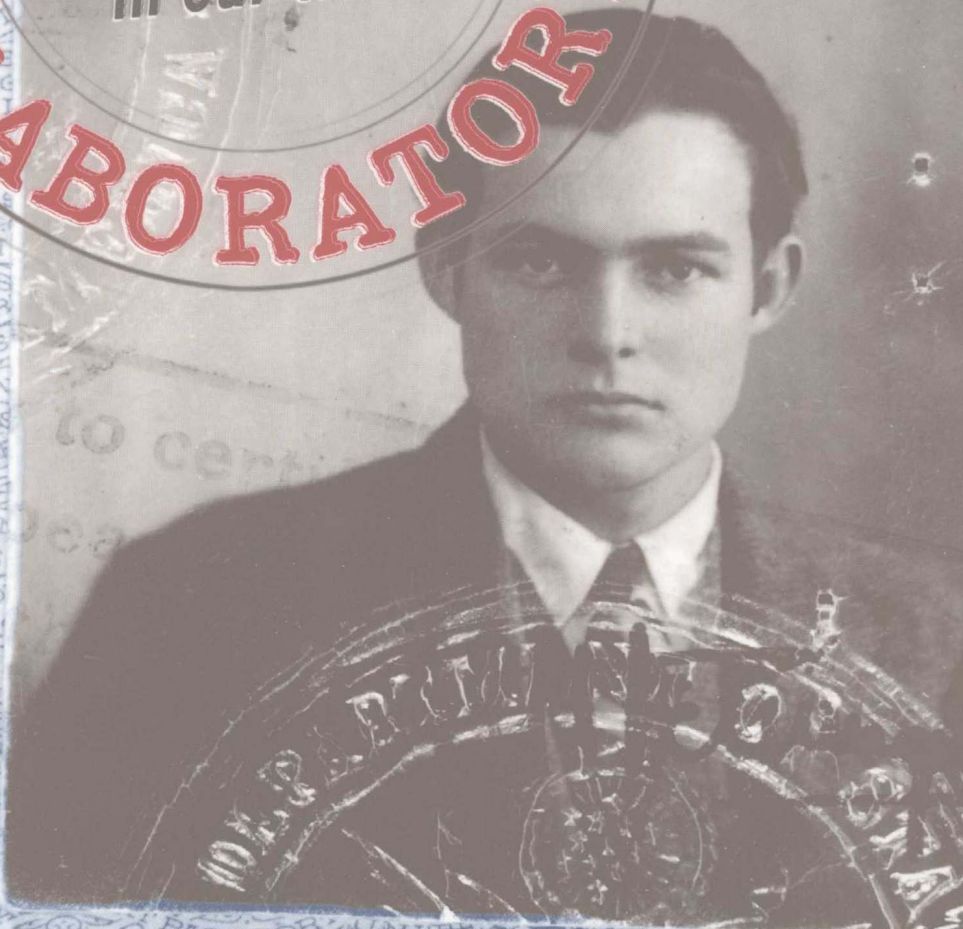


HEMINGWAY'S

THE PARIS
in our time

*

LABORATORY



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Hemingway's Laboratory

The Paris *in our time*

Milton A. Cohen

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Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's books of fiction are commonly thought to begin with *In Our Time*, the remarkable collection of stories interspersed with short "chapters" that he published in 1925. Certainly, that book's acclaim launched his career among knowledgeable critics, journalists, and writers, just as *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) established Hemingway's popular success.

Less well known are two small books Hemingway produced before *In Our Time: Three Stories & Ten Poems* (1923) and *in our time* (1924).¹ Published by little presses in Paris, each book's publication run was tiny: 300 and 170 copies respectively. Except for small holograph editions that appeared in 1977, neither book has been reprinted to date, and extant copies of the originals can be found only in rare book collections.² Understandably, these books have attracted relatively few readers, and even Hemingway scholars tend to neglect them, typically discussing their contents in the context of later collections containing them—*In Our Time*, *The First Forty-nine Stories*, *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, *Ernest Hemingway: 88 Poems*—rather than in their original provenance. To date, no scholarly book before this one has focused exclusively on either *Three Stories & Ten Poems* or *in our time*.³

But do these slender books merit critical studies? Here, the case for each book must be considered separately, and I shall argue only for *in our time*. Three related questions bear on this issue: Are the contents of *in our time*—eighteen brief chapters—important to Hemingway's work? Do the chapters acquire a different meaning when considered as an integral unit rather than interspersed with short stories, as in *In Our Time*? And have these chapters, taken together, received their just due from critics and scholars?

The first question—the importance of the chapters to Hemingway's oeuvre—is easiest. From their first appearance in 1924, the *in our time*

chapters have been recognized by their author, readers, and critics as profoundly compelling prose in an altogether new form. “[I]t is where I think I have gotten hold of it,” Hemingway wrote to Edmund Wilson a few months after finishing them (25 Nov. 1923, in *Selected Letters* 105). Wilson, the most influential critic of his time for Hemingway’s generation, agreed: “[H]is prose is of the first distinction,” Wilson declared in one of the book’s first reviews and added, “he is . . . strikingly original, and in the dry compressed little vignettes of *In Our Time* [sic], has almost invented a form of his own” (“Dry Points” 120). As I will show in Chapter Two, numerous other reviewers, who had never heard of Ernest Hemingway, shared Wilson’s enthusiasm, and even those repelled by Hemingway’s violent subject matter acknowledged the power of his prose. Fellow writers, too, recognized that, as Scott Fitzgerald put it in recommending the book to his publisher, “He’s the real thing.”⁴

In the ensuing eight decades, scholars and critics have confirmed these judgments overwhelmingly—but usually in studies that examine the chapters in the context of the *In Our Time* stories. To be sure, this format was Hemingway’s final choice for the chapters, and he even went so far as to declare that he had *composed* them as “chapter headings” to be interspersed with the *In Our Time* stories⁵—a dubious claim considering that he wrote them in 1923 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.

Leaving aside important textual differences between the two versions, are the chapters of *in our time* really the same in their impact and in the cumulative effect of their subject and style as the chapters interspersed with stories in *In Our Time*? Hemingway himself provides the answer in describing to Edward O’Brien how the two forms intertwined. The chapters, he felt, had more explosive power:

in between each [story] comes bang! the *In Our Time* [chapter]. . . . I’ve tried to do it so you get the close up [of the stories] very quietly but absolutely solid and the real thing but very close, and then through it all between every story comes the rhythm of the *in our time* chapters. (12 Sept. 1924, *Selected Letters* 123).

The perspective of the chapters—pointillistic glimpses of four realms “in our time”: war, crime, politics, and the bullfight—sharply contrasts with the “quiet,” close-up narratives of individuals in the stories. The chapters “give the picture of the whole between examining it in detail

[in the stories],” Hemingway explained to Edmund Wilson. “Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coast line, and then looking at it with 15X binoculars” (18 Oct. 1924, *Selected Letters* 128).

The common denominator of the chapters is violence and responses to it, while the stories (though certainly not bereft of violence) more typically explore relationships, often between family members or couples. Where the chapters focus on recent and often cataclysmic events (World War I, postwar revolutions, and the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War), several stories reach back into the childhood of their protagonist, Nick Adams, to form a chronological bildungsroman. If the chapters thus served to jolt the quieter stories with the impact of their bloody subjects and their boldly compressed form, the opposite could also be claimed: the stories (in their civilian settings, comparatively slower, more gradual development, and understated emotion) muffle the explosive chapters. Without those dampers, then, the impact of the chapters would be like the climax of a fireworks display—a series of continuous explosions, each succeeding the last without giving readers time to catch their breath—surely a very different effect from their cumulative impact when interspersed with stories.

Studying the chapters together, moreover, brings into sharp relief the development and contrast of their themes and techniques—progressions that the intervening stories can obscure. The six bullfight chapters, for example, contrast impressionable and knowledgeable narrators, and juxtapose bullfighters who are incompetent and skillful, escapist and fatalistic, while the obstreperous, intrusive crowd runs through the chapters like a leitmotif. The botched execution of the cabinet ministers in chapter 6 anticipates the travesty of Sam Cardinella’s execution in chapter 17. Imagistic motifs linking rain with misery and death, tranquil settings and violent action, join chapters across the span of the book. These interconnections apply also to Hemingway’s technical experiments—his sentence rhythms, for instance, or his narrative voices, his multiple perspectives, or his ways of handling of emotion. Parallels, contrasts, and variations of these techniques appear throughout. The conjunctive run-ons of one bullfight narrative (chapter 2) appear again in another (chapter 13); yet the very next bullfight chapter (14) employs a quite different combination of complex-compound sentences and fragments. The soldier-narrator who coolly describes the praying soldier in chapter 8 anticipates the narrator of chapter 11, who skeptically relates the naive absolutism of his younger comrade. Both tones are far removed from that of the bemused kitchen corporal in chapter 1 describing the

drunken antics of his battery and the officer in chapter 4 numbly recalling unexpected combat. Significantly, the sentence rhythms in each of these chapters evoke the speaker's particular mood and thus vary sharply among themselves. Studying the chapters in sequence brings out the range and scope of these explorations—Hemingway's experimental brio. In turn, the question of the book's essential nature grows more acute: is it a series of experiments and self-instructive exercises or a unified whole?⁶

This issue of the book's identity brings us to the third question of how critics have dealt with the chapters. Critical studies have related the chapters to each other, to the *In Our Time* stories, and to Hemingway's work as a whole. Scholars have traced the chapters' historical bases and examined their internal themes and (less commonly) their styles.⁷ But one assumption runs through most of the criticism: that in these chapters Hemingway finally, as he put it, "got hold of it" and found his *métier*—consolidated his style, found his typical subject matter, determined his narrative approaches, and solidified particular techniques such as understatement and omission—the hallmarks, in short, of *the* Hemingway style.⁸

There is much to support this critical assumption since the chapters contain virtually all the components of the mature writing: the violent subjects; the study of how men respond, physically and psychologically, to danger; the stripped-down, uncluttered prose; the careful attention to the rhythms of action; and the muted handling of emotion and themes. Indeed, if this book does mark the consolidation of Hemingway's mature style and subject, its importance for that reason alone would merit a scholarly monograph.

But alongside these characteristically "Hemingway" elements are others more modernist and experimental that he either dropped or modified in his subsequent writing: sentence fragments, syntactical elisions (for example, "and each swing the crowd roaring"), long run-ons linked by *and*, intentionally ambiguous narrators and contexts, quick shifts of narrative voice, and even a self-consciously modernist look, such as using dashes instead of quotation marks to separate dialogue speeches.⁹ Equally important, the chapter texts and drafts reveal how tirelessly Hemingway revised, explored alternatives to or variants of each technical element, and tried out differing combinations of several elements. Experienced Hemingway readers will recognize the deadpan objectivity in the voice narrating chapter 6: "They shot the six cabinet ministers at half-past six in the morning against the wall of a hospital."

But these readers may also wonder why an author subsequently famed for clarity and precision fails to identify who “They” are. Variants of this vagueness in several other chapters show that Hemingway was tinkering with opening sentences that were at once mimetic and semiabstract, journalistically precise and ominously vague in omitting explanatory context. Readers will also hear a plethora of voices in these eighteen brief chapters. Twenty-six different speakers, eight of whom are first-person narrators, reveal an author not only diversifying his characters and finding a credible voice for each, but also trying out multiple perspectives in mini-narratives rather than the single, consistent perspective typical of the short story.

This same exploring of alternatives can be seen in the narrative modes of these chapters, where parodies of fairy tales mingle with quasi-journalistic reporting, where first-person experiential narratives bump up against detached descriptions of action. In sentence rhythms, likewise, Hemingway explores diverse combinations of simple, compound, and complex structures to achieve particular rhythmic and thematic effects. The pervasiveness of this experimentation thus changes the identity of these chapters from a finished work employing a unified style to something far more open-ended and exploratory that tries out multiple styles and narrative techniques.

For this reason, I have titled this study *Hemingway's Laboratory*. Its chief aim is to explore the range, individual effect, and outcome of his experiments in narrative mode (Chapter Three), voice (Chapter Four), and sentence rhythm (Chapter Five). Chapters One and Two, as prologue, provide historical and biographical context, tracing Hemingway's styles and competing professional identities (journalist, author of slick fiction, poet, satirist, realist, modernist) before *in our time*, the key influences on his modernist experiments, the composition of the book itself, and critical responses to it. The final chapter—almost half the book—examines the individual chapters of *in our time*: their historical origins, themes, and styles, including a listing of their sentence structures (which are tabulated in an appendix). In addition, I compare the published text to unpublished drafts, not only to trace the chapter's development but also to reveal Hemingway's evolution as a stylist. Finally, the epilogue considers how the *in our time* experiments fared in his subsequent work: which ones were dropped or modified; how others were polished and developed to form the prose we've come to recognize as inimitably Hemingway's.

Ultimately, in this study I hope to change the way *in our time* is

viewed within the Hemingway canon: not as the consolidation of his mature style, but as the experiments that made that consolidation possible. The same provisional status I impute to the book I also depict in Hemingway's career during the crucial year of 1923; his authorial identity now appears far less calculated and self-determined than is usually thought—than Hemingway wanted us to think—and far more susceptible to the external influence of immediate commissions and potential publications, and to the conflicting tensions of artistic and popular success. Although he gradually sorted out the competing professional identities mentioned above, he continued to waver between avant-garde modernist and popular writer until he discovered, in resolving the multiplicity of these experiments into a single style, that he could be both. Finally, if this study succeeds in establishing a new importance for the chapters of *in our time*, I hope that it will lead to a new trade edition of this seminal work. Hemingway deserves no less.

Hemingway's Laboratory

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PART I

PROLOGUE

1

Before *in our time*

Multiple Directions

When Hemingway and his wife embarked for Paris in December 1921, his literary career was very much up in the air. His publications thus far were virtually nil, and he was uncertain about his intentions. But if he did not know what sort of writer he would become, he knew that he was putting behind him the literary identity he had striven for over the past three and a half years: he packed few of his stories and poems.

Those years had witnessed false starts, multiple directions, wasted effort. Their lodestar was his determination to be a successful writer. Besides his high school juvenilia, he wrote stories and poems continuously after he was wounded in July 1918: in Milan while recuperating; at home in Oak Park, Illinois, and at the family cottage on Walloon Lake, Michigan, in 1919 and summer 1920; and when he lived on his own in Petoskey, Michigan (fall 1919), in Toronto (winter–spring 1920), and finally in Chicago (fall 1920 to fall 1921).¹ Concurrently, since leaving high school in 1917, he had worked on and off as a journalist, writing straight news stories as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, short articles for the *Co-operative Commonwealth* magazine in Chicago, and human interest features as a freelancer for the *Toronto Star*.

This divided identity—journalist, poet, fiction writer—partly explains Hemingway's uncertain direction in 1921, but the *kind* of fiction and poetry he should pursue—popular? modernist? satirical?—was also in flux. Failure as a popular writer and exposure to modernist literature in Chicago had already begun to change his thinking. It would change further in Paris, under the tutelage of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound and the influence of several other modernists. But the ambivalence in his literary identity did not resolve itself immediately. During his first year in Paris, he wrote more poems but finished only two stories, “Up in Michigan” (begun in Chicago) and “My Old Man.” His primary

occupation was still journalism. This chapter will briefly trace these various stages in Hemingway's development and look closely at the formative influences of Anderson, Stein, Pound, Eliot, and journalism on his early experimental writing in Europe. His first serious story, "Up in Michigan," is a touchstone for gauging these influences.

Stories for the *Saturday Evening Post*: Oak Park and Petoskey, 1919–20

The modernist who composed *in our time* in 1923 is scarcely recognizable in the Hemingway of four years earlier, who expected to storm the popular market for short stories. So different are the two, in fact, that his creative writing in Europe amounts to almost a clean break. For this reason, his writing for the popular market needs only brief summary, except for one potential link to the chapters of *in our time*.

The Hemingway who returned to America with his war wounds and Italian cape in 1919 had no intention of becoming an innovative "artist"—his eye was fixed on the popular market of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Red Book*. He brought home stories he had written while recovering from his wounds in Milan, and he wrote new ones at home in Oak Park. When his family returned home from their cottage on Walloon Lake, Michigan, Hemingway stayed on, then rented a room in nearby Petoskey in fall 1919 to continue writing. When he moved to Chicago a year later, he was still writing stories. In them, as Michael Reynolds observes, Hemingway "was imitating what he took to be marketplace fiction . . . his eye from the beginning was fixed on the bottom line: would the piece sell?" Reynolds continues:

[T]hese juvenilia read like O. Henry and Ring Lardner, if those two had combined to write for *St. Nicholas* magazine. The heroes are all young, audacious, and successful. Punk Alford, a crime-solving newspaper reporter; Rinaldi Rinaldo, an Italian-American war vet; Jack Marvin, a much decorated pilot; Nick Grainger, a wounded soldier in Milan. The settings are either Italy or Chicago. . . . the plots are serious, romantic, sometimes humorous, and frequently revolve around either winning a girl's heart or a father's approval. Jack Marvin, son of an ex-champion boxer, must prove to his father that he is not yellow. Stuy, a rich boy, must become middle-weight champion to win his girl's hand. ("Looking Backward" 2–3)

The style that has become so thoroughly associated with Hemingway—rhythms of sparsely modified simple and compound sentences—is nowhere to be found in these stories. Instead, ornate complex sentences, often narrated in a facetious tone, proliferate. For example: “I came out of the wind scoured nakedness of Wabash Avenue in January into the cosy bar of the Cambrinus and, armed with a smile from Cambrinus himself, passed through the dining room where the waiters were clearing away the debris of the table d’hotes and sweeping out into the little back room” (“The Mercenaries” 105). Like many novice writers, Hemingway expected the *Saturday Evening Post* to gobble up these stories. When it did not, he kept on cranking them out while finding various ways to support himself.

Over the fall and winter of 1919, however, he did try out one form that Reynolds calls “the seed bed for the interchapters of *in our time* and the subject matter for many of the Nick Adams stories in *In Our Time*” (“Looking Backward” 4). These were brief sketches, most just a few paragraphs long, each about a single character living in a small town. Each sketch is titled with that character’s name and presents his or her personality or situation in narrative that mostly summarizes, dramatizing only a key speech or moment. As Reynolds notes, Hemingway’s immediate source for these eight “Cross Roads” sketches was E. W. Howe’s “The Anthology of Another Town,” which the *Saturday Evening Post* began to serialize in fall 1919. A more prominent source for both Howe and Hemingway was Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology* (1916), whose small-town characters recall from the grave their disappointments and dreary lives.

Although the brevity of the “Cross Roads” sketches anticipates the compressed chapters of *in our time*, the latter are not simply “polished extensions of ‘Cross Roads’” (“Looking Backward” 6). The narrative style of the two works is almost antithetical: the “Cross Roads” sketches are *told* stories, heavily narrated. “Pauline Snow,” for example, concludes after the protagonist’s walk into the countryside with Art Simons:

After a while some of the neighbors made a complaint, and they sent Pauline away to the correction school down at Coldwater. Art was away for awhile [sic], and then came back and married one of the Jenkins girls. (*Along With Youth* 124)

By contrast, nearly all of the *in our time* chapters *present* scenes that start in the middle, often lack an ending, and depend on description and

dramatization rather than narrative summary. Nonetheless, Hemingway was to recycle several of the “Cross Roads” characters and situations into his mature stories. “Pauline Snow,” for example, is the model for the brutal seduction story “Up in Michigan,” which begins with the same summarized character history:

Jim Gilmore came to Hortons Bay from Canada. He bought the blacksmith shop from old man Horton. Jim was short and dark with big mustaches and big hands. He was a good horseshoer and did not look much like a blacksmith, even with his leather apron on. He lived upstairs above the blacksmith shop and took his meals at D. J. Smith’s. (“Up in Michigan” 59)

Pauline Snow was the only beautiful girl we ever had out at the Bay. She was like an Easter Lily coming up straight and lithe and beautiful out of a dung heap. When her father and mother died she came to live with the Blodgetts. Then Art Simons started coming around to the Blodgetts’ in the evening.² (*Along with Youth* 124)

Although Hemingway’s friend Bill Horne encouraged him to keep at these sketches, he quit them after a few months, having finished eight. Reynolds feels that “the young writer did not fully realize the possibilities of what he had written” (“Looking Backward” 6). But arguably, Hemingway did recognize that these sketches were just as derivative as the stories he was trying to publish and that their setting and theme—the constricted life in rural and small-town America—was not one he found congenial. Moreover, he was about to encounter a writer in Chicago who was hard to top in this genre: Sherwood Anderson.

Hemingway, Anderson, and the Chicago Renaissance: Chicago, 1920–21

The avant-garde of Paris was not the first that Hemingway encountered, for Chicago, too, had experienced a creative surge and a lively intermingling of artists, writers, publishers, and journalists. In 1920, when Hemingway moved there, the Chicago Renaissance was well past its prewar prime, however, and several of its leading figures, such as Margaret Anderson and her *Little Review*, had moved on to the more active hubs of the avant-garde in New York and Paris. Nonetheless, the Chicago literary community could still boast Harriet Monroe’s pioneering *Poetry*