

Blom, Paul. “‘It wasn’t any good diving unless you had a big hammer’: Psychoanalyzing Hemingway’s ‘After the Storm.’” *Literature and the Sea: Maritime Literary Currents*, edited by Ekaterina V. Kobeleva, Ben P. Robertson, Shannon Thompson, and Katona D. Weddle. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Jan. 2019.

### Abstract

Hemingway’s short story, “After the Storm,” was first published in the May, 1932 issue of *Cosmopolitan* and was then included in the 1933 short fiction collection, *Winner Take Nothing*. Based on a true story told to him by a Key West fisherman, Captain Bra Saunders, the story is often overlooked by critics. My paper applies a Freudian reading to Hemingway’s “After the Storm,” a story rife with imagery and details revealing the ways in which Hemingway’s narrative is a manifestation of latent desires stemming from his childhood. I use the approaches delineated in Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* to analyze “After the Storm” in the same way Freud might analyze a patient’s dreams, “investigating the relations between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream-thoughts...tracing out the processes by which the latter have been changed into the former.”<sup>i</sup>

Freud himself applied his dream interpretation method to other literary works including *Hamlet*<sup>ii</sup> and even explicitly equated the psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams with the literary interpretation of texts. His statements on the matter acknowledge the multiplicity of inspirations and influences existent upon any symptom, dream, or text, but they also justify the psychoanalysis of any artistic representation, such as a short story, as a manifestation of the author’s personal neuroses.

Although some might claim that a Freudian reading of this short story is an “over-interpretation” of the text, I argue that all texts *need* to be “over-interpreted,” using Freud’s argument, “if they are to be fully understood.” The works of Hemingway, however, are especially notorious for the disparities between what exists on the surface—the manifest or conscious content—and what exists beneath the surface of the text—the latent or unconscious content. In *Death in the Afternoon*, written around the same time as “After the Storm,” Hemingway composes one of his most famous passages about writing, introducing his famous “Iceberg Theory,” which directly corresponds to a Freudian reading of any Hemingway text. Concerning intentional, and even unintentional, omissions in a text, Hemingway explains that “the dignity of movement of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.”<sup>iii</sup> In my analysis, I join the fisherman protagonist of “After the Storm” and dive below the water and attempt to break into the sunken ocean liner that is a significant but mostly overlooked work of short fiction in order to plunder the valuable secrets locked within.

“After the Storm,” with its imagery of homosexuality, castration, impotence, the dangers of the feminine forces, and the security found in male civilization, can be interpreted as Hemingway’s own “dream-thoughts” concerning his oedipal desires. Ultimately, when the anonymous narrator fails to penetrate the ship, Hemingway is rejecting his own violent feelings toward his father and the potential for his own castration at the hands of what he perceived as the dangerous feminine.

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<sup>i</sup> Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. Joyce Crick. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 211.

<sup>ii</sup> Freud, 204.

<sup>iii</sup> Ernest Hemingway. *Death in the Afternoon*. (1932; reprinted New York: Scribner’s, 1999), 154.