in our time
by
ernest hemingway

paris
three mountains press
1924
in our time:
The 1924 Text

Ernest Hemingway

Edited by James Gifford
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INTRODUCTION

Since its first publication, critics have recognized Hemingway’s 1924 *In our time* as a major development in American literature and Modernism. Edmund Wilson, in one of the first reviews, gave the collection high praise and wrote that Hemingway “almost invented a form of his own” (340). In Wilson’s view, the book was a breakthrough with “more artistic dignity than anything else about the period of the war that has as yet been written by an American” (340). However, after Hemingway’s expansion and revision of the collection and the republication of the book as *In Our Time* (with capital letters) in New York by Boni & Liveright, the 1924 Three Mountains Press edition from Paris became nearly impossible to acquire. *In Our Time* displaced *in our time*, and without any trade edition in print, the 1924 version has been impossible to use in the classroom and difficult for researchers to access. As the first instance of Hemingway’s “theory of omission” or Iceberg theory, which has shaped a generation of writers, the difficulty of accessing the 1924 edition is a genuine problem, one that this editions aims to solve.

Despite the accessibility challenges scholars and students have faced with this book, major critics have proven the importance of the 1924 *in our time* by returning to it again and again after Wilson’s first review. Milton A. Cohen’s *Hemingway’s Laboratory: The Paris in our time* makes the case for the story sequence as a central work to Hemingway’s oeuvre. *Hemingway’s Laboratory* was the first monograph dedicated to the 1924 version, but it draws from a lengthy tradition of commentary and recognition, including E.R. Hagemann’s important study “A Collation, With Commentary of the Five Texts of the Chapters in Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, 1923-1938.” As Cohen argues, the critical tendency has been to look at *in our time* as a precursor to *In Our Time* rather than a work com-
plete unto itself. Hemingway contributed to this tendency by claiming to have written the vignettes in *in our time* as “chapter headings” (Hemingway, *Ernest 5*), but Cohen shows this is quite unlikely since Hemingway “first wrote them in 1924 for a commissioned book to consist only of these chapters, well before he envisioned a story-chapter book or had written the stories to fill it,” which became the 1925 *In Our Time* (Cohen x). Cohen argues for a trade edition of the 1924 *in our time*, and it may be hoped that this project serves the need in lieu of a commercial printing. For any study of the 1924 state of the text, Cohen’s work is invaluable for scholars as well as students, in particular his extended close readings of each chapter of *in our time* that form the final chapter of his study.

**Theory of Omission**

Despite the composition of this text at an early stage in Hemingway’s career, readers will also notice in *in our time* the clear operation of Hemingway’s “theory of omission” or “iceberg theory” of writing. For those readers who are coming to Hemingway for the first time or with less familiarity, this is an omission from the text of overt descriptions of some crucial matter around which the emotions or themes of the text pivot. Most typically, students encounter this in his story “Hills Like White Elephants,” in which the characters argue without explicit resolution over an unplanned pregnancy and possible abortion that are never directly mentioned. In the popular phrasing, this is to “show not tell” a reader what is occurring, which requires an active form of reading in which the reader participates in and contributes to the texts rather than passively relying on narrative or self-explication. Hemingway’s “theory of omission” is a more nuanced extension of “show not tell” in which the absent matter can be detected by its influence on those things that do appear in the text.

As an instance of omission, in “chapter 2” of *in our time*, the “kid” matador “shows” his exhaustion and the emotional intensity of his experience killing five bulls, but the text itself never describes
those feelings directly. We may see their profound impact but not find a description. Likewise, in “chapter 10” the reader is left to interpret the protagonist’s emotional response to his broken engagement based on his contracting gonorrhea, though the reader is never actually told he had even received the letter that would cause him such pain. We understand that he has been wounded emotionally and that his tryst with an anonymous “sales girl” was how he dealt with the wound and to unproductively prove his masculinity to himself, though none of this is actually written nor is any of this emotional culmination of the narrative explicitly described in the text. The intensity of the reader’s and protagonist’s response to these omitted materials was made more poignant when the autobiographical inspiration for the story was made public in 1961. Agnes von Kurowsky Stanfield was an American nurse in the Red Cross in Milan who tended to Hemingway, and the two fell in love. They planned to marry, but she broke it off by letter when she became engaged to an Italian officer, much as occurs in “chapter 10.” In Hemingway’s revisions to in our time “Ag” becomes renamed as “Luz” to further distance the work from its autobiographical origins.

The “iceberg” that sits behind the text, the majority of its mass that is missed by an observer who sees only above the waterline, informs how we read. If the reader learns to respond to the missing descriptions in “chapter 10,” such as the young man’s heartbreak, that lesson then leads to a re-reading of “chapter 4” and the shootings at Mons. The soldier shooting enemy Germans is also experiencing something that will shape him for the rest of his life, and once again the reader is not told the nature of this emotional experience nor are the circumstances that lead to it made clear. We see the outcomes and intuit the consequences, and in many respects we are “shown” both, but they remain implicit rather than explicit. As H.R. Stoneback shows, “the omitted parts of the tale may generate the core feeling of the text” (4). In each instance and others across in our time, suffering, politics, economics, social revolution, love, and loss are all shown without being told, much as a shadow indicates an unseen object or we may recognize a past event based
on present consequences.

Other breakthroughs for Hemingway as a stylistic innovator and experimental prose stylist appear here for the first time. While Hemingway is famous for his precise language, this precision also leaves enormous ambiguities since it may tell the reader a great deal about something that is only an outcome of another unseen force. That is, the precision may trace the outline of omitted materials. In the same way, the reader’s anticipations are goaded, as in “chapter 12” in which the horse’s struggles are only slowly revealed to be a part of another bull fight. In the subsequent “chapter 13” the struggle between “he” and “I” is also given to the reader for resolution. We even know in “chapter 17” that the “negroes” being hanged “were very frightened” (19), but the experiences and emotions of Sam Cardinella at precisely “six o’clock in the morning” are only visible in their consequences but not any description. Ambiguity and precision are deeply bound to the omissions here, as are the “unwriterly” plain language and rugged, masculine brevity that have, in many ways, come to define American prose across the rest of the twentieth century. And as is characteristic for Hemingway, the rugged masculinity on display here in subject matter and style are set atop emasculated, traumatized, and frail male characters in a way that also tempts the reader to question the contradictions and complications of social gender norms. Like Jake Barnes in Hemingway’s next major work, *The Sun Also Rises*, the exterior of hard masculine virility appears only as a social performance that masks the omitted traumatized, quasi-castrated male struggling with an impossible role. The contrast between the rugged style and the emasculated characters is difficult to overlook.

Hemingway is, then, a far more difficult author than the simplicity of his prose suggests. This is, in many respects, the greatest challenge and the greatest reward for reading Hemingway: he is both extremely easy and extremely difficult. The contrast lies between his clear and simple prose versus his unstated or implicit concerns. This leads many readers to assume they have “understood” Hemingway by simply reading him when we must first recognize how he trains us to be more careful and more critical read-
ers. In this respect, Hemingway is a pedagogical writer insofar as he teaches his readers a new form of attention, a new form of sensitivity to language.

**TIME IN CONTEXT**

During the First World War, Hemingway served in the Red Cross as an ambulance driver in Italy. He was badly wounded in the Italian front lines and had shrapnel wounds in both legs, which left him in hospital for six months, although he was not permanently injured from these wounds. After the war, in 1921, he began serving as the foreign correspondent for *The Toronto Star* newspaper in Paris. There he met Sylvia Beach, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, and many other modernists.

This time period after the First World War was also marked by unstable currency exchange rates, which often gave the American dollar a great advantage in Europe. A casually working American who had a modest but reliable salary in American dollars could live reasonably well in France. Many American writers took advantage of this, and the “Americans in Paris” moment arrived. Many writers from Canada and the USA moved to Paris or London to take advantage of exchange rates, and Hemingway was among them.

Amid the thick of this milieu, *in our time* was first published in 1924, one year before F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald and Hemingway were good friends, though Hemingway also competed with Fitzgerald, and both of their books are deeply concerned with the American Dream. They were also both responding to the preceding generation of American authors who had become famous in the modernist movement, in particular T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, as well as the Irish writer James Joyce. The use of the em dash to denote direct discourse is a trait drawn from Joyce, later revised to traditional quotations marks in subsequent editions. Hemingway, despite his very clear prose, was also closely tied to the extraordinarily experimental writer Gertrude Stein. Amidst this historical moment and artistic milieu, *in our time* developed as an expression of both in content and form.
The 1924 collection is also remarkably political, although the theory of omission means its politics are not explicit. The first three chapters cover the major themes of the project: the First World War, bullfighting, and the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe following the Greco-Turkish War. Their juxtaposition suggests a relationship between these forms of violence, especially the execution of the senior Greek officials in “chapter 6” and the contrasting execution of the Chicago mobster Sam Cardinelli in “chapter 17” that displaces the War to sit between chapters on the death of a bullfighter and the deposed King Constantine I of Greece. David Roessel has shown the crucial importance of Hemingway’s depictions of the Asia Minor Catastrophe to British and American cultural conceptualizations of Greece (240), and across the sequence as a whole the consequences of violence in war, crime, and sport appear much as the character Nick’s response to his broken engagement. That is, the reader may see the consequences but their relationship to the event is implied only through juxtaposition.

While the First World War plays an obvious role as a major trauma to Europe as well as for Hemingway based on his personal experiences of the Great War, the end of the Greco-Turkish War in the massacre at Smyrna is also crucial in the collection. His attention developed from his dispatches for the Toronto Star on the fall of Smyrna. Greece refers to the events of 1922 as the Asia Minor Catastrophe, the loss of ancient Greek territory to Turkey and the forced evacuation of the Greek population after the massacre of tens of thousands in the burning of Smyrna. Its importance to in our time is also marked by its position near the opening, middle, and at the close of the collection. Furthermore, Hemingway’s final major revision to In Our Time in 1930 was the addition of “On The Quai at Smyrna” to precede the numbered chapters—this new chapter depicts graphically the suffering of the Greek population of Smyrna during the burning of the city and the massacre of thousands of Greeks and Armenians while also pointing to the suffering of the animals. The continuity of suffering across in our time thereby joins the various forms of violence and those who experience it, die from it, or struggle through both physical and emotional wounds as
its consequence.

The collapse of the dream of a Greater Greece, a nationalist vision of country love, is also not simple. In the collection it contrasts against the antinationalism of the Hungarian communist in “chapter 11” who passionately seeks an international movement of workers across national divisions bound to each other regardless of race and ethnicity. However, he finds only suffering for his efforts. An unanswered element of this chapter is the sympathy evoked in the reader for the young communist against the nationalist interests that thwart him and the work of the first person narrator to support him. This may be one more great power shifting its influence and bringing about complex consequences, as with the Great War or Asia Minor Catastrophe, or it may be a political vision of an alternative world struggling to emerge and ameliorate the troubles of the time. John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev have suggested Hemingway became a dilettante spy for the USSR in 1941 based on KGB files, but there is no evidence of his doing so (152-155). Keneth Kinnamon has outlined the history of Hemingway’s politics thoroughly, ranging from his leftism to his protests against communism, and also including those critics who identify him as a conservative and even Hemingway’s description of himself to Don Dos Passos as an anarchist (Kinnamon 156, 149, 158). However, the nature of Hemingway’s shifting political interests, especially from the 1920s to the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, remains unclear, even despite his financial support of the Cuban communists. For Kinnamon, “Hemingway was always on the left” (168), but how this might shape a reading of the 1924 in our time is bound in this text to the theory of omission. That is, the pressing urgency of political commitments call to the reader, but the expression or articulation of those commitments hides in the scotoma, the blind spot, with everything around it tracing the missing space while the matter itself remains inscrutable even while influential.

A final contextual matter is race, ranging from the “wops” of “chapter 9” to the execution of the Italian American mobster Sam Cardinella and the “negroes” to be hanged on the same day in
“chapter 17.” The contrast between mob violence and state violence is on display in the chapter, setting it in clear comparison to the state executions for treason in “chapter 6” but also the deaths of the matador and the bulls. What is typically set as Hemingway’s hard, masculine prose style is bound to a deep sensitivity over trauma and suffering, and for an American writer, the tension binding suffering to race is unavoidable.

These contextualizations then leave the reader with a simple prose showing much complexity from an author sensitive to human suffering, social conflicts around race, the operations of nationalist wars on human actors, and the major ideological conflicts of the twentieth century. Marking out the scope of *in our time* is a more capacious challenge than the text first suggests.

**ABOUT THIS EDITION**

This edition makes the 1924 version of *in our time* available for the first time since the 1977 facsimile edition, which was in a print run limited to 1700 copies. The original edition was printed in only 170 copies and is often presented as the scarcest of Hemingway’s works. While this new edition is intended for student and classroom use, it also brings the text to a wider scholarly audience. Annotations are intended for a general student readership, and more extensive critical resources are indicated in the Works Cited.

The first six chapters of *in our time* are slightly revised from their publication in *The Little Review*, for which Ezra Pound had encouraged Hemingway’s contribution. They appear again between the chapters, and extended in some instances, in the 1925 Boni & Liveright edition in New York, although several matters of copyediting are of uncertain origin, some certainly originating in the publisher with or without Hemingway’s approval. Pound edited the 1924 *in our time* for Three Mountains Press, and he is known for actively intervening in other texts he edited, including T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in 1922 and James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as serialized in *The Egoist* from 1914-1915. In addition, the distinction between Hemingway’s and his editors’ correc-
tions in the editions between 1925 and 1930 is not entirely clear, particularly so for punctuation. The collection reached its final form, apart from minor revisions, in 1930 when “On the Quia at Smyrna” was added to precede the other numbered chapters. Peter L. Hays’ A Concordance to Hemingway’s In Our Time is the definitive work on the various witnesses of the text with Hagemann’s “A Collation, With Commentary of the Five Texts of the Chapters in Hemingway’s In Our Time, 1923-1938.”

Several student research assistants made this edition possible. Special acknowledgement goes to Camilla Castro with Nyarai Tawengwa, Peter Mate, Maria Zrno, and Mickey Truong.

**TEXTUAL NOTES**

Hemingway’s original ligatures, italics, and other markers such as the em dash to indicate direct discourse are all retained here. Hemingway later repudiated the lower case title that is also reflected in the chapter headings, but both are retained here per the original text. Italicization of foreign words is inconsistent in the original text, and both the roman and italics forms are retained in this edition consistent with the 1924 printing.
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