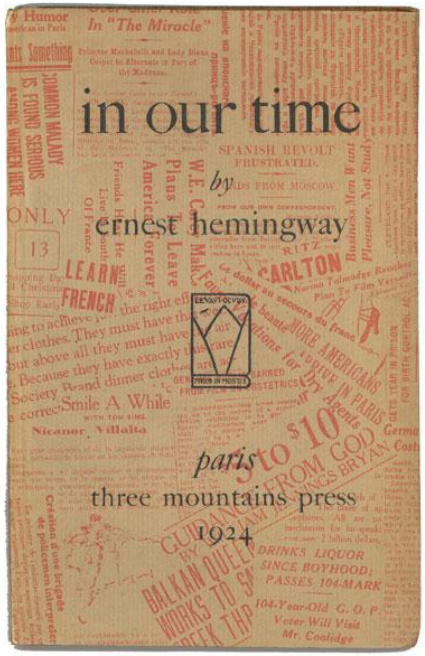
Teaching *In Our Time* in Our Time

An Online Professional Development Seminar



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AMERICA *in* CLASS®
from the National Humanities Center

Common Core State Standards

COMMON CORE GOALS

- Advance the goal of the **Common Core State Standards** in English Language Arts and literacy in history and social studies: "To help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy"
- Promote close attentive reading
- Foster deep and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts

Teaching *In Our Time* in Our Time

GOALS

- To identify ways that Hemingway made use of avant-garde techniques of expression and representation…
- And employed them to forge a powerful and enduring vision of modern war and modern life.
- To hone awareness of the methods of implication and juxtaposition crucial to Hemingway's artistry.

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UNDERSTANDING

- In *In Our Time* Hemingway brought the expressive techniques nurtured in the avant-garde world of little magazines to broad popular awareness.
- *In Our Time* makes a powerful contribution to the modern understanding of war.
- *In Our Time* is a cubist novel that implicitly tells a prodigal son story, as so much American writing of the 1920s does. Boy grows up in a declining world of patriarchal authority; comes to adulthood in an encounter with the brutality and emptiness of war and the degradation of modern commercial society; returns home to an ascetic retreat into the deep, primitive heart of his country. The marvel is the narrative and expressive technique that accomplishes two things: reveals this implicit story only in the implication created by juxtaposition of fragments and styles and forges a literary style that feels consistent with the ascetic discipline modeled by its protagonist.

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FROM THE FORUM
Challenges, Issues, Questions

- How can we get beyond seeing Hemingway as little more that a misogynistic alcoholic who liked nature because it didn't talk back to him?
- How can we prevent students from making a one-to-one correspondence between Nick Adams and Ernest Hemingway?

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A Pinnacle of Feeling: American Literature and Presidential Government
(2008)

Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism
(2000)

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- *In Our Time* (1925) was Ernest Hemingway's first important book.
- Hemingway (1899-1961) wrote most of the book's stories and vignettes, or "interchapters," during the early 20s while living in Paris and travelling through Europe as a reporter for the Toronto *Star.*
- During these years, he was studying at the feet of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce and publishing in avant-garde "little" magazines. Two, shorter versions of the collection were published by small, coterie publishers.

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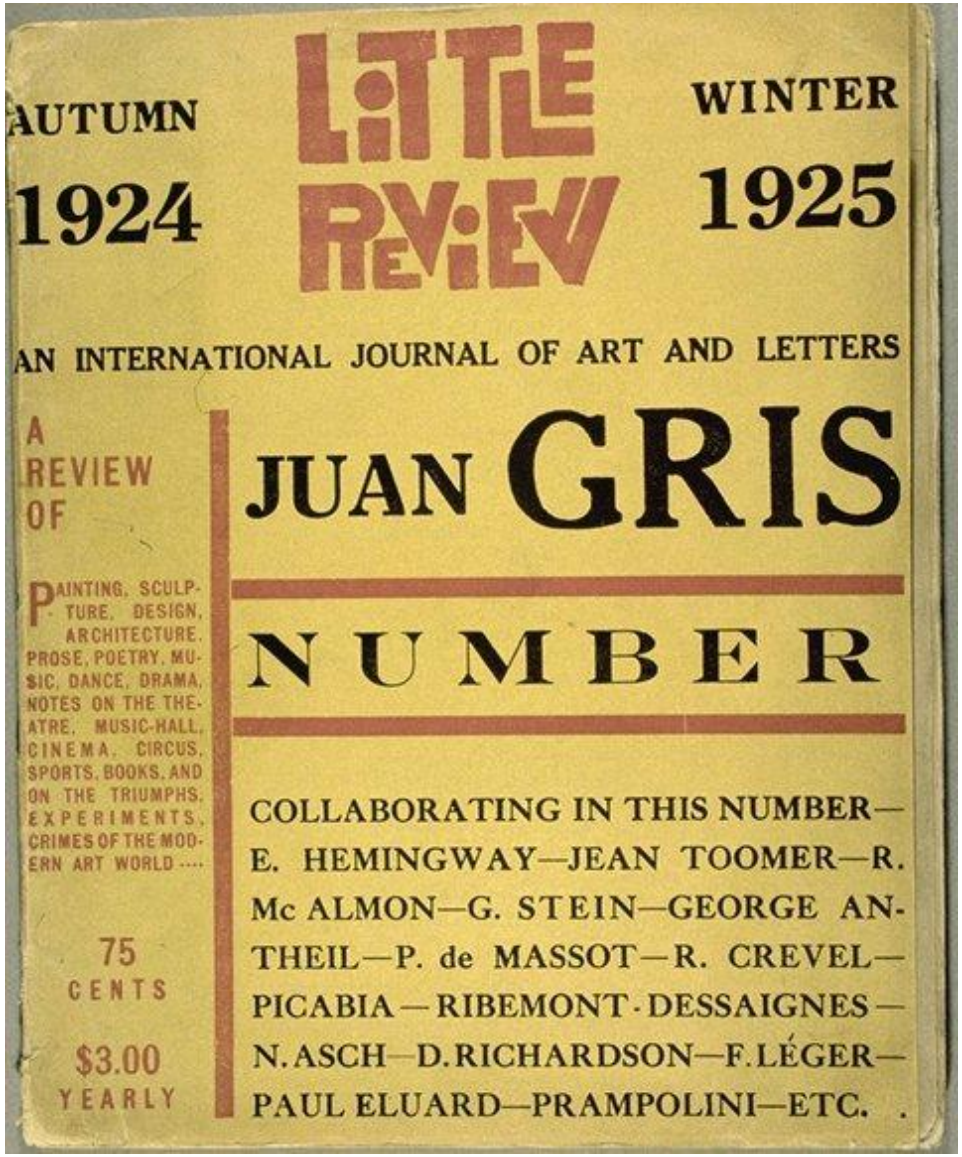

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- The 1925 edition of *IOT* was published by Boni & Livewright--then a hot, new press, and a rival to the prestige house Alfred A. Knopf, whose mission was to bring modernist writing to the mass public.

- The book earned Hemingway admiring reviews and gave him the reputation that enabled his move to Scribner's, where he would publish his bestselling novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

- Like *The Waste Land* (1922), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Hemingway's collection thus represents the moment when the new literary and cultural styles honed among bohemians and avant-gardists broke out to achieve recognition among a broad reading public.

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The book is recognizably modernist in two, related senses:

- It thumbs its nose at conventional literary taste and conventional middle-class values, in particular proposing a bleakly disenchanted view of the twin evils of modern war and modern civilization. A young person's book, reflecting contempt for the shallowness, false piety, artificiality of bourgeois life. Cf. "Soldier's Home."

  EH to Ezra Pound: "Fuck literature."

  Hemingway's Mother: "every page fills me with sick loathing."

- To express these attitudes, it makes use of narrative styles, forms, and diction that were strikingly new and that demanded ways of reading that were unfamiliar then and that remain challenging now.

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More specifically, the book encourages us to develop three closely associated reading skills:

- Reading for style: appreciating the artistry, the control, the performance of the writer--who is analogous in this way to the toreador, the athlete, the fisherman;
- Reading for implication: appreciating what is suggested, but not said; and
- Reading for juxtaposition: taking note of what is implied in the echoes and allusions between different elements of the book.

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Reading *IOT* through these lenses, we can see that it is akin to *a cubist novel*.

It hints at the main elements of a conventional narrative: a protagonist; secondary characters and associates; conflict, development and resolution.

But it does not draw these elements into a strongly coherent picture. Instead, it gives the story added resonance partly by leaving its larger design fragmentary and incomplete.

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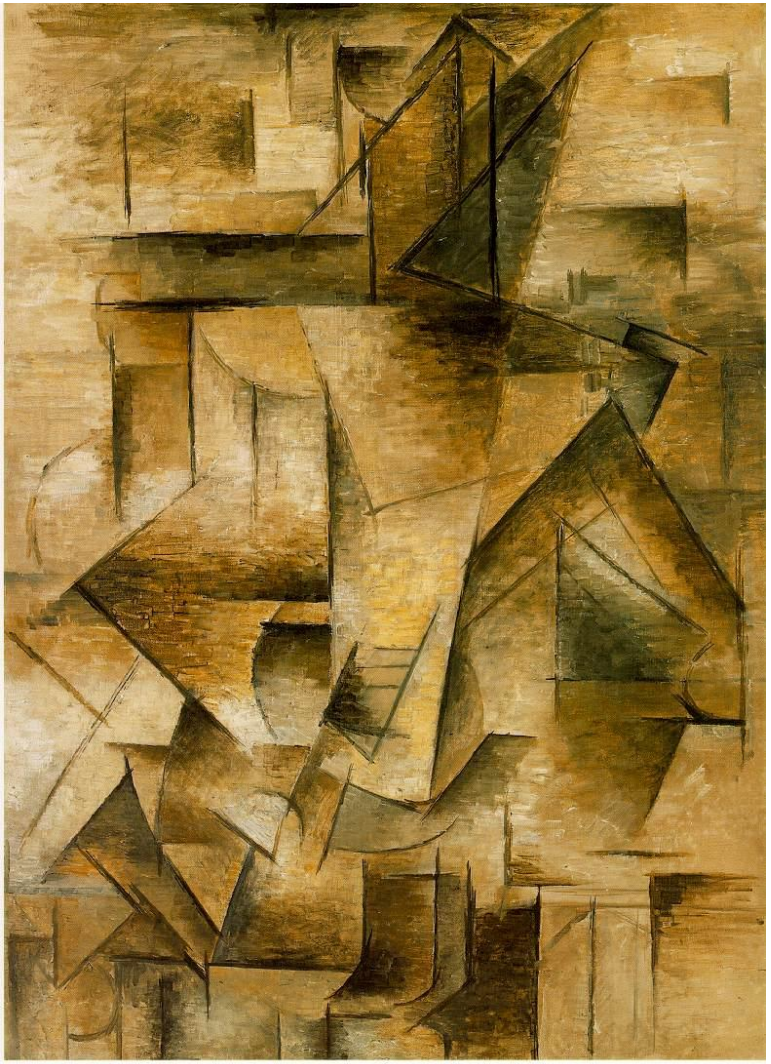
Paul Rosenfeld review *IOT* for *The New Republic* in 1925:

"Hemingway's stories belong with cubist painting, [and Stravinsky's] *Le Sacre du Printemps*." All create a "primitive modern idiom" by combining the use of "direct, crude, rudimentary forms of the primitive classes" with the "textures and rhythms of the mechanical and industrial world."

"Plastic elements accurately felt are opposed point against point, and a whole brought into view."



Picasso, *Guitar Player*, 1910

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What "whole" is "brought into view"? What larger story does *IOT* hint at?

A prominent narrative of the American 1920s: a disenchanted, prodigal son story.

Think, e.g., Nick Carraway.

Boy grows up, leaves his family, encounters the brutality and spiritual corruption of the modern world, and ultimately returns to a provisional, uncertain home.

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A story told by juxtaposition.

Consider: how do the first two, complete stories in the book— “On the Quai at Smyrna” and “Indian Camp”--compare to each other?

What elements do they share in common?

How do they differ?

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The strange thing was, he said, how they screamed every night at midnight. I do not know why they screamed at that time. We were in the harbour and they were all on the pier and at midnight they started screaming. We used to turn the searchlight on them to quiet them.

. . .

It was all a pleasant business. My word yes a pleasant business.

The first and last lines of "*On the Quai at Smyrna*"

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At the lake shore there was another rowboat drawn up. The two Indians stood waiting.

. . .

The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.

In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure he would never die.

The first and last lines of "*Indian Camp*"

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- These stories are similar in their remarkable compression and their excision of conventional context. And they share some elements. Such as?
- How do they differ? In setting, time, time frame, and event? In point of view? In theme and implication?
- In particular, how might the juxtaposition of Nick's father and the speaker in "On the Quai" affect our view of these two men? What differences between them are we asked to recognize?

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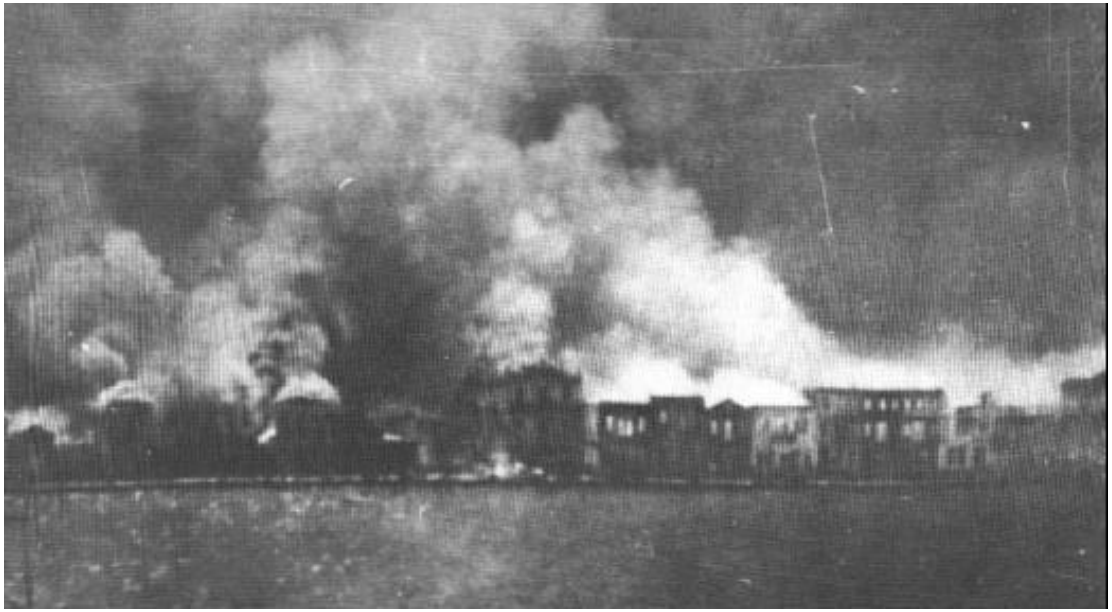

"On the Quai at Smyrna" describes a once widely noted (and still disputed) humanitarian disaster produced by the Greco-Turkish War of 1922. This brutal conflict, which developed out of the breakup of the imperial order following WWI, involved mass suffering, ethnic cleansing, and craven or ineffectual action by the European powers. Hemingway witnessed some of this conflict as a reporter and refers to it in "Chapter II," "Chapter V" and "L'Envoi."

For EH and his contemporaries, in other words, "Smyrna" would have had the resonance we hear in the names "Sarajevo" or "Rwanda."

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Beginning *IOT* with "Quai," in short, implied a strong view of the qualities that characterize "our time"—i.e., what the characteristics of the modern world are.

Importantly, the book's title—like "The Sun Also Rises," a quotation from *Ecclesiastes*--is drawn from a Christian religious text. The phrase, which was suggested to Hemingway by Ezra Pound, comes from *The Book of Common Prayer*. It appears in the responses following the "Apostle's Creed":

Minister:	O Lord, show thy mercy upon us.
Answer:	And grant us thy salvation.
. . .	
Minister:	O Lord, save thy people.
Answer:	And bless thine inheritance.
Minister:	Give peace in our time, O Lord.
Answer:	For it is thou, Lord, only, that makest us dwell in safety.
Minister:	O God, make clean our hearts within us.
Answer:	And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

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- What does Hemingway mean to suggest by juxtaposing this religious text with his collection of stories?

- What should we recognize about our time from the counterpoint between the stories and the religious text?

For a useful, different vantage on this question, consider the next, full-length story, "*The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife*."

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Dick Boulton came from the Indian camp to cut up logs for Nick's father. He brought his son Eddy and another Indian named Billy Tabeshaw with him. They came in through the back gate out of the woods.

. . .

"I know where there's black squirrels, Daddy," Nick said.
"All right," said his father. "Let's go there."

The first and last lines of "*The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife*"

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How does this story compare to “Indian Camp”?

- How do the settings differ?
- Or the depiction of Native Americans?
- Or the view of Dr. Adams? (What new complications appear in his life? How, e.g, has his relation to medical journals changed?)
- How have the roles of Nick and his father altered?

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The difference between “Indian Camp” and “The Doctor . . . , ” in short, implies a painful maturing of consciousness on young Nick’s part. Like Joyce in *Portrait*, EH doesn’t describe this growth; he shows it via small changes in narrative style and detail.

But, alongside “Quai” and *IOT*’s “chapters,” the juxtaposition of the stories also implies a view of modern society. What world is Nick coming to be aware of as he grows older?

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Another place in which Hemingway uses juxtaposition artfully to create important tonal echoes and intimations occurs in the counterpoint between the *IOT*'s "interchapters"—the book's numbered "chapters"--and the titled stories.

The interchapters describe three similar, yet different kinds of scenes. What are they? What do they have in common? How do they differ?

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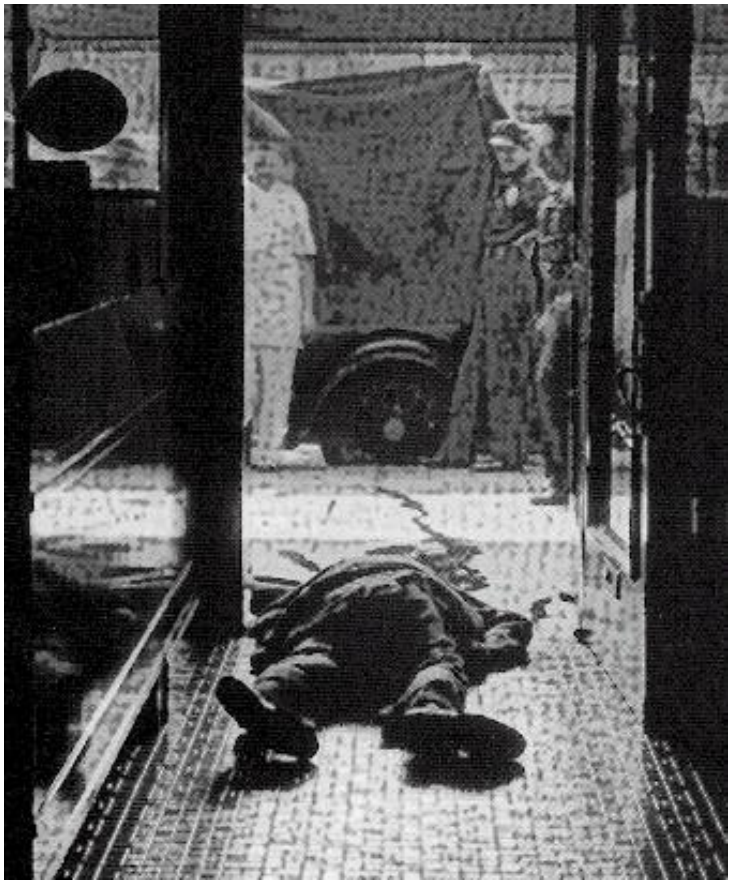

At two o'clock in the morning two Hungarians got into a cigar store at Fifteenth Street and Grand Avenue. . . . Boyle shot one off the seat of the wagon and one out of the wagon box.

. . .

Wops, said Boyle, I can tell wops a mile off

The opening and concluding lines of "Chapter VIII"

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The first matador got the horn through his sword hand and the crowd hooted him. The second matador slipped and the bull caught him through the belly. . . . The kid came out and had to kill five bulls because you can't have more than three matadors. . . . [H]e finally made it. He sat down in the sand and puked and they held a cape over him while the crowd hollered and threw things down into the bull ring.

The opening and conclusion of "Chapter IX"

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How do these two scenes compare to each other? What differences does Hemingway expect us to recognize?

What do we know about the world of the bullfight from the description of the beautiful toreador (Ch. XII)? From the acknowledgment of the bad toreador (Ch. XI) that he is "not really a good bull fighter"? How do these people compare to Drevitts and Boyle, or Sam Cardinella, or the WWI combatants described in the "interchapters"?

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Notice that there is a structure implied in the order of Hemingway's vignettes:

Chapters 1-7	War, revolution in Europe
Chapter 8	Crime in U.S.
Chapters 9-14	Bullfighting in Spain
Chapter 15	Crime in U.S.
L'Envoi	Revolution in Europe, coming to U.S.?

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Note that the scenes of bullfighting are placed at the center of the book. But note, too, that they are flanked by depictions of different kinds of violence and death.

Hemingway heightens the intimations of this structure by juxtaposing his scenes of bullfighting with stories that feature Americans living in Europe:

- "The Revolutionist"
- "Mr. and Mrs. Elliott"
- "Cat in the Rain"
- "Out of Season"
- "Cross-Country Snow"
- "My Old Man"

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What are we meant to perceive in the similarities among this group of stories? E.g., what does the unhappy married couple in "Out of Season" or "Cat in the Rain" have in common with the young Communist described in "The Revolutionist"? How are they all unlike the people at the bullfights?

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How might the young Communist in turn compare to Nick Adams? (The story describes events in 1919, but was written after Mussolini had taken power in Italy in 1922.) That he does not like Mantegna and conceals his copies of Avanti—the newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party—in reproductions of Piero Della Francesca tells us a lot about the revolutionist from Hemingway's perspective?

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A still more striking example of intimation. What do we know from the way George regards his wife in “Cat in the Rain”?

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She went over and sat in front of the mirror of the dressing table looking at herself with the hand glass. She studied her profile, first one side and then the other. Then she studied the back of her and her neck.

"Don't you think it would be a good idea if I let my hair grow out?" she asked, looking at her profile again.

George looked up and saw the back of her neck, clipped close like a boy's.

"I like it the way it is."

"I get so tired of it," she said. "I get so tired of looking like a boy."

George shifted his position in the bed. He hadn't looked away since she started to speak.

"You look pretty darn nice," he said.

She laid the mirror down on the dresser and went over to the window and looked out. It was getting dark.

"I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel," she said. "I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her. . . . And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring . . . .

"Oh, shut up and get something to read," George said. He was reading again.

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Discussion Questions

- What can we guess about the marriage of George and his wife from this scene alone?
- What do we know about their different desires?
- What pathos does Hemingway expect us to see in George and his wife's situation?
- How does George compare to the unnamed protagonist of "Out of Season," or to Nick in "Cross-Country Snow" or to Joe in "My Old Man"?

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As with Hemingway's interchapters, stories like "The Revolutionist" and "Out of Season" are implicitly placed in a larger structure created by the order of *IOT*'s stories.

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2 (Indian Camp) – 6 (Battler)	Nick Adams in America
7 (Very Short) – 8 (Soldier's Home)	Bad Homecomings
9 (Revolutionist) – 14 (My Old Man)	Americans lost in Europe
15-16 (Big 2 Heart)	Nick Adams in America

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In fact, the book not only juxtaposes individual fragments; it artfully places two large-scale narrative strands—like musical themes--in counterpoint. One is developed in the order of the interchapters, and the other is developed by the pattern of the titled stories.

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Ch. 1-7	War in Europe	2 - 6	Nick in U.S.
Ch. 8	Crime in U.S.	7-8	Bad returns
Ch. 9-14	Bullfight in Spain	9	Expats
Ch. 15	Crime in U.S.	15-16	Nick in U.S.
L'Envoi	Rev in Europe		

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All of this should help us to see the resonance of Nick's final appearance in the two parts of "Big Two-Hearted River":

Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were done. There had been this to do. Now it was done. It had been a hard trip. He was very tired. That was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it.

Discussion Questions

- What resonance does Hemingway expect us to recognize in this passage?
- What does Nick mean when he thinks, "nothing could touch him"?

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Famously, “Big Two-Hearted River” concludes with Nick declining to fish the swamp:

Nick did not want to go in there now. He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits. . . . [I]n the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today.

Discussion Questions

- What are we meant to understand about Nick by his reluctance to fish the swamp?
- How in this way does he compare to the bullfighters at the center of the book?

Final slide

Thank you