

ANALYSIS

In Our Time (1925)



Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

“*In Our Time*, 15 short stories by Hemingway with vignettes serving as interchapters, published in the U.S. in 1925. *in our time* (Paris, 1924) contains only the vignettes. Most stories treat life in the Middle West, but the interpolated sketches describe war in Europe and bullfights. ‘Indian Camp,’ ‘The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,’ ‘The Three-Day Blow,’ and others tell of the boyhood experiences of Nick, the author’s counterpart, who grew up in the Great Lakes region, learning the bitter as well as the beautiful facts of existence through the work of his father, a physician, and through his association with Indian guides and their families. Such stories as ‘Mr. and Mrs. Elliot,’ ‘Out of Season,’ and ‘Cross Country Snow’ are brief, poignant tales of American expatriates in Europe and their complex loves and friendships. ‘My Old Man’ is the story of a boy’s loyalty to his father, an American jockey forced to work in Europe because of unsportsmanlike conduct at home, and of the boy’s disillusion following his father’s death. The author’s enthusiasm for sport and the American wilderness is shown in ‘Big Two-Hearted River,’ an account of a trout-fishing expedition.”

James D. Hart

The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(Oxford 1941-83) 362

“*In Our Time* (1924 in France, 1925 in the United States), a collection of fifteen tales by Ernest Hemingway, his second book. The style is strongly under the influence of Gertrude Stein and reveals some of Hemingway’s characteristic moods and themes, such as his interest in sports and in American expatriates. Some of the sketches speak of his own boyhood. ‘A Very Short Story’ introduces a plot later more fully utilized in *A Farewell to Arms*.”

Max J. Herzberg & staff

The Reader’s Encyclopedia of American Literature
(Crowell 1962) 516

“The originality and force of Hemingway’s early stories, published in little magazines, and in limited editions in France, were recognized from the first by many who made their acquaintance. The seeds of his later work were in those stories of *In Our Time*, concerned chiefly with scenes of inland American life and a boy’s growing awareness of that life in contrast to vivid flashes of the disorder and brutality of the war

years and the immediate post-war years in Europe. There are both contrast and continuity between the two elements of *In Our Time*. There is the contrast between the lyric rendering of one aspect of the boyhood world and the realistic rendering of the world of war, but there is also a continuity because in the boyhood world there are recurring intimations of the blackness into which experience can lead even in the peaceful setting of Michigan.”

Robert Penn Warren
Introduction, *A Farewell to Arms*
Three Novels of Ernest Hemingway
(Scribner's 1962) vii

“What Hemingway has done is to reconstruct a decade, 1914-23. His choice is not random. The Great War and its aftermath were collectively, *the* experience of his generation, the experience that dumped his peers and his elders into graves, shell-holes, hospitals, and onto gallows. These were ‘in our time,’ Hemingway is saying, and he remarks the significant and the insignificant.... Time-and-history begin in *In Our Time* with Chapter IV (‘It was a frightfully hot day’) and Chapter III (‘We were in a garden in Mons’). The terse narrator is Lieutenant Eric Edward Dorman-Smith, Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (Fifth Fusiliers), First Battalion, dedicatee of the 1924 edition, and a personal friend of Hemingway.... [This article provides biographical, geographical and historical background for each of the vignettes or chapters.]

Time-and-history in these sixteen Chapters begins in a garden in Mons and terminates artistically in a garden in Athens; begins with the Tommies shooting Germans and ends with George II saying that Plastiras ‘did right...shooting those chaps,’ that is, the six Greeks in Chapter V. The decade begins with death and ends with death, but as George so cheerfully puts it, ‘The great thing in this sort of an affair is not to be shot oneself’.... There is no peace *In Our Time*, nor is there a ‘separate peace’ unilaterally declared by Nick Adams as he sat against the wall of the church....

Interchapters:

IV, III: August 23, 1914; Mons, Belgium
I: Late September—early October 1915; Champagne, France
VIII: November 19, 1917; Kansas City, Missouri
VII: June 16, 1918; Fossalta di Piave, Italy
VI: Early July, 1918; Fossalta
XV: April 15, 1921; Chicago, Illinois
II: October 16, 1922; Eastern Theatre
V: November 22, 1922; Athens, Greece
IX-XIV: Summer 1923; Athens”

E. R. Hagemann
“‘Only Let the Story End As Soon as Possible’:
Time-and-History in Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time*”
Modern Fiction Studies 26 (1980)
reprinted in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*
ed. Jackson J. Benson
(Duke 1990) 192-93, 199

“There are some good reasons for seeing Nick as the implied author of *In Our Time*, and doing so resolves many confusions about the book’s unity, structure, vision, and significance. Moreover, such an approach casts new light on Nick Adams as a character separate from yet also an extension of Hemingway.... ‘Although Nick is not Hemingway, he reflects more of Hemingway than any other Hemingway hero,’ and Philip Young observes that Nick has ‘much in common’ with his creator and was, for Hemingway, ‘a special kind of mask.... Ironically, it is actually because Hemingway was so close to Nick and yet not Nick that he was able to conceive of surrendering authorship to Nick without destroying the illusion of his fictional world.... Hemingway actually gave Nick the background needed to be considered author of all of *In Our Time*, not just...‘My Old Man’ and ‘Indian Camp’....

Although Nick's mind is fragmented, confused to pieces by his accelerated entry into adulthood, *In Our Time* is not at all fragmentary. It is a complete work, unified by the consciousness of Nick Adams as he attempts to come to terms through his fiction with his involvement in World War I and, more recently, with the problems of marriage and his fear of fatherhood. Furthermore, reading the book from this perspective removes our focus from Hemingway's biographical sources, a focus which has too often caused critics to juggle the sequence of stories in an attempt to make their chronology match the order of events in Hemingway's life or to state simply that *In Our Time* lacks structural unity. To the contrary, the stories are ordered precisely to reflect the actual history and the psychological state of Nick Adams. As F. Scott Fitzgerald suggested in 1926, *In Our Time* does not pretend to be about one man, but it is."

Debra A. Modellmog
"The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience:
Nick Adams as Author of *In Our Time*"
American Literature 60 (December 1988)
reprinted in *New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*
ed. Jackson J. Benson
(Duke 1990) 18-19, 30-31

"In late 1924 and early 1925, driven by a creative flowering to compose the best short stories of his career, Hemingway began to envisage a new role for the vignettes. Interspersed between the short stories, the vignettes allowed Hemingway to exploit a typically modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and juxtaposition. The rapid-fire exchange of story and interchapter in the new *In Our Time*, sometimes working by complementary meanings sometimes by ironic counterpoint, drew on the collage technique of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, the film montage of Sergei Eisenstein, the poetics of Pound and Eliot, and the narrative experiments of Joyce. As the work unfolds, the reader comes under increasing pressure to make sense of the crosscutting of scenes and characters, abrupt transformations of narrative voice and perspective, and sudden shifts in geographical and temporal location.... In his early work in particular, Hemingway stood ready to sacrifice the logic of traditional narrative and rhetorical modes in order to present the incoherence and incompleteness of action....

As unstructured as it might appear, *In Our Time* seems a cohesive if not necessarily unified work. The first five stories, interspersed with vignettes about war, form a relatively homogeneous section that deals with the slow maturing of Nick Adams. These stories are all set in Michigan and move chronologically through Nick's boyhood and early manhood in the years before the war. Chapter 6, following 'The Battler,' marks a crucial turning point: Nick becomes the subject of a vignette for the first time, subsequently disappearing from the collection until near its end; and his wounding signals an entry into the more disorienting postwar world of the second half of *In Our Time*.

Three stories, 'A Very Short Story,' 'Soldier's Home,' and 'The Revolutionist,' deal with the aftermath of the war, the first two concerning American soldiers returning from the war, and the latter (set in Italy) providing a bridge to the ensuing five stories about expatriate Americans in Europe—a sequence that reintroduces Nick Adams in 'Cross-Country Snow,' but breaks away to 'My Old Man' before returning to Nick and Michigan in the spectacular finale, 'Big Two-Hearted River.' In the meantime, two pieces on crime bracket the second major thematic block of vignettes—the bullfighting sequence in chapters 9 through 14—before the collection concludes, in L'Envoi, with the Greek king who longs for America. The reach of these stories and vignettes is thus deliberately transcultural in order to effect Hemingway's goal of examining the perilous state of Western culture. The stories shift from the United States to Europe and back to the States, while the story/vignette technique in the early part of the book constantly shifts our perspective between Michigan and the Great War. Loosely speaking, too, *In Our Time* moves from the prewar to the postwar period and from youth to disillusioned maturity, through the vignettes between the young Nick Adams stories foreshadow the war to come....

In Our Time pivots on chapter 6, in which Nick is wounded on the Italian front during World War I. The vignette draws together the first part of the collection. It connects at last the previously disjunctive time sequences of Nick's adolescence and of the war vignettes; it is the only vignette to focus on a character from one of the stories; and it even offers an ironic flashback to Nick's maudlin memories in 'The

Three-Day Blow' of talking to Marjorie about how they would go to Italy together and the fun they would have' (47). Yet Nick's serious wound also foreshadows ensuing tales like 'A Very Short Story,' 'The Revolutionist,' and 'Soldier's Home,' which document the geographical displacements and psychic woundings that follow hard upon the conclusion of World War I...

Hemingway's work is perhaps most astonishing in its capacity to evoke within its small compass such a rich variety of human predicaments and significant but often costly achievements. And it does so with a fervor for experimental writing that never obscures but only intensifies the pathos of the work's struggling survivors, whether Peducci, Nick Adams, or a displaced monarch. From our own time of cultural conflicts and inadequate codes of conduct, the work has never seemed so enduring, so relevant, or, though out of its own historical season, so timely."

Thomas Strychacz
"In Our Time, Out of Season"
The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway
ed. Scott Donaldson
(Cambridge U 1996) 55-57, 60-61, 71-72, 85

Michael Hollister (2015)