

## Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*

### Hemingway and His Style

- Ezra Pound once said that the poet should be a polisher of gems. Ernest Hemingway can be read as a writer who uses prose in similar fashion. For the imagistic poet, there is an emphasis on:
  - the centrality of the image (where it should be concrete, not abstract)
  - objectivity in presentation
  - juxtaposition as a means of connecting parts to create a single image
  - a simple and direct presentation of sensory images
  
- In Hemingway's fiction, there is a
  - centrality of the "image," where the scene becomes the "image"
  - emphasis on meaning being presented directly
  - juxtaposition of images where one becomes a comment on another (a direct image can be suggestive of an implied image)
  - simple and direct presentation of the scene
  
- Some of the characteristics of the Hemingway style include:
  - indirect judgment – the author doesn't comment or make judgments; there is more of an emphasis on understanding the subject matter
  - omission – what isn't stated can be just as significant, if not more significant, than what is directly stated; this allows the reader to participate more actively in the story, and it also tends to make the reader's emotional response more powerful – similar to what Eliot referred to in his comments on the objective correlative
    - The term "objective correlative" was first used by poet and painter Washington Allston (in a lecture on art), describing the process by which the external world produces pleasurable emotion. In 1919, T. S. Eliot gave the term a new meaning. In his essay on *Hamlet*, "Hamlet and His Problems," he writes:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.
    - For Eliot, the "objective correlative" is a pattern of objects, events, or actions, or a situation that can serve effectively to awaken in the reader an emotional response without being a direct statement of that subjective emotion. It is a means of communicating feeling, giving the "internal world" a correlative relation in the "external world," and doing so in a way that was definite, impersonal, and concrete.

- An example of this can be found in Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*:
  - Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
- You can see this description as an objective correlative signifying the loneliness and desolation of modern urban life. Hemingway does something very similar in his short fiction by suggesting through symbolic language, such as in "Cat in the Rain"
- indirection – similar to Dickinson's poetic edict, "tell the truth but tell it slant"
- suggestion and implication – uses compressed language in his short fiction; the language is closer to poetry than it is to that in the traditional novel
- repetition, with variation – similar to that found in writings of Gertrude Stein and James Joyce; many denotations of a single word give different meanings
- repetition in dialogue – many of his stories are told through dialogue; dialogue is the heart of the modern short story
- meaning is based on noun usage, closer to the actual physical object – there are few adjectives, and "to be" is a prominent verb usage; "and" is used throughout to link nouns and images
- an "objective" style that relied on sensual presentations of images or scenes – this helped in avoiding sentimentality and direct authorial intrusion
- irony – an emphasis on understatement and what isn't expressed; the use of contrast to expose the depths of the emotional meaning
- open endings – the endings of stories are often ambiguous and resist any traditional form of closure
- many times chronological ordering is eliminated
  - differences between story and discourse
    - story: the way the events would occur in chronological order
    - discourse: the way in which the author chooses to present the events
  - story and discourse differ in terms of
    - the order of events
    - the duration, tempo, and time of events
    - the frequency of events
  - with discourse, the author manipulates narrative distance (the way in which events and dialogue are narrated), narrative perspective (focalization, or through whose eyes/mind we see the action unfolding), and voice (narrator's "level" and place within the narrative)

### Hemingway and *In Our Time*

- The book as a collection of two "separate texts" that form one
  - The vignette chapter sections: with the exception of chapter 6, they all presented in public time, but written from the perspective of private time
    - Chapters I-V: during the war, beginning in community (e.g., drunk soldiers, movement of a cavalry) and ending in isolation (e.g., executions and killing for "sport")
    - Chapter VI: Nick (much like Hemingway) wounded

- Chapter VII: last scene during the war, where faith becomes an empty lie – after this, on the way back to America (this vignette immediately followed by “Soldier’s Home”)
- Chapter VIII: post-war America, crime and violence
- Chapters IX-XIV: post-war Europe, bullfighting (linked to violence of war)
- Chapter XV: post-war America, executions
- L’Envoi: post-war Europe, Greek revolution
- Short stories:
  - Nick Adam stories:
    - “Indian Camp,” “The Doctor and His Wife,” “The End of Something,” “Three-Day Blow,” “The Battler,” “Cross-Country Snow,” “Big Two-Hearted River: Part I,” “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II”
    - Progress chronologically from youth to adulthood
  - Spatial and temporal progression of short stories:
    - begin in Europe (“On the Quay at Smyrna”), then move on to America (Nick Adams stories from “Indian Camp” to “The Battler”), then back to Europe (“A Very Short Story”), then to post-war America (“Soldier’s Home”), then to post-war Europe (“The Revolutionist” to “My Old Man”), then ends in America (“Big Two-Hearted River: Part I” and “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II”)
    - straddles the time of World War I, showing the effects of the war on modern consciousness
  - Hemingway is extremely sensitive to the effects of violence and shows us the ways in which violence makes us look at everyday experience. Kinds of violence in *In Our Time*:
    - War slaughter – random violence (e.g., World War I)
    - Legal slaughter – slightly less random violence (e.g., executions)
    - Ritual slaughter – most ordered violence (e.g., bullfighting)
- *In Our Time* as a mixture of objective reporting and subjective experience
  - Hemingway, who began his writing career as a journalist, conceived the book as a series of reported stories (the 16 short stories) having a more objective stance and tone
    - the more objective tone of the stories was a safeguarded against sentimentality
    - there is no authorial intrusion – the author stands outside of the story, as a reporter would be
    - the narrators, even first-person narrators, seem detached from most of the action
    - there are no critical judgments of the characters or their actions – it is up to the reader to decide how to interpret
  - the vignettes can be read as impressionistic episodes from Hemingway’s own experiences, both during the war and in its aftermath
    - each one is based on (for the most part) a single scene, not a longer narrative
    - they are told in such a way that they create a word-based “picture,” something like a impressionistic painting
    - in this way, the various interchapters have a more subjective feel, providing a more emotional balance with the 16 short stories

➤ *In Our Time* as short-story cycle:

- A series of 16 linked stories within a larger narrative framework, interspersed with vignettes
- The stories are directly linked in some significant fashion (e.g., through common protagonist, Nick Adams, or through the themes of violence, war, barrenness/waste) in ways that encourage a more holistic reading
  - The short-story cycle is like a “mere collection” of stories in that the individual parts can be separated from the whole (as in an anthology) and still stand alone. It differs from the more “traditional” collection in that the meaning of each individual story is somewhat determined by its context within the whole (setting, theme, protagonist, etc), and as such, loses something when taken out of that context
  - The short-story cycle is like the novel in that there are various narrative elements that more tightly bind the parts together. It differs from the novel in that the individual stories (as opposed to the novel’s chapters or sections) can be removed from their context without significantly undermining or damaging the meaning of the remaining parts
- The relationship between the part and the whole betray a more metonymic structure
  - For Roman Jakobson, metonymy is created through semantic congruity, that is, the joining together through consistency of meaning (**congruity**)
  - Paul de Man emphasizes metonymic meaning through “contingent association” – that is, the meaning of the whole is dependent on the parts, or put another way, the part’s relationship to the whole helps determine meaning (**contingency**)
- The arrangement of the various parts, and the meaning that arises from this, is determined by the author – there is a reason the various parts are arranged the way they are
  - Stories and “chapters” are meticulously organized with not only thematic links, but also motifs linking one story/chapter to the next. Examples:
    - the “death” of Nick’s relationship with Marge is followed by the execution of cabinet ministers in Chapter V
    - the year of action in “The Revolutionist” is 1919, the same year as Krebs returns home in the story that immediately precedes it
    - vignette VII, where the soldier (Nick? Krebs?) prays for his life, then ends up sleeping with a prostitute, is immediately followed by “Soldier’s Home,” where Krebs is unable to pray and has problems with women
    - the matador who throws up in Chapter IX is linked to Mrs. Elliot throwing up in the story that follows it
    - the sense of forlornness in “Cat in the Rain” is bracketed by scenes of violent isolation in the vignettes surrounding it
    - Nick enjoys camaraderie with a friend and discusses his relationship with a woman in both “The End of Something” and “Cross-Country Snow,” two stories that share similar positions within the next (one is the fourth story in, and the other is the fourth story from the end)

- “My Old Man” ends with Butler being killed in horseracing, and Chapter XIV (which immediately follows the story) begins with Maera being killed in bullfighting
- This arrangement is nonetheless dependent on the reader’s ability to recognize the “larger picture” or the patterns of the various parts – the reader discovers the stories’ connections
  - Hemingway wrote to Edmund Wilson in 1924, upon finishing *In Our Time*, that the effect of organizing the book in the way he did was “to give the picture of the whole between examining it in detail. Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coast line, and then looking at it and living in it—and then coming out and looking at it again.”
- The stories are linked in such a way that the reader’s experience with each one is modified by his/her experience and knowledge of the others.
  - Can one get a full appreciation of Nick in “Big Two-Hearted River” without first having read the earlier Nick stories? The layout suggests Nick’s growth as a future writer