

ANALYSIS

“Out of Season” (1923)

Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

“Although one might classify ‘Out of Season’ as a fishing story, the point of the story is that nothing (including fishing) is done. The strength of the story is the portrayal of the officious guide Peduzzi, a fine characterization. He serves to focus sharply the ‘out-of-season’ theme, which relates both to the young man’s relations with his wife Tiny, and to the proposal (by Peduzzi) that the young man fish out of season in evasion of the local game laws.”

Carlos Baker
Hemingway: The Writer as Artist
(Princeton 1952-73) 123

“Not does it seem likely that ‘Out of Season’ would have been written quite the way it was without the example of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and Damned*, which had been published in 1922. The debt is nowhere near as large as the debt of ‘My Old Man’ to Anderson, it is less a matter of prose style, and the story is not as good. But, as sometimes in Fitzgerald, an attempt is made to convey the feelings of things falling apart in a way that seems to have intrigued the early Hemingway, and the discomforting atmosphere is persuasive. The story is concerned with everything going wrong with a marriage in a quiet and unexciting way: a young gentleman and his wife in the Tyrol want to go fishing. But it is illegal to fish there, the weather is raw and cold, they do not have the proper equipment, and the venture is finally abandoned. The piece moves in the mood of the aftermath of a quarrel the couple has had, and is quite like ‘The End of Something,’ that fishing story in which Nick Adams and Marjorie found themselves ‘quits’.”

Philip Young
Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration
(Penn State 1952,1966) 178

“In *A Moveable Feast* Hemingway said that the first story he wrote after ‘losing everything’—that is, after most of his manuscripts had been stolen—was ‘Out of Season’ and that the ‘real end’ of the story (based on his new theory of omission) was that ‘the old man hanged himself’ after the story’s conclusion.... In a December 1925 letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, written almost two years after the completion of ‘Out of Season’...Hemingway said...‘At that time I was writing the *In Our Time* chapters and I wanted to write a tragic story without violence. So I didn’t put in the hanging. Maybe that sounds silly. I didn’t think the story needed it.’

‘Out of Season’ is, we notice, a story much like ‘Cat in the Rain.’ In both stories we have a young couple not communicating very well (a lack of communication and mixed signals is general in both stories). Each story presents an unsuccessful quest, for fish, for a cat. Each story has, in addition to the young couple, an old man (the fishing guide in one, the hotel owner in the other) and a second girl (the girl at the Concordia who serves the marsalas and the maid with the umbrella). ‘Cat in the Rain’ ends with the hotel owner sending a cat up to the young couple’s room. “Out of Season” ends with the young man about to leave word with the ‘same’ hotel owner. It rains in one story and sprinkles in the other. Both stories take place on holiday at an ‘out of season’ place.

They both seem ‘Waste Land’ stories (Peduzzi is a kind of aging, unsuccessful fisher king, a digger of frozen manure), with the hint of World War I hovering in the background (the war memorial, Peduzzi’s claim of having been a soldier and his military jacket). Also, the ‘young gentleman’—perhaps he too is a Harvard grad—of ‘Out of Season’ may be a newspaper correspondent, like the young man of ‘Cat in the Rain’ (the Harvard man Hemingway had met at the Genoa conference): he thinks about Max Beerbohm drinking Marsala, a fact that Hemingway had picked up at the Genoa conference a year before. In fact it

may be the same young man (and young couple) in both stories, and the same quarrel being carried on. The similarity of the two stories again suggests that Hemingway was writing from life....

Peduzzi, a former soldier, is now, like Malatesta, a man who has seen the final ruin of all his hopes; he is a man at the end of his luck, humiliated at the end of his life. (Hemingway's penchant for silently evoking the reader's pity also implies that the story is essentially 'about' Peduzzi, not the young man and wife.... As 'cat' (and 'kitty') is repeated often in 'Cat in the Rain,' so toward the end of 'Out of Season' 'piombo' (and 'lead') is used in rapid repetition: it appears nine times in less than half a page. It is likely that this repetition means something in addition to Peduzzi's disappointment and excitement...*piombo* can mean both bullet and kingfisher. In the story, of course, it means the lead used to hang at the end of a fishing line (a small sinker). And it seems likely that the repetition of the word...implies the hanging: Peduzzi ('Ped' may imply 'at the foot of') hanging from a rope, as a lead sinker hangs from the end of a fishing line....

So it's a matter of words... 'posse,' 'neck,' 'stretched out,' and the suddenly and oft repeated 'piombo,' a weight to hang at the end of a line. Apparently this is why Hemingway thought that the story didn't need the hanging (*in* the story). He thought it well enough implied that the 'quite drunk and very desperate' and humiliated old man, whose mood quickly goes up and down, then up, and then down again near the story's end (and down to rock bottom later when he is fired) hangs himself. And the story's final words ('I will leave word with the padrone at the hotel office,' the young gentleman tells Peduzzi), words that lead to the suicide, give us an ironic ending, for the word left with the hotel owner has quite a different effect than the young gentleman imagines—as the cat sent up to the room by the 'same' hotel owner in 'Cat in the Rain' has a different effect than he supposed it would."

William Adair
"Hemingway's 'Out of Season': The End of the Line"
New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway
(Duke 1990) 341-46

"If there is one central story in the bundle of whipsaw-keen narratives, terse vignettes, and fragmentary epiphanies of Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), it may be 'Out of Season.' The story probes the paradox of the book's title by asking, What does it mean to be in our time but out of season? The phrase 'in our time' promises both relevance and revelation. It suggests that the book will deal with contemporary historical circumstances, perhaps record valuable collective wisdoms, and certainly stake a claim to be documenting the entire epoch. Moreover, by echoing the plea in the English *Book of Common Prayer* to 'Give us peace in our time, O Lord,' the phrase invites a new descent of the Holy Spirit into the era following the World War I apocalypse.

But 'Out of Season,' like all the stories of *In Our Time*, presents a world of thorough disorientation. Spiritual deadness, anomie, aimless wandering, conflict between genders and cultures, and miscommunication—these define the relationship between the expatriate American couple and their guide Peduzzi, and emerge more broadly as Hemingway's concerns in *In Our Time*, his first major inquiry into the state of the lost generation. The story suggests powerfully that we may only understand our time as the communal loss of temporal, geographical, and cultural certainties; and it focuses *In Our Time*'s often ironic and sometimes funny quests for adequate guides, codes of conduct, and manly actions in a world where the old, communal prayers seem to have lost their power.

The Americans of 'Out of Season' lack both a cohesive sense of time and a language in which to express its loss. Peduzzi intends the Americans to fish before the season officially opens; the young gentleman is tardy at the beginning of the story; the Specialty of Domestic and Foreign Wines shop is 'closed until two' (*IOT* 98) when Peduzzi tries to purchase marsala; and Tiny, the young wife, may herself be 'past her time'—that is, pregnant. Narrative chronology, too, seems oddly truncated. In the first paragraph, for instance, the statement that the 'young gentleman went back into the hotel and spoke to his wife' segues directly into 'He and Peduzzi started down the road.' The narrative suspends the familiar logic of sequential events—the young gentleman speaking to his wife, then coming out of the hotel, then starting down the road. Momentary and fragmentary actions appear out of a continuum we can only intuit. To be

out of season is to experience time as other, to see it as separate from the normal process and aspirations of human life. Narrative gaps in time and action suggest that dissociation from commonplace logic....

If temporal dislocations characterize 'our time,' how much more ironic sounds the prayer to 'give us peace...O Lord.' For the intercessor—the Holy Spirit—of 'Out of Season' is the war veteran Peduzzi, who tries to intercede between the warring couple but proves hilariously inept at setting things right. Though the Holy Spirit bestows the gift of tongues on Christ's disciples, Peduzzi merely confuses his charges as he speaks '[p]art of the time in d-Ampezzo dialect and sometimes in Tyrolen German dialect,' and sometimes in Italian, while the 'young gentleman and the wife understood nothing.' Yet Peduzzi, clownish as he seems, is the one character who is not ruled entirely by disrupted chronologies. For Peduzzi, unlike the American couple, the duration of time spent does not alter the significance and value of the experience....

The day and Peduzzi together experience rebirth along with the resurrected sun; time cycles back, reminding us of the seasonal return of life, light, sun, and spring. And perhaps the tipped bottle reminds us of the rites practiced from generation to generation to celebrate that return. Though we should not miss the irony of Peduzzi's heroic stature—'Life was opening out,' he promises himself when accepting four lire from the young gentleman at the end of the story, which reminds us that to begin with 'On the for lire Peduzzi had earned by spading the hotel garden he got quite drunk'—for a moment he lives in transcendent or mythic time. He experiences briefly the unchangingness of seasonal change.

Peduzzi's bumbling efforts to save the day appear painfully (though comically) representative of our time and *In Our Time*, for Hemingway, like many other modernist writers, saw the disruption of time and mythic experience as at once a pressing reality and a pertinent metaphor for the entire angst- and anomie-ridden post-World War I landscape. Like other Modernists, Hemingway understood that such a drastic reshaping of temporal experience demanded new narrative strategies. T. S. Eliot put the case most strikingly, claiming that others would follow James Joyce in finding ways of 'controlling, or ordering, of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.' Works like 'The Waste Land' (1922) and *In Our Time* register the decay of what must have seemed fundamental verities: religion, intimate human relationships, hierarchies of culture and class, masculine authority. New strategies of fragmentation, temporal discontinuity, and abrupt juxtaposition would be pressed into service as attempts to define and respond to a terrifyingly denatured and devitalized landscape of alienation, lostness, and emptiness. The wanderers of Hemingway's stories, out of season and beset with impotent guides like Peduzzi, are at once empty and revelatory of these profound changes."

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

Michael Hollister (2015)