man, but one who "eases his position a little to lessen the pain."

In ITS, Hemingway questions the artist's devotion to art and attempts to find meaning in the artist's decision to pursue art even though he must subject himself to loneliness, isolation, and discipline. In Book I, Hudson affirms his decision to devote himself to art, but in making this decision assumes that he will be able to create. Hemingway, in contrast, was plagued with fears of losing his ability to create, and in ITS he searches for the force which is the foundation of artistic creativity. Hemingway strips Hudson of his artistic vision and then sends him out to sea to regain those elements that will restore his vision. At the end of his search, Hudson discovers that the fundamental force that ultimately enables him to regain his vision is love. Even as early as A Farewell to Arms, Hemingway has emphasized the importance of love. When wise old Count Greffi asks Frederick Henry, "What do you value most?" Henry replies, "Someone I love."¹⁷ Robert Lewis, however, suggests that there is a difference in the way Hemingway handled love in his writing as he grew older. Lewis believes that as he aged, Hemingway was overwhelmed by the complexity of mature love.¹⁸ Perhaps that is why Hudson never really understands what he is searching for. The only "truth" Hemingway seems to offer us at the end of Islands in the Stream is that we can never understand about love--certainly not a very satisfactory solution. Perhaps that is why Hemingway chose not to publish the novel. Islands in the Stream is not one of Hemingway's major works; however, it is a valuable contribution to the Hemingway canon in its exploration of the relationship between love and art and therefore deserves more serious critical attention than it has received to date.

Notes

¹ Carlos Baker, The Writer as Artist (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 383.

² Several critics have alluded to the Hemingway-as-Hudson voice in ITS. See Baker, pp. 384-391; Christopher Ricks, "At Sea with Ernest Hemingway," New York Review of Books, 8 Oct. 1970, p. 18.; and Edmund Wilson, "An Effort at Self-Revelation," The New Yorker, 2 Jan. 1971, p. 59.

³ John Aldridge, "Hemingway Between Triumph and Disaster," Saturday Review, 10 Oct. 1970, p. 25.

⁴ Baker, p. 385.

⁵ Ibid., p. 389.

⁶ Ibid., p. 409.

⁷ John Updike, "Papa's Sad Testament," New Statesman, 16 Oct. 1970, p. 489.

⁸ Edmund Wilson, "An Effort at Self-Revelation," The New Yorker, 2 Jan. 1971, p. 60.

⁹ Aldridge, p. 39.

¹⁰ Ernest Hemingway, Islands in the Stream (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 103. All subsequent parenthetical page numbers are from this text, hereafter cited as ITS.

¹¹ Irving Howe, "Great Man Going Down," Harper's, Oct. 1970, p. 122.

¹² In "Fathers and Sons," Nick Adams speaks of "getting rid of it" by writing. The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 491.

¹³ Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (1964; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1956), p. 12.

¹⁴ Christopher Ricks, "At Sea with Ernest Hemingway," New York Review of Books, 8 Oct. 1970, p. 18.

¹⁵ Malcolm Cowley, "A Double Life, Half Told," Atlantic, Dec. 1970, p. 108.

¹⁶ Stephen L. Tanner, "Hemingway's Islands," Southwest Review, 61 (1976), 74-84.

¹⁷ Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (1929; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 262.

¹⁸ Robert W. Lewis, Jr., Hemingway on Love (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1965), p. 6.

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