

Hemingway's Mythical Method: Implications of Dante Allusion in *In Our Time*

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Abstract of Thesis

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The widely accepted assessment of Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* is that the text's fragmentary form belies a complex but cohesive narrative wholeness. Missing from the critical record, however, is an adequate account of *In Our Time*'s use of what T.S. Eliot termed "the mythical method." Using a palimpsestic system of indirect allusion, Hemingway's fragmentary novel constructs an overarching pattern of reference to the journey of Dante's pilgrim through Hell and Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*. Hemingway's use of this mythical method not only provides his novel a more concrete narrative framing device than its critics have recognized, but also reflects new dimensions of the influence Dante, Eliot, and Ezra Pound exerted on Hemingway's earliest work. In particular, similarities between *In Our Time* and Pound's *Draft of XVI Cantos* (both published in 1925), combined with Pound's well-documented mentorship of Hemingway, suggest Pound may have been a primary source of influence on Hemingway's apprehension of and engagement with Dante and the epic tradition he represents.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The widely accepted assessment of Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*¹ is that the book's fragmentary form belies a complex but cohesive narrative wholeness. Hemingway's "fragmentary novel"² arranges fifteen short stories and sixteen prose vignettes in alternating order, producing both complementary and contrasting facets like a collage of life "in our time." Since the time of the novel's concern spans from just before to just after the First World War—about 1910 to 1925—these facets, or rather fragments, not only represent the disillusionment, trauma, and alienation of the modern period, but also the modern author's efforts to create a form capable of "giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," to borrow from T.S. Eliot.³ Missing from the critical record on *In Our Time*, however, is an adequate account of Hemingway's use of what Eliot termed "the mythical method."⁴ In fact, using a palimpsestic system of indirect allusion, *In Our Time* constructs a "major form"⁵ of reference to the journey of Dante's pilgrim through Hell and Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*—a modernist mosaic rendering of "the journey of our life," in our time. Prioritizing ethics and catharsis over moral order and salvation, the novel also begins to develop the ethic of resilience, self-mastery, and enjoyment of living that would come to be known as the Hemingway code.

¹ Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

² D.H. Lawrence, "Review of *In Our Time*," *Calendar of Modern Letters* IV (April 1927): 72-73.

³ T.S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," review of *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, *The Dial* (1880-1929), *American Periodicals Series III* (November 1923): 480.

⁴ Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," 480.

⁵ An "over-all design in which the parts are significantly related to the whole." Daniel D. Pearlman, *The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969): 3.

We may therefore improve our understanding of the novel by explicating its mythical method, which not only provides the narrative a recognizably modern framing device, but also offers a model for its use of a composite protagonist with a quasi-authorial component as part of its narrative organization. In order to understand how Hemingway arrived at this particular mode of construction for *In Our Time*, it will also be useful to review the ways in which *In Our Time*'s narrative method reflects the influence of leading modernist authors including Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Doing so will reveal Pound as a likely source of influence on Hemingway's apprehension of Dante, and Pound's *Cantos*⁶ as a significant model for *In Our Time*'s use of the mythical method. Eliot, on the other hand, has already been identified as the probable source of certain non-Dantean allusions in *In Our Time*, and the unique authorial consciousness in *The Waste Land* has also been discussed as an influence on the novel's treatment of Nick Adams. Therefore a review of what Matthew Bolton calls the "Eliotic consciousness"⁷ in *In Our Time* will facilitate our discussion of both the novel's authorial consciousness and its underappreciated method of indirect allusion, while an extended consideration of Hemingway's tutelage under Pound will color our understanding of the Poundian vision that underlies *In Our Time*'s major form.

As we shall see, Hemingway, largely as a result of his tutelage under Ezra Pound,

⁶ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1994). The composition history of *The Cantos*, spanning several decades, is even more complex than that of *In Our Time*. For our purposes, only the portion of the text that had been published by the time of *In Our Time*'s publication will be referenced: the first sixteen cantos, originally published in 1925 as *A Draft of XVI Cantos* by Bill Bird's Three Mountains Press in Paris.

⁷ Matthew Bolton, "Memory and Desire: Eliotic Consciousness in Early Hemingway," in *Ernest Hemingway and the Geography of Memory*, ed. Mark Cirino and Mark P. Ott (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2010), 37-56.

appears to have been attuned to the same Dantean influences as his high-modernist peers during the construction of his fragmentary novel. Although this paper focuses on the *Divine Comedy*, it should be noted that, in keeping with its mosaic method, *In Our Time* deploys allusion to other literary models simultaneously with its *Divine Comedy* allegory. The overlapping of symbolisms within the text is no accident; an effect of simultaneity is absolutely one of this cubist text's goals.

This should be a topic of interest in Hemingway studies for a number of reasons. First, it contributes to the recent growth in interest regarding Dante's place in Hemingway's body of work, as indicated by Hilary Justice's invitation for "speculation that Dante figures earlier and more centrally in his thinking than critics have considered"⁸ and Matthew Nickel's observation of the "deficiency of full-length studies examining intersections between Hemingway and Dante in Hemingway criticism,"⁹ by illustrating the *Divine Comedy*'s integral involvement in Hemingway's first major publication. Second, it sheds light on critical debates over the nature, method, and meaning of *In Our Time*'s fragmentary form by advancing a coherent model of the narrative's redemption allegory. Finally, it adds to our knowledge of the literary relationship between Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot by considering *In Our Time*'s mythical method of *Divine Comedy* allusion in the context of its likely influences: Pound's tutelage on Dante and the epic tradition, and Eliot's narratological modeling of authorial consciousness.

⁸ Hilary Justice, *The Bones of the Others: the Hemingway Text from the Lost Manuscripts to the Posthumous Novels* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2006), 9.

⁹ Matthew Nickel, "Hemingway's Dark Night: Catholic Influences and Intertextualities in the Work of Ernest Hemingway" (PhD diss., University of Louisiana-Lafayette, 2011), 135.

While it seems most appropriate to conduct my close reading of the text after discussing its critical and historical contexts, it may also be helpful to offer a brief outline of my reading here at the outset. In the arrangement of *In Our Time*'s short stories, particularly those involving Nick Adams, we will observe a pattern of themes reminiscent of Dante's Hell and Purgatory: for example, the limbo of his parents' dysfunctional marriage in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," the sins of lust and gluttony in "The End of Something" and "The Three-Day Blow," and the sins of wrath and violence in "The Battler." A pastiche of heresy and violence follows "The Battler," signifying a descent through the lower circles of Hell, and coinciding with Nick's disappearance from the narrative—or at least his disappearance as a named character. Simultaneously, however, there commences a *Purgatorio*-like display of virtues and vices in the series of bullfighting vignettes, underscoring the mosaic quality of the text's allusive structure. Following this, Nick's reappearance in "Cross-Country Snow" coincides symbolically with the pilgrim's passage through the bottom of Hell at the end of *Inferno*, while his restorative hike through Seney's fire-scarred landscape to the idyllic forest river in "Big Two-Hearted River" closely parallels the pilgrim's ascension of Purgatory and arrival at the Earthly Paradise in *Purgatorio*.

Chapter 2: Hemingway's Dante

To contextualize this essay's intended contribution to Hemingway studies, it will be useful to review the prevailing currents of criticism pertaining to Dante's influence on Hemingway's thinking and writing. While considerable work has been done to explicate the various Dantean references and resonances in Hemingway's body of work, the absence of a clear and unifying narrative of Hemingway's serious literary engagement with the Dantean tradition has left open the possibility for misconceptions about the depth of his reading and knowledge of the poet who in fact may have been one of his greatest unacknowledged influences.

Hemingway, who was not formally educated beyond high school, and who left behind no work of conscious and sustained structural allusion to a classical source, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, or obvious research into mythical materials, such as Eliot's footnotes to *The Waste Land*, is not always granted the same credentials of literariness enjoyed by his high-modernist contemporaries. Instead, a combination of factors, including the poor critical reception of the 1950 novel *Across the River and into the Trees* (which critic Gerry Brenner has called Hemingway's most overt "Dantesque imitation"¹⁰) and the absence of smoking gun evidence that he knew enough Dante to appreciate his own allusions to the *Divine Comedy*, have left Hemingway to be accused sometimes of dilettantism. Nowhere is this line of thinking better exhibited than in Kathleen Verduin's essay "Hemingway's Dante: A Note on *Across the River and into the Trees*."¹¹

¹⁰ Gerry Brenner, *Concealments in Hemingway's Works* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 151.

¹¹ Kathleen Verduin, "Hemingway's Dante: A Note on *Across the River and into the Trees*," *American Literature* vol. 57, no. 4 (December 1985): 633-40.

As its title suggests, Verduin's paper focuses on the novel that represents Hemingway's most overt engagement with Dante, *Across the River and into the Trees*. That novel's preoccupations with death and how one prepares to meet it make it a natural home for *Divine Comedy* allusion, and Verduin is far from the first to essay the topic. In *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*, for example, Philip Young notes how its opening paragraphs suggest "a mood of Stygian strangeness, as a man makes a difficult crossing of a canal in Italy with the help of a surly and Charon-like poler."¹² While Young does not raise the question of authorial influence, others have.

For instance, Michael Reynolds supposes a connection between *Across the River and into the Trees*' interest in Dante and the collection of T.S. Eliot's complete works in Hemingway's Key West library. In the introduction to his inventory of Hemingway's reading, Reynolds writes:

Ernest packed all the poems and all the criticism—even the Dante essay. In another crate, he took *The Divine Comedy*. Maybe, just maybe, Hemingway knew more Dante than most of us. Maybe Cantwell was serious when he told Renata: 'I am Mister Dante. For the moment.'¹³

Verduin presents her argument as a counter to Reynolds: "In point of fact, Hemingway seems hardly to have known Dante at all: that is, he reveals no more than a superficial knowledge of Dante's actual writings, and certainly of nothing beyond the *Inferno*."¹⁴

For Verduin, Hemingway's Dante is the Dante of popular imagination, a "Byronic hero" known less for his work than the Saturnine sneer of his bust, "once ubiquitous in

¹² Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), 115.

¹³ Michael S. Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading, 1910-1940: An Inventory*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 30.

¹⁴ Verduin, "Hemingway's Dante," 635.

pretentious interiors and university libraries.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, insufficient attention to the existing record¹⁶ on Hemingway’s Dante leads Verduin to conclude incorrectly that his interest was short-lived and superficial:

Hemingway’s attention to Dante, for a writer in his generation, is hardly unique: but unlike Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, all of whom (perhaps owing to their superior education) discovered Dante early, Hemingway does not reflect the Dante influence until relatively late in his career, nor does he resemble his contemporaries in their attraction to the *Commedia* itself.¹⁷

Likewise, Verduin overlooks Hemingway’s apparently ironic tone in a 1949 letter to John Dos Passos—“Since trip to Italy have been studying the life of Dante. Seems to be one of the worst jerks that ever lived, but how well he could write! This may be a lesson to us all”¹⁸—misinterpreting the letter as genuine evidence of a newfound interest, as she writes: “Confirming the Dante image implicit in the novel, several of Hemingway’s letters shed further light on his interest, apparently stimulated by travel to Italy in 1948.”¹⁹

While it is unfortunate that Verduin reifies the well-worn view of Hemingway as poorly read and undereducated, it would be wrong to suggest that her essay had the final word on the subject.²⁰ Perhaps the most extensive consideration of Dante’s place in Hemingway’s thinking and writing has come from Hilary K. Justice, who already has

¹⁵ Ibid, 636.

¹⁶ For example, Joseph B. Yokelson explores Dante allusion in a 1933 Nick Adams story in his essay “A Dante-Parallel in Hemingway’s ‘A Way You’ll Never Be,’” which preceded Verduin’s in Duke University’s *American Literature* journal by sixteen years.

¹⁷ Verduin, “Hemingway’s Dante,” 635.

¹⁸ Qtd. in *ibid*, 636-37.

¹⁹ Ibid, 636.

²⁰ For instance, Howard Hannum’s “Nick Adams and the Search for Light” was published only the following year (*Studies in Short Fiction* vol. 23, no. 1 [January 1986]: 9-18).

detailed the Dantean resonances and references in *Death in the Afternoon*,²¹ *True at First Light*,²² and *The Garden of Eden*.²³ By explicating *In Our Time*'s pattern of reference to the *Divine Comedy*, this essay unequivocally confirms Justice's observation that the persistent references to Dante in Hemingway's work, "combined with Mary and Patrick Hemingway's separate assertions that Hemingway rarely travelled without his copy of *Inferno*," should be cause for "speculation that Dante figures earlier and more centrally in his thinking than critics have considered."²⁴

I am not quite the first to observe Dantean themes in *In Our Time*, as Bates Hoffer²⁵ and Ellen Andrews Knodt²⁶ have also briefly noted *Inferno* imagery in "The Battler" and "Out of Season," respectively, although their analyses have not extended to the novel as a whole. In other ways, a number of scholars over the last few decades have anticipated much of what I conclude about *In Our Time*'s overarching unity, although their arguments have been limited in various manners by the absence of the unique textual evidence this essay produces. It is a testament to Hemingway's iceberg theory that so many readers seem to have sensed certain fundamental truths about the novel even without a comprehensive blueprint of its narrative architecture.

²¹ Hilary K. Justice, "The Necessary Danger: Hemingway and the Problem of Authorship" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001).

²² Hilary K. Justice, "The Lion, the Leopard, and the Bear," *Hemingway Review* vol. 19, no. 1 (October 1999): 39-42.

²³ Justice, *Bones of the Others*.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

²⁵ Hoffer analyzes the *Inferno*-derived descent and rise motif in the story "The Battler" in a brief, primarily pedagogical entry in *Language, Linguistics, and Literature: The Eureka! Approach* vol. 29 (2004): 31-34.

²⁶ Knodt's essay "Hemingway's *Commedia Dell'arte* Story?: 'Out of Season'" considers whether "Dante's *Divine Comedy* may be another possible Italian literary source for "Out of Season" before asserting that Hemingway's story is "more in the *commedia dell'arte* or comic opera tradition." (*The Hemingway Review* vol. 31, no. 1 [September 2011]: 107-17.)

Chapter 3: Critical Review

In October of 1925, Ernest Hemingway's first major work of fiction, *In Our Time*, was published by Boni and Liveright, the same New York firm which only three years earlier had published the book form of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. While *In Our Time* earned significant critical acclaim,²⁷ it was soon overshadowed by the publication, just one year later, of the novel that would catapult Hemingway to international fame and launch his career as an author in earnest: *The Sun Also Rises*. *In Our Time*'s unusual composition and publication history have further contributed to the perception of it as a developmental work. As a result, several of its thematic concerns have been persistently overlooked, to the detriment of our full appreciation of the book as a unique example of fully realized high-modernist experimentation in both theme and narrative method.

To be clear, *In Our Time* is no neglected stepchild of the Hemingway canon. Hemingway scholar Linda Wagner, for example, considers it "perhaps his most striking work" and notes that the eminent twentieth century critic Malcolm Cowley also rated it as "Hemingway's best, most fully realized work."²⁸ Even so, Wagner's praise that "[t]hematically, all the later Hemingway writing is here in embryo"²⁹ says much about the way *In Our Time* has been regarded as a precursor to more notable novels. Furthermore, despite Cowley's high opinion of the work and his authoritative interpretive efforts of its "waste land" allegory, his attention to *In Our Time* must be understood in relation to research on the later works. As Peter Hays notes, it was only "[a]fter Malcolm

²⁷ For instance, Edmund Wilson's contemporaneous praise that it "has more artistic dignity than any other book that has been written by an American about the period of the war" still adorns the back cover of Scribner's 2003 paperback edition.

²⁸ Linda Wagner, "Juxtaposition in Hemingway's *In Our Time*," *Studies in Short Fiction* vol. 12, no. 3 (July 1975): 243-52

²⁹ Wagner, "Juxtaposition," 243.

Cowley's 1943 revelation that Hemingway had used the same mythic materials that T.S. Eliot had in *The Waste Land* to create a Fisher King motif in the *Sun Also Rises* that critics "found referential details in 'Big Two-Hearted River,'" despite its evident waste land symbolism, "opening on a burnt-over, war-like landscape, featuring a wounded fisherman, and, lest we miss the allusion, even a kingfisher."³⁰ Moreover, as Hays' comment indicates, allegorical discussions of *In Our Time* have focused predominantly on "Big Two-Hearted River," the book's best-known short story, to the detriment of our appreciation of the work as a whole.

Such is the unusual nature of *In Our Time*'s composition that it will help to establish here at the outset some basic terms for discussing it. Although this paper refers to *In Our Time* as a novel, it does so with the same understanding as D.H. Lawrence's 1927 review: "*In Our Time* calls itself a book of stories. But it isn't that. It is a series of successive sketches from a man's life and makes a fragmentary novel."³¹ Comprising fifteen short stories (the last and longest of which is split into two parts) and sixteen prose vignettes, *In Our Time* does not look like a traditional novel—nor is it always studied as one, as Paul Smith indicates. Noting that many modern readers first encounter *In Our Time*'s stories in anthologized collections rather than as a whole, Smith asks: "Would the force of each of those stories be diminished if each was read as randomly as they were written, as most of us do?"³² While Smith is right to point out the novel's piecemeal

³⁰ Peter Hays, "Hemingway's "'Now I Lay Me,' Prayer, and The Fisher King," *The Hemingway Review* vol. 37, no. 1 (September 2017): 108.

³¹ Lawrence, "Review of *In Our Time*," 72-73.

³² Paul Smith, "Who Wrote Hemingway's *In Our Time*?" in *Hemingway Repossessed*, ed. Kenneth Mark Rosen (Westport: Praeger, 1994), 146.

composition, his insinuation that the text is no greater than the sum of its parts must be questioned.

When it was published in 1925, *In Our Time* represented a pastiche of Hemingway's oldest and newest work, including some previously published stories and others written specifically for the new book. On the older side, two of *In Our Time*'s short stories, "Out of Season" and "My Old Man," originally were published as part of a 1923 collection, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*. Moreover, all of its prose vignettes—some gleaned from Hemingway's 1921 reporting on the Greco-Turkish War for the *Toronto Star*—were published in 1924 under the title *in our time*; several were edited, retitled, or converted to short stories for the 1925 publication. On the newer side, the story "The Battler" was written bespoke to replace another story from the 1923 collection, "Up in Michigan," which Hemingway wanted to include in *In Our Time*, but which his publisher considered too graphic for mass publication.³³ Furthermore the novel did not reach its final form until the 1930 edition, which included for the first time an author's introduction that would later be titled "On the Quai at Smyrna" (this paper refers to that edition and treats "On the Quai at Smyrna" as a short story).

Despite *In Our Time*'s blend of vintages, it would be crucially misleading to consider its construction as random. As John Beall's aptly titled study of Hemingway's formation of *In Our Time* demonstrates, Hemingway's arrangement of the novel's stories and vignettes was anything but random. Beall first notes the loose consensus among Hemingway critics that *In Our Time* enjoys a sort of collagic unity, reflecting the approaches of cubist painters and authors such as Pablo Picasso and James Joyce.

³³ John Beall, "Hemingway's Formation of *In Our Time*," *The Hemingway Review* vol. 35, no. 1 (September 2015): 63-77.

Through close examination of Hemingway's hand-written memos during the early and middle points of *In Our Time*'s formation—after “Hemingway's initial suggestion in a letter to Edward O'Brien on 2 May 1924 that he bring out ‘a good fat book’ that would ‘have *In Our Time* in it and the other stories, *My Old Man* and about 15 or 20 others,”³⁴ and before his decision, probably on Gertrude Stein's advice, to excise and revise the original ending to “*Big Two-Hearted River*”—Beall “offer[s] a glimpse into Hemingway's process of forming his collage of stories and chapters,” demonstrating his extreme detail “in laying out the structure of *In Our Time*—down to word counts for each story and a separate table of contents with stories set between chapters from *in our time*.”³⁵ Hemingway would tweak the structure of his first major book continually, explaining several times in strongly worded letters to Edmund Wilson, Horace Liveright, and John Dos Passos, “how the interconnection of stories and chapters is vital to his shaping of *In Our Time*.”³⁶

Despite our solid record of Hemingway's perspective on *In Our Time*'s form—he felt it had “a pretty good unity”³⁷—the specific nature of its wholeness remains a site of critical debate. We may agree that it resembles a collage, but what does that collage do or show? Because seven of the book's fifteen stories (and one of its vignettes) center on the character Nick Adams, it is not uncommon to see *In Our Time* called a bildungsroman. After all, the first five stories after the “author's introduction” (the so-called “Michigan cycle”) portray an apparent chronology of Nick's youth and adolescence in the Northern

³⁴ Beall, “Formation of *In Our Time*,” 63-64

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 128.

Michigan woods, and two of the novel's last three stories, "Cross-Country Snow" and "Big Two-Hearted River," see Nick as an adult and wounded veteran. Still, in light of Nick's absence in over half of the novel's stories and vignettes, it is difficult to reconcile the view that *In Our Time* is about Nick's growth. Even if loss and alienation are understood as formative experiences in Nick's life, we cannot equate omission with character development.

Wendolyn Tetlow astutely summarizes the argument against the bildungsroman reading of *In Our Time*. Hemingway does not focus on Nick's subjective development, Tetlow writes, so much as he uses Nick as a representational device:

While the first five stories and six interchapters function independently, taken as a whole they portray the movement of a sensibility from denial of death to direct engagement with it. Hemingway's use of the character Nick as a cohesive device in the first five stories helps to underscore this movement by grounding it in a concrete set of recognizable emotions. However, Hemingway's decision not to add Nick stories to the sequence when the new editions appeared demonstrates that Nick's growth and maturity are not meant, as some commentators insist, to be the focus of *In Our Time*.³⁸

Hemingway not only decided to add "On the Quai at Smyrna" to the 1930 edition instead of a Nick Adams story—"The Killers," "Now I Lay Me," and "In Another Country" all were published in the 1927 story collection *Men Without Women*—he also made the critical decision to change the original ending to "Big Two-Hearted River," which strongly implied Nick as the meta-fictional author of *In Our Time*. As its title indicates, Tetlow's book, *Hemingway's In Our Time: Lyrical Dimensions*, credits Hemingway's innovative prose technique as the ultimate source of his text's wholeness.

³⁸ Wendolyn E. Tetlow, *Hemingway's In Our Time: Lyrical Dimensions* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992), 49.

Such a technically minded analysis, however, may not satisfy those who sense in the novel a greater sort of vision and significance. For such readers, the suggestion of Nick Adams in a quasi-authorial role has been hard to forget. As Debra Modellmog puts it, “just because Hemingway saved ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ by removing Nick’s monologue does not mean that we, like a jury commanded to disregard a witness’s last remark, should automatically ignore all we learn here.”³⁹ Indeed, this is precisely how Hemingway’s theory of omission operates—the implicit suggestion is more powerful than the explicit statement. Moreover, Modellmog contends, not only are there “good reasons for seeing Nick Adams as the implied author of *In Our Time*,” but “doing so resolves many confusions about the book’s unity, structure, vision, and significance.”⁴⁰ Ultimately, however, Modellmog’s argument struggles to settle its evident concerns over the new confusions it creates regarding the author-character relationship.

Intent on defining *In Our Time* as a novel, Modellmog essentially re-situates our understanding of Hemingway’s use of Nick Adams as a device for narrative cohesion. If we make Nick Adams the author of *In Our Time*, then the text becomes a “record of Nick’s recent mental history” and thus “a novel, not merely a collection of short stories.”⁴¹ In other words, Modellmog removes the fragmentary label from the novel by relocating the fragmentariness to the author’s mind. Emphasizing the purgative or cathartic nature of fiction writing, Modellmog presents the text as both representation and materialization of the author’s attempt to write his fragmented mentality into order:

³⁹ Debra A. Modellmog, “The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience: Nick Adams as Author of *In Our Time*,” *American Literature* vol. 60, no. 4 (December 1988): 593.

⁴⁰ Modellmog, “Unifying Consciousness,” 592.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 608.

However, as I have argued, 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.⁴²

It might be helpful to think of this conceptualization as an extreme innovation on the *kunsterroman* sub-genre. Yet as attractive as this rehabilitative treatment of the narrative may be, it nevertheless repeats a commonplace overstatement of Nick's fragility. The idea of Nick as "confused to pieces by his accelerated entry into adulthood"—or as Philip Young puts it, "a sick man...in escape from whatever it is that made him sick," in whom "a terrible panic is just barely under control"⁴³—simply does not square with our picture of Nick at the end of *In Our Time*. How many times must "Nick felt happy" be repeated before we believe it? One gets the sense that Nick's woundedness must be continually amplified in order to support an overdetermined reading of authorial trauma.

Another problem with this argument is that one easily loses track of which author's mind must be fragmented in order for the formulation to work, as the essay's conclusion indicates: "*In Our Time* reveals, through the unifying consciousness of Nick Adams, a more substantial kind of bravery, for it indicates that the greatest opponent [Hemingway] wrestled with was himself."⁴⁴ Even its thesis falls between one sentence decrying "the kinds of author-character confusions we have come to expect from many postmodern writers" and another promising "new light on Nick Adams as a character both separate from yet also an extension of Hemingway."⁴⁵ Self-consciously or not,

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Young, *Reconsideration*, 45-47.

⁴⁴ Modellmog, "Unifying Consciousness," 610.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 592.

Moddelmog's quasi-kunsterroman analysis utilizes author-character confusion as a productive site of analysis, and is hardly alone among Hemingway scholars in doing so.

One can little blame any critic of such a famously autobiographical fiction writer for stumbling over this issue, and Moddelmog's interpretation of the author-character relationship doubtless improves upon the struggles of past models:

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 the 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.⁴⁶

Yet the argument falters when it comes to its own uneasy understanding of who exactly that "one man" is. Its malleable treatment of the author-character relationship does not comport with its insistence against biographical fallacy. This insistence may reflect an effort to check against the essay's overreliance on the author-character relationship alone to provide cohesion for a work made from such disparate pieces. There is a sense of something missing, an unresolved tension stemming from the critic's instinct to seek additional, hard evidence—not something omitted, not something biographical, but something inside the text.

In the absence of additional textual evidence, one of the more compelling formulations of *In Our Time*'s unity has come from Carl Wood's 1973 essay "*In Our Time*: Hemingway's Fragmentary Novel."⁴⁷ As its title indicates, Wood's essay accepts D.H. Lawrence's assessment of the novel's fragmentariness, expanding upon it to

⁴⁶ Ibid, 608.

⁴⁷ Carl Wood, "*In Our Time*: Hemingway's Fragmentary Novel," *Bulletin of the Modern Language Society*, vol. 74 (1973): 716-26.

demonstrate a principle of cohesiveness crucially distinct from Modellmog's: "*In Our Time* is indeed 'a series of sketches from a man's life,' if we understand that this man, the protagonist of the work, is a composite personality, the development of which is depicted by events in the lives of a number of very similar individual characters."⁴⁸ As the most prominent character in the novel, Nick Adams looms large in this "composite personality," and Wood classifies the various individuals in his composite in two basic ways: those like Nick and those unlike Nick.

Harold Krebs in "Soldier's Home," for example, "so resembles Nick in his background and predicament that as a character he may be regarded in some sense as an alternate version of the personality Nick represents."⁴⁹ As we encounter similar character-types in "Cat in the Rain" and "Out of Season," and then re-encounter Nick in "Cross-Country Snow" and "Big Two-Hearted River," Wood continues, "the impression increases of being exposed to interchangeable characters in a narrative of the development of a single central personality."⁵⁰ While this first group of characters "lend[s] unity to *In Our Time* by presenting alternate versions of Nick's personality," others, such as the "idealistic revolutionist" and the "effeminate poet, Hubert Elliot," "enrich Hemingway's narrative through contrast and function collectively in this fragmentary novel much as a sub-plot functions in a traditional novel."⁵¹

Wood is somewhat dismissive, however, of this latter group of "characters very unlike Nick whose connections with him are very inconsequential," and almost entirely dismissive of the sequence of bullfighting vignettes in Chapters IX through XIV,

⁴⁸ Wood, "Fragmentary Novel," 725.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 721.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 722.

⁵¹ Ibid.

mentioning them only once as “an interconnected series of scenes about bullfighters” in a section of the novel linked by “arbitrary unifying factors.”⁵² Wood’s composite personality formulation is more coherent and concise than Modellmog’s, but it excludes significant elements of the narrative that the authorial consciousness model better accounts for. Furthermore, Wood’s reading lacks the attractive cathartic promise of the other: “At the end of Hemingway’s narration of the experience of his many-personed protagonist, then, Nick, like Krebs and the main characters of ‘Cat in the Rain’ and ‘Out of Season,’ is pictured as having chosen to avoid a direct confrontation with life’s challenges.”⁵³

Even so, Wood’s theorization is more easily summarized, defended, and generalized. As a fragmentary novel, he concludes, *In Our Time* may be understood as “a collection of short stories which are unified, not merely by a common theme or subject matter, but also by a discernible plot development dealing with a single character or a single personality type represented in several characters,” with each story “contributing coherently to the development of the plot” or complementary sub-plot.⁵⁴ As a sort of cubist collagic version of a traditional narrative, *In Our Time* may be seen as part of “a series of related works which seem to constitute an as yet unidentified sub-genre of twentieth-century fiction,”⁵⁵ including Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*, James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, and William Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses*, among others. Wood’s interpretation is sound and useful, but still not entirely satisfactory, as evidenced by the fact that, preceding Modellmog’s by fifteen years, it did

⁵² Ibid, 722-23.

⁵³ Ibid, 725.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 719.

not end the debate.

On the contrary, these overlapping interpretations together suggest a novel both unified and strained by the relationship between its composite structure and the elusive authorial consciousness that contributes simultaneously to the wholeness and fragmentariness of that structure. This dualistic view comports with the interpretation offered in Matthew J. Bolton's essay, "Memory and Desire: Eliotic Consciousness in Early Hemingway," which joins other contemporary Hemingway critics, including Joseph Flora,⁵⁶ in suggesting the significant influence of Eliot's *The Waste Land* on Hemingway. Bolton focuses on *The Waste Land* as a model of the narratological method of "incorporating the remembered word or image into the fabric of a story" and "using the processes of memory...as a structuring principle for layering a series of scenes and stories outside the normal scheme of narration."⁵⁷ This method of allusion, Bolton argues, may be seen to produce structure in *In Our Time* just as it does in *The Waste Land*:

The Waste Land might therefore have been one of Hemingway's models for how the vignettes and stories of the 1925 *In Our Time*, written at different times and in different modes, could be organized and brought into conversation with each other. The answer lay not in adding a traditional framing device but in eschewing such contrivances altogether in order to create a mosaic-like arrangement of brilliant fragments.⁵⁸

This conceptualization of *In Our Time*'s primary structural method, however, will require revision following the revelation of the novel's overlooked pattern of allusion to the *Divine Comedy*. While Eliotic metaphor may have inspired *In Our Time*'s method of indirect allusion, the novel's major form, which we may understand as Hemingway's

⁵⁶ Joseph Flora, "Ernest Hemingway and T.S. Eliot: A Tangled Relationship," *The Hemingway Review* vol. 32, no. 1 (September 2012): 72-87.

⁵⁷ Bolton, "Eliotic Consciousness," 37-38.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 40.

rendering of the mythical method, reflects a distinctly Poundian vision.

Although Eliot was not alone in experimenting with such techniques, Bolton demonstrates distinctly “Eliotic” resonances in Hemingway’s work: “It is not only single images and lines from *The Waste Land* and other Eliot poems that have stayed with Hemingway, but a distinctly Eliotic mode of alluding to and working with such memory images.”⁵⁹ In this mode, complex allusions are achieved by mimicking the process of memory, as if “words that had once been read and set to memory reemerge from the depths of the subconscious mind having taken on a strange new form,” creating “a hybridization of an objective text and a subjective consciousness.”⁶⁰ He illustrates the passage of this technique from Eliot to Hemingway with the example of *A Farewell to Arms*’ subtly complex reference to *The Waste Land*’s allusion to Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”: “Down below on the street a motor car honked. ‘But at my back I always hear / Time’s winged chariot hurrying near,’ I said.”⁶¹ Hemingway, Bolton demonstrates, “is alluding not just to Marvell but to Marvell as approached by way of Eliot’s poem.”⁶² In this view, framing devices such as allegorical structures play a subordinate role to the “governing consciousness” suggested by the author’s “objective rendering of memory,” which asserts “an intuitive and associative logic rather than the chronological, cause-and-effect ordering that marks traditional narratives.”⁶³

Integral to this conclusion is a sense of the autobiographical currents in Eliot and Hemingway’s fiction. Indeed, asserting this Eliotic method of cohesion for *In Our Time*

⁵⁹ Bolton, “Eliotic Consciousness,” 43.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 43-44.

⁶¹ Qtd. in ibid, 43.

⁶² Ibid, 44.

⁶³ Ibid, 50-51.

helps to explain the “narratological and epistemological contradictions” that critics such as Modellmog and Wood have wrestled with, aptly summarized by Bolton: “While both works are peopled with authorial doubles who gesture toward being their respective work’s governing consciousness, and who may stand as narrator for a time, neither has a single unified narrator or protagonist.”⁶⁴ In fact, Bolton’s conclusion effectively hybridizes Modellmog’s and Wood’s: “If one draws back far enough from these images to identify this governing consciousness, one finds it to be synonymous with the author himself, or with the author’s consciousness as represented and formalized by the poem.”⁶⁵ Bolton’s formulation of the Eliotic method in *In Our Time* not only finds a more defensible basis for the novel’s autobiographical undercurrents than the confusing character-author relations Modellmog traces, but also allows a more holistic reading than Wood’s more narrowly defined composite protagonist theory.

Given the centrality of allusion in his analysis, Bolton’s evaluation of Hemingway’s facility with the technique is somewhat surprising: “if Hemingway tends to use direct literary allusion less skillfully and less naturally than Eliot, there are other referential modes in which he rivals the poet.”⁶⁶ Bolton is not wrong, of course, to point out that Hemingway’s best-known examples of allusion come in his titles and epigraphs, that occasionally his use of direct allusion can come across as uneasy or overly ironic, and that his dialogic allusions are relatively subdued, as evidenced by the comparison of *The Waste Land*’s Wagnerian allusion (“Weialala leia / Wallala leialala”) to that in “Cross-Country Snow”:

⁶⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 54.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 46.

The girl went out and they heard her singing in German in the next room...
'What were you singing?' he asked her.
'Opera, German opera.' She did not care to discuss the subject. 'We have some
apple strudel if you want it.'⁶⁷

And yet, the indirect sort of allusion Hemingway uses here is a much-overlooked element of his meaning-making method. In fact, this rather plain-looking reference to Wagner in "Cross-Country Snow" actually is part of a broader pattern of allusion to the Fisher King myth that unfortunately has been left out of most critical considerations of the intertextual relationship between *In Our Time* and *The Waste Land*.

Though a full exploration of this topic would exceed this paper's scope, it serves our purposes to note that, in addition to the well-known Fisher King motif in "Big Two-Hearted River," there are apparent references to Wagner's opera *Parsifal*—which is based on Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval rendition of the Fisher King myth, *Parzifal*—in the "Wagner apple"⁶⁸ Nick Adams picks up in "The Three-Day Blow," and the symbolism in "The Battler" suggesting Ad Francis and Nick as a Grail guardian and questing knight.⁶⁹ More important at present is the fact that *In Our Time* uses this same method of indirect allusion to create an even more significant arc of reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, effectively forming a framing device analogous to Pound's Dantean parallels in *The Cantos*.

⁶⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 110.

⁶⁸ Presumably an intentional misspelling of the Wagener apple varietal.

⁶⁹ Nick asks Ad a sacred question, "Honest to God?" (*In Our Time*, 56), while Ad requests Nick's knife—a stand-in for the sacred healing blade. Nick's scraped knee symbolically parallels Ad's shuffling step—the Fisher King is typified by a leg wound—and Ad's wilderness isolation also foreshadows Nick's journey into the wilderness in "Big Two-Hearted River." Peter Hays has observed that Nick in "Two Hearted" represents "a conflation of both the wounded Fisher King and the young questing knight who heals him and his lands, and becomes the next keeper of the Grail" (Hays, "Fisher King," 110).

Chapter 4: Ezra Pound and the Mythical Method

T.S. Eliot has been credited with coining the term “mythical method,” owing to his 1923 review of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. He uses the term not only to describe that novel’s Homeric parallels, but also to describe their narrative function, indicating that by “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity,” the modern author may have a way “of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”⁷⁰ In Eliot’s eyes, the implications of this innovation were considerable: “Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art.”⁷¹ Considering these comments, it is interesting to note that many modern critics, Bolton included, push back on the popular perception that Eliot was a primarily “mythical” poet.

Bolton adeptly summarizes the present-day perspective that the notes Eliot added to *The Waste Land*—“at Pound’s prompting to fill out the page count of the Boni and Liveright edition”—misled readers, including the New Critics, to overrate the literariness of Eliot’s poetic project: “That *The Waste Land* is too often read as a ‘series of complex literary symbols’ speaks to the abiding powers of Eliot’s endnotes to overdetermine a reader’s interpretation of the poem.”⁷² This misperception, Bolton continues, was not shared by contemporaries of Eliot who recognized the poem’s autobiographical content: “Those who knew Eliot—or knew a bit about him, as Hemingway did—read the new

⁷⁰ Eliot, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” 480.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Bolton, “Eliotic Consciousness,” 49.

poem not as an act of modern mythologizing but as one of intense self-revelation.”⁷³

Bolton does not linger on the point, nor hazard an extended discussion on biographical fallacy, and neither shall we. His interest in the subject is in asserting the interconnectedness of autobiography and myth created by Eliot’s associative method; mine is to point out the irony that Pound and Hemingway both make the mythical method Eliot describes a more integral part of their projects than he does. Moreover, I argue that the similarities between Hemingway’s use of the mythical method in *In Our Time* and Pound’s use of it in *The Cantos* leave little room for doubt about Pound’s influence on Hemingway’s Dante.

The Pound-Hemingway relationship has been the subject of multiple essays⁷⁴ and even a recent book-length study by John Cohassey.⁷⁵ Pound is well-known as one of Hemingway’s most important friends, advocates, and mentors during his early career, and he was a rarity among such figures in that Hemingway never turned on him in resentment for his help (as he did with Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and many others). In later years, Hemingway would return the favor, in a sense, by encouraging Pound’s insanity defense against his 1943 treason charges and later signing a letter advocating for Pound’s release from confinement at St. Elizabeths in Washington, D.C.

Their friendship began in early 1922, soon after Ernest and Hadley’s arrival in Paris. Pound was already an accomplished critic, poet, and figurehead of the literary

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For example, see: Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, “Ernest Hemingway and Ezra Pound,” in *Ernest Hemingway, the Writer in Context*. ed. James Nagel (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 179-200.

⁷⁵ John Cohassey, *Hemingway and Pound: A Most Unlikely Friendship* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014).

avant-garde. He had a founding role in the Imagist movement of the previous decade, assisted with the publication of all Joyce's works up to and including *Ulysses*, and more or less midwived Eliot's early career, providing such crucial editing for *The Waste Land* as to earn its dedication. Though Hemingway later would become notoriously averse to criticism, Pound is also credited as one of the most important critics and influences—or tutors,⁷⁶ as Harold Hurwitz puts it—of his early career.

In contrast to his well-documented efforts as Eliot's editor, there are no known manuscript pages bearing Pound's criticism of Hemingway's work. Nevertheless, biographical accounts make clear his editorial role: "in Paris, Hemingway submitted much of his apprentice work in fiction to Pound. It came back to him blue-penciled, most of the adjectives gone. The comments were unsparing."⁷⁷ Pound's influence on Hemingway is often discussed in these biographical terms, as Hurwitz indicates:

Those critics who have discussed [Hemingway's indebtedness to Pound] have usually confined themselves to general remarks about the value of Pound's criticism of Hemingway's early work. Although the poet's suggestions were helpful, even more important was the transference of certain attitudes and values that lay behind the criticism. This process was of profound significance in Hemingway's artistic development, for it re-enforced his dedication to his craft and aided him in discovering and defining a credo and a faith. All of this resulted primarily from the impact of Pound's character and art and was interwoven with their friendship.⁷⁸

Their relationship seems to have been conducted through camaraderie and conversation as much if not more than ink-based editing. Their walking tour of Italy's ancient battlefields in the winter of 1923, wherein they discussed the fifteenth century military leader and patron of the arts Sigismondo Malatesta, is an illustrative example.

⁷⁶ Harold M. Hurwitz, "Hemingway's Tutor, Ezra Pound," *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 17, (1971): 469-82.

⁷⁷ John Peale Bishop qtd. in Hurwitz, "Hemingway's Tutor," 479.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 469.

Interestingly, Pound regarded Malatesta as “the first attractive personality to live after Dante,” according to Stephen Sicari, and made him the first “‘historical’ (as opposed to mythic or literary) figure” to be included in his *Cantos*.⁷⁹ It also bears mentioning here Michael Reynolds’ account of Hadley Hemingway recalling her husband’s attentiveness as a pupil: “Ernest listened at E.P.’s feet, as to an oracle, and I believe some of the ideas lasted all through his life.”⁸⁰ As a lifelong student and enthusiast of Dante who once memorably stated, “anyone who don’t know the *Commedia* is thereby ignoramus,”⁸¹ Pound presents an exceedingly likely source of influence on Hemingway’s interest in and understanding of Dante.

Keeping in mind the usual grain of salt to be taken with any posthumous memoir, it is also worth pointing out Hemingway’s recollection of a conversation about *terza rima* in *A Moveable Feast*: “I finally convinced Ezra that few people ever died while speaking in well rounded phrases and that I had never known any man to die while speaking *terza rima* and that I doubted even if Dante could do it.”⁸² In their essay on the same story, “An Agent of Evil,” Paul Smith and Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin demonstrate, through a close examination of its clever wordplay, evidence of Hemingway’s thorough versing in that “revered form from Dante’s *Commedia*,” which they assert “probably derived from Ezra Pound’s tutelage in matters of Italian poetics.”⁸³ In “that important chapter of *A Moveable Feast*,” they conclude, Hemingway “is clearly suggesting the ways in which he

⁷⁹ Stephen Sicari, *Pound’s Epic Ambition: Dante and the Modern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 9.

⁸⁰ Bolton, “Eliotic Consciousness,” 42.

⁸¹ Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1954), 203.

⁸² Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 110.

⁸³ Paul Smith and Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, “‘Terza Riruce’: Hemingway, Dunning, Italian Poetry,” *The Hemingway Review* vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 50.

had been delegated by Ezra Pound, the oracle of the expatriate generation before him, to pass on through allusions that generation's secret understanding of its literary inheritance."⁸⁴ Although there is limited primary evidence of their discussing Dante, there is more than enough smoke to suggest a fire.

Dante represented more than just an intellectual interest for Ezra Pound. As Stephen Sicari explains in *Pound's Epic Ambition: Dante and the Modern World*, Pound and his fellow high-modernists found in the Dantean tradition both a narrative and a narrative method that attended to their particular concerns about representation in the modern era:

It is no mere coincidence that [these writers], who do so much to determine the artistic sensibility of the modern period, each claim Dante as their most important and lasting literary influence. For in Dante they find expression of their own most basic and urgent need, the need to give unity to a world in fragments.⁸⁵

Sicari's explanation of the modernists' representational concerns largely echoes Eliot's assessment of "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." Although Sicari does not focus on the term, the introduction to his study may as well be an introduction to Pound's understanding of the mythical method:

Pound's formal difficulties in beginning his epic have some important implications for the study of modernism in general...he could not allow the fragmented anarchy of the modern world to dictate an aesthetic decision to ignore order and form altogether. This tension—between the pull toward chaos urged by the state of the modern world and the need for form dictated by the nature of poetry and all art—may be the tension that best accounts for the texture of *The Cantos* and the works of high modernism in general.⁸⁶

For the modernists working in the wake of the First World War, and particularly for Pound, the *Divine Comedy* not only provided an apt metaphor of modern life in the form

⁸⁴ Smith and Tavernier-Courbin, "Terza Riruce," 50.

⁸⁵ Sicari, *Pound's Epic Ambition*, 219.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

of the pilgrim's redemptive journey through Hell, but also offered a model for synthesizing the fragments of history into a cohesive and meaningful narrative order. At the center of this model is what Sicari defines as the "composite wanderer."

It is illuminating simply to compare Carl Wood and Matthew Bolton's assessments of *In Our Time's* "composite protagonist" with Sicari's discussion of the "composite wanderer" that is the organizing principle of both Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Pound's *Cantos*. For Dante and Pound alike, this composite figure represents "a structural principle both traditional enough to provide coherence and stability and flexible enough to allow for the integration of diverse material into a single unified journey of redemption."⁸⁷ Casual readers of the *Divine Comedy* may "underestimate the composite nature of the chief figure, a man named Dante in the poem," Sicari writes, but "Dante the poet is constantly measuring his pilgrim-hero against other famous wanderers from the literary tradition he inherits, most particularly Ulysses and Aeneas."⁸⁸ Even the literary history Dante inherits, or displays as his inheritance, is a multifaceted one which the poet must synthesize: "a Christian tradition of dogma and philosophy; a classical (or pagan) tradition of artistic masterworks (most prominent of which is the *Aeneid*); and the troubadour tradition of erotic love songs."⁸⁹

Likewise, Pound found his own adaptation of the composite wanderer—at once a stand-in for the poet himself and a "unique synthesis of Homer's Odysseus, Dante's Ulysses, and Dante's pilgrim, as well as certain elements of the Anglo-Saxon wanderer

⁸⁷ Ibid, x.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 219.

theme”⁹⁰—essential for the creation and cohesion of his poem: “Pound indicates that it was his decision to deploy this composite and ever-shifting wanderer that enabled him to begin the epic task.”⁹¹ To say that Pound sought to include a diversity of literary traditions in his work would be an understatement. As William Cookson notes, by the seventh canto, the poem’s time span “extends from Homer to the twentieth century...presenting ‘luminous details’ from the *Iliad*, the Roman poets, Provence, Dante, Liu Ch’e, Camoens, Flaubert and Henry James.”⁹² As with Dante, Pound’s personal quest to write an epic poem containing these luminous fragments of history becomes a constitutive part of the narrative. In other words, just as Dante “established his own journey of redemption as the unifying principle of the *Commedia*,”⁹³ so too “Pound presents his quest for knowledge and beatitude in terms of a tradition of epic wanderers whose similarly motivated journeys provide direction and purpose to Pound’s.”⁹⁴ As Hugh Kenner puts it, “Pound hoped to become, while writing the poem in public, the poet capable of ending the *Cantos*.”⁹⁵

As Sicari adds, Kenner’s statement comes in the context of discussing Pound’s “adoption of Odysseus as the figure for the opening canto”⁹⁶ of his epic poem, a decision that both strengthens and complicates the relation between the *Cantos* and the *Divine Comedy*. Sicari notes that Pound “refers to his decision to make Odysseus’s descent to

⁹⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁹¹ Ibid, 8.

⁹² William Cookson, *A Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Croom Helm, 1985): 15.

⁹³ Sicari, *Pound’s Epic Ambition*, xi.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁹⁵ Qtd. in *ibid*, 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 7.

the underworld the opening canto” as the shift that “solved his formal problem,”⁹⁷ but he also suggests that this decision may have resolved an anxiety of influence for Pound as well. While Pound emulates Dante’s method and goal as a poet in many ways, “imitation would be servile,” Sicari writes, “and Pound’s ambition is not to copy Dante’s achievement but to accomplish the same comprehensive scope and authority for his age and nation as Dante did for his.”⁹⁸ Thus, when Pound descends into the underworld for his first canto, he chooses not Dante’s Hell, but the classical underworld. In this way, Pound manipulates a connection with Dante without imitating him.

The figure of Ulysses also offers both poets a sort of meditation on the poetic motivation underlying their epic projects. The Ulysses of Pound and Dante is quite distinct from Homer’s Odysseus. Whereas Odysseus seeks to return to the literal place of his home, Dante’s Ulysses “forsakes even a brief stop in Ithaca and...instead journeys beyond the assigned limits of the world toward new experience,” seeking a new sort of home: “a return to the lost original consciousness that has access to the ‘new,’ the consciousness that marvels at all aspects of experience as if each moment were fresh and unique...the original experience of humanity figured by the earthly paradise of Eden.”⁹⁹ In “identify[ing] his own poetic project with Ulysses’ craft,”¹⁰⁰ Dante essentially anticipates Ezra Pound’s modernist injunction to “make it new.” Moreover, Dante also anticipates the mythical method by reinterpreting “antiquity” to make it new.

And yet, Dante’s Ulysses drowns just before reaching the island-mountain of Purgatory and is “consigned to hell as a false counselor, for...misus[ing] the powers of

⁹⁷ Ibid, 8.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 3.

language by persuading his companions to break God's decrees and travel after forbidden knowledge."¹⁰¹ For Dante, Ulysses is a sort of Icarian figure, a cautionary reminder "of the possible treachery of his own language and the madness of his own journey."¹⁰² Like Pound, Dante does not merely imitate his predecessors, but reinterprets them. Dante's pilgrim hears Ulysses' story in *Inferno* XXVI and remembers him in *Purgatorio* I, as Sicari explains:

As the pilgrim embarks on his own purgatorial experience up this mountain, the poet recalls Ulysses who failed to see the need for purgation before he set sail for ultimate experience. Unlike Ulysses, Dante undergoes purification as preparation for the return to an original state.¹⁰³

Dante makes clear the interconnectedness of authorship and redemption in *Purgatorio* XXXII, as Beatrice admonishes Dante's pilgrim of his duty as a writer: "for that world's good which liveth ill... what thou seest, having returned to earth, take heed thou write."¹⁰⁴

It is in this sense of authorship as a purgatorial task, Sicari notes, that Dante's Ulysses most significantly influences Pound's exilic wanderer: "Pound calls upon Dante to suggest that the 'home' to be sought in *The Cantos* is similar to the earthly paradise of Eden, now lost beyond memory and regained only by the terrifying descent to hell and the painful ascent up Mount Purgatory."¹⁰⁵ Pound's personal investment in the journey he depicts in *The Cantos* suggests that the poetic task, in his eyes, is not simply to tell a tale of redemption, but to make the experience of purgation part of the authorial process.

Sicari traces this "purgatorial motive and mentality" in Pound's work as well as Eliot's

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰² Giuseppe Mazzotta qtd. in ibid, 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 423. All references are to page numbers in this prose translation of *Purgatorio*.

¹⁰⁵ Sicari, *Pound's Epic Ambition*, 18.

and even James Joyce's.¹⁰⁶ Their line of thinking is aptly summarized in an early, anonymous review of Eliot's *Waste Land*: "Life is neither hellish nor heavenly; it has a purgatorial quality. And since it is purgatory, deliverance is possible."¹⁰⁷ Given that this anonymous review was provided by Eliot's own journal, *The Criterion*, in the same inaugural issue in which Eliot first published *The Waste Land*, it should be safe to consider the reviewer's voice as being in line with Eliot's views on the subject.

I emphasize the centrality of the purgatorial theme in these modernists' thinking because it is also one of the most significant themes to emerge from *In Our Time*'s mythical structure. Just like Pound's *Draft of XVI Cantos*, *In Our Time* begins with a prophetic visit to the land of the dead and ends with a purgatorial scene, suggesting an upward-striving arc for the writer-character, Nick Adams, who bookends the novel. Indeed, one hears an echo of the *kunstlerroman* quality implicit in Debra Modellmog's reading of *In Our Time*'s authorial consciousness when one considers that the novel's most evident parallels to the *Divine Comedy* and *The Cantos* occur in the Nick Adams stories. That is not to say, however, that *Divine Comedy* parallels only occur in Nick's presence, or even that every story and vignette must independently display overtly Dantean characteristics. On the contrary, the inclusion of diverse material is integral to the mythical method.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 225.

¹⁰⁷ *The Waste Land: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Michael North (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 137.

Chapter 5: *In Our Time's* "Introduction" and *Nekuia* Story

Like *The Cantos*, *In Our Time's* major form derives primarily from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but it is not limited to imitative allegory. Instead, its method bears out Bickford Sylvester's observation concerning the authors from whom Hemingway learned:

[T]he modernist method of Eliot and Pound is not to construct the one-to-one equations of allegory but to assemble mosaics of allusion that in their cumulative effect make the reader feel a coherent parallel between...between the present work and the work alluded to.¹⁰⁸

Rather than mere collages of literary bric-a-brac, these modernists use patterns of allusion to form complex, multifaceted portraits. *In Our Time's* mosaic narrative most resembles the journey of Dante's pilgrim, but it also contains significant and simultaneous references to other narrative traditions. This not only entails alluding to established traditions such as Biblical Genesis, the Fisher King myth, Wagner's *Parsifal*, and the *Commedia Dell'arte*, but also bringing what Hemingway sees as the neglected tradition of bullfighting into relation with the historical canon. Therefore our explication of *In Our Time's* Dantean allusions must be supplemented with considerations of the text's complementary structures of allusion.

These complementary structures of allusion are apparent in *In Our Time's* very first stories. Fittingly, its first story, "On the Quai at Smyrna" operates symbolically as a Genesis metaphor. However, Hemingway subverts our expectations of what a Genesis story should be. The story's opening lines emphasize darkness, light, water, and land, and yet instead of God saying "let there be light," there is a British Naval crew shining their

¹⁰⁸ Bickford Sylvester, "Hemingway's Italian Waste Land: The Complex Unity of 'Out of Season,'" in *Hemingway's Neglected Short Fiction*, ed. Susan F. Beegel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 75-98.

ship's spotlight on screaming evacuees to silence them: "We were in the harbor and they were all on the pier and at midnight they started screaming. We used to turn the searchlight on them to quiet them."¹⁰⁹ The story's memorable imagery includes such Genesis inversions as women "hav[ing] babies dead for six days" and "mules with their forelegs broken pushed over into the shallow water"¹¹⁰—a far cry from Noah's Ark and the six days of Earth's creation.

The wordplay here is not to be overlooked. Not only does the haunting image of drowned animals that did not make it aboard evacuation ships liken the modern condition to being left off the Ark; through repetition with subtle variation, Hemingway creates a confused multitude of meanings about birth and death: "You couldn't get the women to give up their dead babies. They'd have babies dead for six days."¹¹¹ Rather than alluding to the *Divine Comedy*, "On the Quai at Smyrna" introduces the hellish conditions in which Hemingway's "journey of our life" takes place.

In a characteristic example of the relationship between *In Our Time*'s stories and vignettes, "Chapter I" picks up themes from "On the Quai at Smyrna" and develops them. It is narrated in similar fashion, as if relayed or reported by the author—"We can, if we like, visualize the Britisher telling his story to the 'author' over a glass in some quiet bar," writes James Harrison¹¹²—and it accentuates both the motif of life's journey and the theme of inversion that seems inherent to the modern condition as *In Our Time* sees it: "Everybody was drunk. The whole battery was drunk going along the road in the

¹⁰⁹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 11.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 11-12.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 11.

¹¹² James Harrison, "Hemingway, *In Our Time*," *Explicator* vol. 18 (Jan. 1959): 18.

dark...It was funny going along that road.”¹¹³ The scene, theme, and motif are repeated with subtle variation in “Chapter II”: “No end and no beginning. Just carts loaded with everything they owned... There was a woman having a kid with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it.”¹¹⁴ In fact, repetition with variation is one of this book’s central techniques, operating both within the stories and vignettes and between them.

Nowhere is Hemingway’s use of repetition and variation on multiple structural levels more evident than in the lapsarian cycle of the first five stories and vignettes. Just as “On the Quai at Smyrna,” “Chapter I,” and “Chapter II” feature modernist inversions of the cycles of life, so does “Indian Camp” portray a scene of birth and death—with a screaming woman under a blanket, no less—while also introducing a significant and recurring character, Nick Adams, and metaphor, the Fisher King myth. The story opens with Nick, his father—a doctor—and his Uncle George crossing a lake in rowboats to a Native American logging camp on an emergency medical call for a woman in her second day of labor.

“Indian Camp” signals the beginning of Nick’s education about and initiation into the adult world. Not only does he watch his father perform a rudimentary caesarian section, and bear witness after the operation when the woman’s husband is found dead from suicide; he also sees his father experience humiliation. The doctor’s jocular behavior reflects poorly even before the revelation of the husband’s suicide, and his boisterous bedside manner, “exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game,” stands in harsh juxtaposition to the humbled, almost apologetic tone

¹¹³ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

of his fatherly attention to Nick on their journey home: “‘I’m terribly sorry I brought you along, Nickie,’ said his father, all his post-operative exhilaration gone. ‘It was an awful mess to put you through.’”¹¹⁵

“Indian Camp” represents an interesting confluence of Fisher King symbolism with the notion of fatherly anxiety that remains a theme throughout *In Our Time*. Not only does the story’s setting suggest a wasteland scene, but also its featuring of fish and fishing imagery—Nick’s father uses fishing line to sew up the mother’s caesarian incision, and the closing image shows a “bass jump[ing], making a circle in the water”¹¹⁶—further asserts the allusion. Moreover, the husband who ultimately commits suicide is said to have “cut his foot very badly with an axe three days before.”¹¹⁷ Foot or leg wounds are a typical characteristic of the Fisher King character, and it is no coincidence that, in the timeline the story offers, the woman’s labor begins one day after her husband’s injury. In Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal* and Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzifal*, the Fisher King’s wound comes as a punishment for his improper wooing of, or seduction by, a woman. “Indian Camp” sports vague hints of an affair associated with the woman’s pregnancy,¹¹⁸ but definitive proof of impropriety is not necessary to establish the story’s clear preoccupation with reproductive anxieties.

Though it is most often associated with Eliot’s notes to the *Waste Land*, the Fisher King myth was first popularized (relatively speaking) as a life-cycle allegory as a result

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 18.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 19.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 16.

¹¹⁸ There are hints of a possible affair not only in the doctor’s choice of words (“Ought to have a look at the proud father. They’re usually the worst sufferers in these little affairs”), but also in the “young Indian” character who “smile[s] reminiscently” at the bite the woman gives Uncle George’s arm (Ibid, 18).

of two nineteenth and twentieth century works of anthropology and comparative religion and literature, namely Sir George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*¹¹⁹ and Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*.¹²⁰ Frazer's influential study of religion and mythology identified shared traits of historical belief systems, centering on the idea of fertility rituals—specifically the periodic sacrifice of a divine, king-like figure to ensure natural and social vitality—as a common thesis of religious orders: “The man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay.”¹²¹ Weston applies Frazer's schema to a study of the Arthurian Grail legend, identifying, among other things, the Waste Land motif of natural and societal decline, the Grail Quest as a fertility ritual, the Fisher King as the sacrificial king figure, and the questing knight as his successor.¹²²

One implication of Frazer's analysis is that the Arthurian tale's theme of decline and regeneration does not merely signify the cycles of the natural world, but also an intergenerational drama in which the younger generation represents an inherent threat to its progenitors. In “Indian Camp,” therefore, Fisher King symbolism corresponds naturally with the conflation of fatherhood and suicide in the husband character—it is both a repetition of and a variation on *In Our Time*'s “journey of our life” motif. In this light, the doctor's sorrow about bringing along his son gains new meaning, as both are implicated in the intergenerational drama that is the “awful mess” of life in our time.

¹¹⁹ Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Abridged ed. (London: Macmillan, 1922).

¹²⁰ Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920).

¹²¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 324-25.

¹²² Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*, 74-76.

It is important to note, however, that the Fisher King metaphor alone does not establish the conflation of fatherhood and suicide—the literal proximity between the husband’s suicide and the child’s birth does. Nor does the metaphor become a source of moral order or explanation, as indicated by the doctor’s answer to Nick’s question about the suicide:

‘Why did he kill himself, Daddy?’
‘I don’t know, Nick. He couldn’t stand things, I guess.’¹²³

The doctor’s subtle, darkly ironic pun on the husband’s injured foot can be taken in many ways, but not as a moral center. If anything, it gestures to a post-moral worldview. All at once it is bitterly ironic, wickedly clever, and painfully honest—it is Hemingway’s philosophy in a nutshell. Most importantly for our purposes, it speaks to the associational method of allusion *In Our Time* uses to great effect. The symbolism in “Indian Camp” serves to situate it within the narrative’s overarching theme, universalizing the story while also enhancing its individual integrity.

One might fairly wonder how this discussion fits into our larger consideration of *In Our Time*’s mythical method. Here it is crucial to note that “Indian Camp” does not merely signal Nick Adams’ initiation into the adult world, nor does its Arthurian metaphor simply run in a parallel and coincidental relationship to the novel’s *Divine Comedy* allusion. “Indian Camp” also forms a structural parallel to canto I of Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*,¹²⁴ which features the *nekuia* episode from book eleven of Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus sails to Hades to learn his fate from Tiresias. It should not require an extended explication of this canto to demonstrate its similarities to “Indian

¹²³ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 19.

¹²⁴ Pound, *The Cantos*, 3.

Camp,” which, of course, was *In Our Time*’s first story until “On the Quai at Smyrna” was added to the 1930 edition. Like Odysseus, Nick travels over water to a wasteland scene and learns what his future holds—even if he does not yet understand the lesson. The “awful mess” Nick witnesses in the camp foreshadows the experiences of injury, disillusionment, death, and intergenerational anxiety that await *In Our Time*’s composite protagonist.

Even Hemingway’s use of a Fisher King metaphor in “Indian Camp” may be understood in relation to Pound’s influence. By using a Fisher King metaphor in this opening story which parallels Pound’s *nekua* episode, Hemingway engages in a sort of repetition and variation on his mentor’s work. Just as Pound avoids imitating Dante, Hemingway converses with Pound’s *Cantos* without copying them—after all, the last line of Pound’s first canto also refers to “the golden bough of Argicida.” It is also worth noting here Nicholas Joost and Alan Brown’s assertion that Hemingway’s habitual reading of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* “is apparent from Dr. Gregory Hemingway’s memoir...in a passage relating to his father’s ‘sub-chasing’ exploits off Cuba during the second World War,” which states: “Papa reached for a book more often than a bottle. He had a bag crammed with detective stories, *War and Peace*, and Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*.”¹²⁵ Furthermore, as Joost and Brown’s essay indicates, Hemingway’s use of the Fisher King metaphor also places his project in conversation with Eliot’s *Waste Land*.¹²⁶ The Fisher King metaphor in “Indian Camp” therefore may be seen as part of an associative palimpsest of allusion which hybridizes the methods and influences of both

¹²⁵ Nicholas Joost and Alan Brown, “T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway: A Literary Relationship,” *Papers on Language and Literature* vol. 14, (1978): 432.

¹²⁶ Joost and Brown also argue that *The Sun Also Rises*’ use of a Fisher King metaphor represents Eliot’s influence on Hemingway’s mythical method.

Eliot and Pound. Hemingway's project thereby identifies itself with those of its high-modernists peers as much as it does the mythical material to which they all refer.

Chapter 6: Limbo and Lapsarian Cycles

The next several stories after “Indian Camp” form a general order that is distinctly resonant with that of the *Divine Comedy*. The full order of Dante’s Hell is as follows: 1) Limbo, 2) The Lustful, 3) The Gluttons, 4) The Avaricious and Prodigal, 5) The Wrathful and Sullen, 6) The Heretics, 7) The Violent, 8) The Fraudulent, and 9) The Traitorous. The dysfunctional marriage of the titular characters in “The Doctor and The Doctor’s Wife” suggests a worldly sort of limbo, and the nature of their relationship aligns with Dante’s characterization of the souls outside limbo. Whereas *Inferno*’s limbo proper is inhabited by “virtuous heathens” such as Homer, Ovid, and Virgil himself, the bleak space outside limbo is occupied by “the neutrals,” those whose passivity and avoidance in life continues after death in blindness, ignominy, sighs, and lamentations.¹²⁷ We might also recall here the line of refugees with “no end and no beginning” in “Chapter II” as a distinct echo of Dante’s neutrals: “so long a train of people that I should never have believed death had undone so many.”¹²⁸

Passivity and avoidance define the relationship between Doctor Adams and his wife, a Christian scientist. Their withered marriage and personal distance are represented symbolically in the simple but compelling fact of their physical separation. They remain in separate rooms throughout the story, speaking to one another, unseen, through distance and darkness: “he heard his wife’s voice from the darkened room.”¹²⁹ Again, there need not be a perfect allegory in order to achieve the mosaic effect of allusion Hemingway seeks. The story’s scene of domestic dysfunction creates a multitude of associations, from

¹²⁷ Dante, *Inferno*, 55.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 49.

¹²⁹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 26.

a realistic sort of marriage-in-limbo to a lapsarian metaphor of trouble in the Garden.

“Chapter III,” a vignette in which British soldiers shoot Germans climbing over a garden wall, continues this theme of domestic discord while also foreshadowing the lapsarian theme that develops further in “The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow.”

“The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow” are closely related to one another in a number of ways. The former depicts a young adult Nick Adams struggling to break up with his girlfriend, Marjorie, because he has fallen out of love, while the latter deals with the fallout of that breakup, as Nick and his boon companion Bill—introduced at the end of “The End of Something” as Nick’s knowing confidante—drink and talk about drinking, baseball, literature, and relationships. “The End of Something” marks the end of Nick’s innocence, as he states, “I feel as though everything was gone to hell inside of me.”¹³⁰ “The Three-Day Blow is replete with imagery of the Fall, “The fruit had been picked and the fall wind blew through the bare trees,”¹³¹ as well as the beginning of the pilgrim’s journey through Hell. “The Three-Day Blow” underscores the boys’ ironic ignorance with its dry narrative tone about their “conducting the conversation on a high plane.”¹³² Symbolically, the fruit of the tree of knowledge has been picked, but Nick has much yet to learn from his journey through Hell.

The title of “The Three-Day Blow” suggests the length of the pilgrim’s journey through Hell, while the story’s heavy winds allude to the windstorm in the second circle of Dante’s *Inferno*, the circle of “those the wind drives,” the lustful. Drinking gluttonously, taking questionable relationship advice from his friend Bill, and engaging

¹³⁰ Ibid, 34.

¹³¹ Ibid, 39.

¹³² Ibid, 45.

in willful self-deception, Nick in this story exemplifies the vice of *Inferno*'s upper circles: subjecting reason to desire. Furthermore, the boys' discussion of books such as *Forest Lovers* and *The Dark Forest* not only parallels Francesca and Paolo's discussion of reading the love story that led to their affair in canto V, but also contributes to Hemingway's indirect allusion to *Inferno*'s "lovers," as well as the dark forest in which Nick comes to himself in the following story, "The Battler."¹³³

Because all of this takes place during an autumn windstorm, it reads quite naturally, demonstrating the effectiveness of Hemingway's method of indirect allusion. In the same vein, we learn from a seemingly offhand remark that the story takes place on a Thursday night: "He felt happy now. There was not anything that was irrevocable. He might go into town Saturday night. Today was Thursday."¹³⁴ Dante's *Inferno* opens with the pilgrim lost in a dark wood on the night of Maundy Thursday; the next time we see Nick Adams, in "The Battler," he is walking through a dark wood, having lost the straight way (i.e. thrown from a train). Bill's comment about going to town—"Wouldn't it be hell to be in town?"¹³⁵—ironically proves prophetic as Nick's journey by rail toward the town of Mancelona in "The Battler" symbolically represents his passage into hell proper, represented by his wounding in "Chapter VI."

¹³³ Interestingly, Hemingway's "Summer People" also alludes to the wind-driven lovers of *Inferno* V. The characters Nick and Kate figure as the lovers Paolo and Francesca, while Odgar, who hopes to marry Kate, figures as Giovanni Malatesta, the disabled husband of Francesca who catches and murders 'the lovers.' According to Donald Daiker, Hemingway "wrote and completed 'Summer People' in the summer of 1924, but he had trouble deciding whether to include the story in *In Our Time* (1925) and even where to place it within that volume" ("What to Make of 'Summer People'?" *The Hemingway Review* vol. 34, no. 2 [Spring 2015]: 36-51).

¹³⁴ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 48.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 41.

Taken together, “The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow” offer an illustrative example of the conflation of allusion to adjacent or related circles of sin—the lustful and the gluttonous—that is typical of *In Our Time*’s mosaic style of metaphor, a style rooted in Pound’s adaptation of the *Divine Comedy*’s ordering principles. Pound does not “follow Dante by imitating the *Commedia*’s ‘scaffolding’”¹³⁶ exactly, Sicari explains, but he does draw from Dante’s general divisions of human behavior. As Pound puts it, “I have made the division between people dominated by emotion, people struggling upwards, and those who have some part of the divine vision. The thrones in Dante’s *Paradiso* are for the spirits of people who have been responsible for good government.”¹³⁷ While Pound’s ill-fated interest in government and his understanding of “the divine vision” become points of departure for Hemingway, his general divisions of human behavior are germane to *In Our Time*’s, especially as the narrative’s general faithfulness to *Inferno*’s circles of order begins to see exceptions.

“The Battler” is not one of those exceptions. In a brief essay in the journal *Language, Linguistics, and Literature: The Eureka! Approach*,¹³⁸ Bates Hoffer analyzes the *Inferno*-derived descent and rise motif in “The Battler,” noting that the story starts with Nick going off the railroad track “down the bank to the swamp where he sees a fire in the dark,” and ends “with Nick leaving the fire in the swamp...as he goes up the bank on the track.”¹³⁹ Suggesting an in-class analysis exercise—the publication is primarily pedagogical—Hoffer also charts the ways in which the story’s diction mimics and

¹³⁶ Sicari, *Pound’s Epic Ambition*, 8.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁸ Bates Hoffer, “The Battler,” *Language, Linguistics, and Literature: The Eureka! Approach* vol. 29 (2004): 31-34.

¹³⁹ Hoffer, “The Battler,” 31.

contributes to the narrative structure's descent and rise, noting the repetitions of "hell" and "damn" (the former occurring five times) "at the traditionally climactic part of the story, the ¾ point."¹⁴⁰ In fact, the landscape and scenery of Nick's walk symbolically mirror the journey of Dante's pilgrim to an even greater extent than Hoffer points out.

As the "The Battler" begins *in medias res*, Nick stands up on a railroad track in the middle of a woody swamp and looks "up the track at the lights of the caboose going out of sight around the curve."¹⁴¹ Having been thrown off a train as a stowaway, he literally comes to himself "within a dark wood where the straight way was lost."¹⁴² Furthermore, Nick's backward look in the story's last line, "Looking back from the mounting grade before the track curved into the hills he could see the firelight in the clearing,"¹⁴³ distinctly echoes the pilgrim's backward look in *Inferno*'s first canto: "as he who with laboring breath has escaped from the deep to the shore turns to the perilous waters and gazes, so my mind, which was still in flight, turned back to look again at the pass which never yet let any go alive."¹⁴⁴

"The Battler" has even stronger correspondences with *Inferno*'s seventh, eighth, and ninth cantos.¹⁴⁵ Nick crosses "three of four miles of swamp" which appears "ghostly in the rising mist."¹⁴⁶ This setting recalls the appearance of the "marsh which is called

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 32.

¹⁴¹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 53.

¹⁴² Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 23. All references are to page numbers in this prose translation of *Inferno*.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Dante, *Inferno*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ This is fitting, considering John Sinclair's observation of the similarities between the scenes of the first and ninth cantos in his commentary: "The scene and mood of the first canto and [Dante's] first meeting with Virgil on the desert slope are vividly recalled to us" (*Inferno*, 129).

¹⁴⁶ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 54.

Styx”¹⁴⁷ in canto VII, the realm of the wrathful. Likewise the appearance of Styx’s inhabitants, seen “smiting each other not only with the hand but with head and breast and feet and tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth,”¹⁴⁸ resonates with the violent overtones of “The Battler.” Moreover, even as “The Battler” begins with Nick watching a train’s lights disappear before spotting the light from a campfire beyond the swamp shortly afterwards, *Inferno*’s eighth canto opens with a view of the signal fires atop the fortified entrance to Dis, the garrison-city marking entry to the lower circles of Hell—the realm of violent and willful sin.¹⁴⁹

Hoffer’s discussion of possible allegorical interpretations of the characters Ad Francis and Bugs—two vagrants whose interaction with Nick forms most of the story’s action, a disgraced former prizefighter and his traveling companion—is worth examining. He rightly identifies both Nick Adams (“Hemingway’s ‘Everyman’”) and Ad Francis as Adam figures. If “Ad had married a woman who was reputed to be his sister, very like a twin,” but they were “no more brother and sister...than a rabbit,” he writes, then surely “Ad as Adam fits, since Eve is a perfect twin, made of his very tissue, but not a sister.”¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Hoffer notes possible Satanic interpretations of Bugs, observing that his name and tending of the campfire plausibly align him with Beelzebub, the “Lord of the Flies” who “tends the abyss with its fires and punishments and plaguing insects.”¹⁵¹ In other ways, however, Hoffer’s assessment of the story against the scheme of Dante’s *Inferno* is questionable, as he places a supposedly repentant Ad Francis in Limbo: “Ad...has sinned

¹⁴⁷ Dante, *Inferno*, 105.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 105.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 111.

¹⁵⁰ Hoffer, “The Battler,” 33.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 34.

and is repentant but is in Limbo under domination.”¹⁵² Problematically, however, the former prizefighter’s repeated insistence of his own toughness shows few signs of repentance: “‘They all bust their hands on me,’ the little man said. ‘They couldn’t hurt me.’”¹⁵³ In fact, Ad has most in common with *Inferno*’s unrepentantly wrathful Capaneus.

Dante’s pilgrim encounters Capaneus among the violent sinners in Hell’s seventh circle; he is one of only a few blasphemers, and the only one to be named. It should be noted that violence is a complex and important sin for Dante. Hell’s seventh circle is split into three terraces for the various types of violent sin Dante distinguishes: violence against others (murder), violence against self (suicide), and violence against God, nature, and art (blasphemy, perversion, and usury). Dante’s understanding of violence likely is not what today’s reader imagines; his murderers include tyrants like Attila the Hun. The intemperate physical aggression of the wrathful in the fifth circle—those seen smiting each other in the eighth canto—probably fits better with the modern imagination of violence. Therefore it should be no surprise that we see elements of both circles adapted and combined in Hemingway’s story.

Capaneus introduces himself with characteristic bluster, interrupting the pilgrim’s query to Virgil about his identity and stating proudly: “What I was living, that I am dead. Though Jove wear out his smith from whom in rage he seized the keen bolt with which, the last day, I was smitten—though he . . . hurl his shafts at me with all his force, he should not so have the joy of vengeance.”¹⁵⁴ Virgil’s response indicates the irony with which we

¹⁵² Ibid, 33.

¹⁵³ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 56.

¹⁵⁴ Dante, *Inferno*, 183.

should regard Capaneus' statement: "in that thy pride is unquenched thou art punished the more; no torment by thy own raving would be pain to match thy fury."¹⁵⁵ Writing in her *Commento Baroliniano*, Teodolinda Barolini explains that Capaneus enunciates a foundational principle of Dante's vision: "It is nothing less than a declaration of how Dante's Hell functions overall...If Capaneus' greatest punishment is his own arrogance, then in effect Capaneus creates his own Hell."¹⁵⁶ In Dante's moral order, punishments do not merely fit their crimes; crimes beget their own punishments. As Barolini succinctly puts it in her title, "we are our own hell."

Ad Francis resembles Capaneus in a number of significant ways. Most apparently, Nick encounters him in the symbolically proper location, and his boasts are quite similar to those of Capaneus: "'They all bust their hands on me,' the little man said. 'They couldn't hurt me.'"¹⁵⁷ It is also worth noting that the word "cap" occurs five times in Hemingway's descriptions of his Capanean figure.¹⁵⁸ Such repetition is a subtle form of evidence, but the author's economy and precision of diction—the word appears only twice more in the rest of the book¹⁵⁹—allow us to treat his use of repetition seriously. Altogether, the character Ad Francis presents a representative example of the method of indirect allusion Hemingway uses throughout *In Our Time* to create a deep structure of reference to the *Divine Comedy*, which has hidden in plain sight since the book's publication.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 183.

¹⁵⁶ Teodolinda Barolini, "Inferno 14: We Are Our Own Hell: sunt lacrimae rerum," *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante (New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2018), <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-14/>

¹⁵⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 56-57.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 55, 56, 59.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 127, 143.

This is not to say that Ad Francis should be understood only as a *Divine Comedy* allegory. The strength of Hemingway's indirect allusion is not just its subtlety, but also that it endows a story with significant allegorical meaning without limiting it to allegory. Indeed, Hemingway creates a new and complex metaphor by placing Ad Francis in the role of Capaneus while characterizing him with unique sympathy.

Barolini concludes that it is necessary that Dante's reader not become emotionally invested in Capaneus in order to absorb the lesson of his punishment: "this kind of information is best absorbed vis-à-vis a character like Capaneus, a character whom Dante does not seek to make sympathetic."¹⁶⁰ We must believe that Capaneus deserves his punishment in order for the moral system of Dante's *Inferno* to work. With this in mind, one begins to wonder whether that system fits the surprisingly sympathetic Ad Francis. After all, Ad is avuncular towards Nick, treating his fight with the brakeman seriously, offering him food, and disclosing his own "craziness"—itself a result of brain injuries and a falling out with his wife—almost apologetically. He boasts not about inflicting punishment in the ring, but about his ability to absorb it thanks to his slow heart that let him outlast opponents: "I could take it...Don't you think I could take it, kid?"¹⁶¹ He even has Nick count his pulse.

Ad's eventual snap, the story's climax, results from an incident with Nick's knife. The offense he accuses Nick of giving clearly comes from a flashback: "You come in here...and smoke my cigars and drink my liquor and then talk snotty. Where the hell do you think you get off?"¹⁶² It is unclear whether the presence of a weapon acts as a trigger

¹⁶⁰ Barolini, *Commento Baroliniano*, 14.

¹⁶¹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 55.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 59.

for Ad, or if perhaps he hopes to keep his young doppelganger out of trouble. But in the story's denouement, after Bugs knocks Ad unconscious to prevent him from hitting Nick, Bugs discloses that he himself had been imprisoned for "cuttin' a man" while Ad was merely "busting people all the time," leading one to wonder whose control of the knife would be more dangerous anyway. More importantly, seeing Ad knocked out with a blow to the head—a procedure Bugs evidently has administered many times before¹⁶³—calls to mind Teolinda Barolini's description of the sinner's experience of Hell: "the sinners of Dante's *Inferno* perform the sin for which they are damned... Over and over, the sinner performs the spiritual condition that led him or her to Hell. Over and over we learn that we are our own Hell."¹⁶⁴ What Ad repeatedly performs, however, is less a sin than a sad parody of the resilience that marked his boxing career, and of the one blow from which he never quite recovered—his falling out with his sister-wife.

With this in mind, our sense of Ad takes on a tragic tone. Whereas Capaneus portrays the spiritual condition of blasphemy, Ad's living hell represents a tragic irony of life in the modern world: we are damned to live in it. He stands as a warning to Nick of what his life will entail—"You won't get out of it... You're going to take a beating, see?"¹⁶⁵ In this way, "The Battler" anticipates a theme that resonates throughout Hemingway's body of work, from *A Farewell to Arms* ("If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them"¹⁶⁶), to

¹⁶³ Bugs knocks Ad unconscious with a bone-handled blackjack just before telling the story of Ad's Eve-like sister-wife. This moment's Genesis symbolism, and its place in the Michigan cycle's lapsarian arc, remains under-evaluated critically.

¹⁶⁴ Barolini, *Commento Baroliniano*, 14.

¹⁶⁵ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 59.

¹⁶⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 249.

The Old Man and the Sea (“A man can be destroyed but not defeated”¹⁶⁷). Nick Adams is the first Hemingway hero to begin learning this lesson, and he, though damned to live “in our time,” at least has the benefit of learning it while still living.

¹⁶⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 103.

Chapter 7: Journey Through Hell

Chapters IV-VI offer a representative example of the increasingly complex interrelationship between the stories and vignettes in *In Our Time*'s developing narrative. If "Chapter III" and "The End of Something" signify Nick's fall from innocence, "Chapter IV" joins "The Three-Day Blow" in representing the aftermath of that fall: "We'd jammed an absolutely perfect barricade across the bridge. It was simply priceless. A big old wrought-iron grating from the front of a house. Too heavy to lift and you could shoot through it and they would have to climb over it."¹⁶⁸ The image of soldiers being shot as they climb over a wall doubtless recalls "Chapter III," and the continued occurrence of the word fall ("we had to fall back"¹⁶⁹) maintains the lapsarian theme. But a different sort of relationship also exists between "Chapter IV," "The Three-Day Blow," and "The Battler."

We have established already the allusion to the marsh Styx in Nick's crossing of the tamarack swamp in "The Battler." In light of this relatively firm allusion, others may insinuate themselves by association. For instance, the "absolutely perfect barricade" of a "big old wrought-iron grating" in "Chapter IV" might resemble the fortified entrance to Dis in *Inferno* VIII, the garrison-city marking entry to the lower circles of Hell, where Virgil and the pilgrim are turned back by the gate's defenders. Similarly, the branch-baring windstorms of "The Three-Day Blow" might reflect the "noise of a wind violent...which strikes the forest and with unchecked course splits the branches"¹⁷⁰ that accompanies the angel sent from Heaven to clear the way in *Inferno* IX. In this way, *In*

¹⁶⁸ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 37.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Dante, *Inferno*, 123.

Our Time's stories and vignettes gain additional meaning simply by the associative relationship of their juxtaposition.

A similar case study may be made of "Chapter V," "The Battler," and "Chapter VI." Considering that "Chapter V" falls between the gluttonous drinking of "The Three-Day Blow" and the wrath and violence of "The Battler," it stands to reason that it might represent some combination of avarice or prodigality. The vignette features a dismal scene of six government officials, one too sick with typhoid to stand, being executed by firing squad against the wall of a boarded up hospital. While we know nothing of the cabinet ministers' crimes, it is easy to imagine bureaucrats being condemned for avarice, prodigality, or both. It is also worth remembering that we learn from Bugs in "The Battler" that Ad "spent all his money"¹⁷¹ as well, indicating that prodigality is afoot one way or another.

Techniques of repetition, variation, and juxtaposition further link "Chapter VI" with "The Battler" and "Chapter V." Whereas the last line of "Chapter V" is an image of one of the cabinet ministers "sitting down in the water with his head on his knees,"¹⁷² the first line of "The Battler" is "Nick [standing] up."¹⁷³ Likewise, the first image we see of Ad Francis in "The Battler" mimics that of the cabinet minister, "sitting there with his head in his hands looking at the fire,"¹⁷⁴ and foreshadows the first line of "Chapter VI": "Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of machine-gun fire in the street."¹⁷⁵ "Chapter VI" is also the only time Nick appears as a

¹⁷¹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 61.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

named character in the vignettes, and it is the last time Nick appears as a named character at all until “Cross-Country Snow.” His wartime injury symbolically punctuates the notion that *In Our Time*’s composite wanderer has entered the lower circles of Hell—fragmented, nameless, and alienated, a member of the Lost Generation wandering “the way among the Lost People.”¹⁷⁶

Just as *Inferno*’s fifth circle contains both the wrathful and the sullen—one sin of excess emotion counterpointing the other of insufficiency—so does “A Very Short Story” naturally follow “The Battler.” “A Very Short Story” is *In Our Time*’s first story without Nick Adams (discounting “On the Quai at Smyrna”), though its nameless main character has much in common with Nick. A recently wounded American soldier, he falls in love with a nurse, Luz, and they talk about getting married, but their romance does not survive long after the war. He returns to America to find work and send for her, leaving on bad terms—“He felt sick about saying good-bye like that”—and soon she writes him a Dear John letter calling their relationship “only a boy and girl love.”¹⁷⁷

His response, or lack thereof, indicates the nature of his sin: “Luz never got an answer to the letter to Chicago about it. A short time after he contracted gonorrhoea from a sales girl in a loop department store while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park.”¹⁷⁸ The story’s judgment falls not so much on the nameless character’s careless intercourse as the apathy it represents. His silence is the opposite of callous—it suggests emotional cowardice, leading to dissolution instead of resolution. This is the essence of sullenness as Dante understands it, “The word used here and commonly translated *sloth*...connotes

¹⁷⁶ Dante, *Inferno*, 47.

¹⁷⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 66.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

spiritual ennui,”¹⁷⁹ and it is the essence of the narrative’s fairly unsympathetic judgment towards its main character, represented in his increasingly passive presence, almost to the point of absence, in the story’s final lines.

“Chapter VII” represents a repetition and variation on this manipulation of narrative perspective to imply judgment. “Chapter VII” centers on yet another nameless iteration of *In Our Time*’s composite protagonist, now in the trenches at Fossalta during a bombardment: “While the bombardment was knocking the trenches to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here.”¹⁸⁰ After the preceding examples of wrath and sullenness in “The Battler” and “A Very Short Story,” “Chapter VII” fits as a representation of heresy: “I believe in you and I’ll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters... The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus.”¹⁸¹ Hemingway’s manipulation of narrative perspective—from third person singular to first person singular, then first person plural, then third person singular again—makes clear a sense of judgment about the character’s foxhole faith.

His sin results in silence and isolation, the crime begetting the punishment: “And he never told anybody.”¹⁸² And yet, the last line’s movement towards silence and isolation paradoxically indicates an intimacy of knowledge about the unnamed individual that imbues the narrative perspective with an element of self-consciousness. We know that he knows he never told anybody. Just as consciousness of one’s sin both worsens the offense and opens the door to remediation, the vignette’s heightened narrative

¹⁷⁹ Sinclair, *Purgatorio*, 242.

¹⁸⁰ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 67.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

consciousness produces a sense of guilt as well as sympathy—exactly what the numbed and distant tone of “A Very Short Story” lacked.

It fits a familiar pattern regarding *In Our Time*'s anticipation of later works that Arnold E. Davidson makes a similar argument regarding Hemingway's manipulation of narrative perspective in *A Farewell to Arms*. As might be guessed from its title, “The Dantean Perspective in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*,”¹⁸³ Davidson's essay explains this perspective—essentially a hybrid of affective immediacy and objective judgment—with reference to *The Divine Comedy*:

The great prototype for this particular narrative perspective is, of course, Dante in the *Inferno*. Frederic Henry, like Dante, can be, at one and the same time, the man who is in hell and the man who has been through it, who has learned, perfectly or imperfectly, the lessons that hell should teach.¹⁸⁴

In describing a narrative perspective that has learned the lessons Hell should teach, Davidson may as well be addressing the purgatorial motive and mentality at work in *In Our Time*. While Davidson suggests that the “more objective and more controlled” *A Farewell to Arms* improves upon Hemingway's earlier work by clearly separating “the protagonist-actor and the protagonist-narrator,” “the narrator from his story,” and “the author from his material,”¹⁸⁵ we need not argue the relative merits of *In Our Time*'s narrative consciousness in order to appreciate its effect on the narrative. Bearing this in mind, we may consider the ways in which the story “Soldier's Home” further demonstrates the interconnectedness of *In Our Time*'s narrative consciousness and its purgatorial motive and mindset.

¹⁸³ Arnold E. Davidson, “The Dantean Perspective in Hemingway's ‘A Farewell to Arms,’” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 1973): 121-30.

¹⁸⁴ Davidson, “Dantean Perspective,” 124.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

“Soldier’s Home” portrays the post-war torpor of another American soldier, Harold Krebs, who, as Carl Wood observes, “so resembles Nick in his background and predicament that as a character he may be regarded in some sense as an alternate version of the personality Nick represents.”¹⁸⁶ Krebs returns home almost a full year after the armistice and experiences alienation from society, from his family, and even from himself, as he profanes his memories of the war by embellishing them: “Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it...Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration.”¹⁸⁷ He is distinguished, however, by his self-awareness, and the story’s drama comes from his internal struggle.

Krebs’ struggle against the alienation he feels is twofold. His efforts to regain a sense of truth and stability within himself and about himself, represented by his embrace of simple routine and his reading a book of military history “about all the engagements he had been in,” come in conflict with his sense of place in the world of social relations: “He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics...He did not want to tell any more lies...the world they were in was not the world he was in...It was not worth it. Not now when things were getting good again.”¹⁸⁸ This is the sense in which we should understand Krebs’ difficult conversation with his mother toward the end of the story:

‘God has some work for every one to do,’ his mother said. ‘There can be no idle hands in His Kingdom.’

‘I’m not in His Kingdom,’ Krebs said.

‘We are all of us in His Kingdom.’

Krebs felt embarrassed and resentful as always.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Wood, “Fragmentary Novel,” 721.

¹⁸⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 69-70.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 72.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 75.

Krebs is not only embarrassed and resentful at his mother's piety, but also at his sullen and heretical reaction to it. More significant than the sense of his sin, however, is the sense that Krebs wishes to express truthfully the social and spiritual alienation he feels, but his inability to do so only makes things worse. As is often the case in *In Our Time*, this theme crystallizes memorably in Hemingway's later writing, as here in one of *A Farewell to Arms*' more famous passages: "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain... There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity."¹⁹⁰

The story's climax occurs when Krebs' mother asks him if he loves her. He responds harshly and hurtfully and immediately regrets it; his regret centers on both his failed attempt to tell the truth about the alienation he feels and the harm his words cause:

'No,' Krebs said.

His mother looked at him across the table. Her eyes were shiny. She started crying.

'I don't love anybody,' Krebs said.

It wasn't any good. He couldn't tell her, he couldn't make her see it. It was silly to have said it. He had only hurt her.¹⁹¹

Though it would be easy to miss, there is good reason to believe that when Krebs later thinks "He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie,"¹⁹² the lie to which he refers is that about not loving anyone. When we read the last line of the story, "He would go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball,"¹⁹³ we should recall his earlier conversation with his little sister Helen:

'Will you love me always?'

¹⁹⁰ Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 184-85.

¹⁹¹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 76.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

‘Sure.’
‘Will you come over and watch me play indoor?’
‘Maybe.’
‘Aw, Hare, you don’t love me. If you loved me, you’d want to come over and watch me play indoor.’¹⁹⁴

With this in mind, we may understand Krebs not simply as a sinner consigned to suffer for his sullenness and untruths, but as one living through a purgatorial struggle—suffering through ‘spiritual ennui,’ endeavoring to avoid heresy against the truth of his experience.

Like a penitent in Purgatory, Krebs is not in God’s Kingdom, and he cannot pray for his own sake, but he can suffer purgation, and he can accept the prayers of others, as he does when his mother offers:

‘Would you kneel and pray with me, Harold?’ his mother asked.
They knelt down beside the dining-room table and Krebs’s mother prayed.
‘Now, you pray, Harold,’ she said.
‘I can’t,’ Krebs said.
‘Try, Harold.’
‘I can’t.’
‘Do you want me to pray for you?’
‘Yes.’¹⁹⁵

It feels like a stretch to compare Krebs’ mother and sister with Dante’s Beatrice—even though it bears mentioning that Helen is also the name of Nick Adams’ “girl” in “Cross-Country Snow,” and the pseudonym Hemingway uses for his wife, Hadley¹⁹⁶—but we should have no expectation for a perfect allegory anyway. Instead, they play real and complex roles in Krebs’ struggle, and, though he may be loath to admit it, they seem to matter to him. Although Krebs may not feel he is in their world, they are still in his life, keeping him from the total isolation that Hell represents. In this way, “Soldier’s Home”

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 74.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 76.

¹⁹⁶ Beall, “Formation of *In Our Time*,” 69.

exemplifies *In Our Time*'s partaking of a purgatorial motive and mentality, even in the midst of a hellish mosaic, in its efforts to create a truthful representation of life.

“Chapter VIII” portrays the murder of “two Hungarians,” guilty only of cigar store-burglary, by a racist policeman named Boyle. His partner, Drevitts, is complicit in the murder and nervous about the consequences: “Drevitts got frightened when he found they were both dead. Hell Jimmy, he said, you oughtn’t to have done it. There’s liable to be a hell of a lot of trouble.”¹⁹⁷ Boyle claims confidently that they were Italians, “wops,” and therefore unlikely to raise sympathy or trouble: “They’re wops, ain’t they? Who the hell is going to make any trouble?”¹⁹⁸ Repetition is a central technique in this spare vignette, producing a stark, vaguely absurd tone:

—That’s alright maybe this time, said Drevitts, but how did you know they were wops when you bumped them?
Wops, said Boyle, I can tell wops a mile off.¹⁹⁹

Moreover, the repetition of “hell” makes clear that hell is not just a wartime or foreign-soil condition. Whereas the purgatorial quality of “Soldier’s Home” suggests deliverance is possible, “Chapter VIII” asserts that it is not so simple as deliverance back home to America.

In telling the story of a young Hungarian socialist traveling to Italy, “The Revolutionist” complements “Chapter VIII” on the surface level. At a more significant level, it continues and contrasts the purgatorial theme of “Soldier’s Home.” “The Revolutionist” features a nameless, reserved narrator recounting the story of the young revolutionist whose idealism, “in spite of Hungary,” where “Horthy’s men had done

¹⁹⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 79.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

some bad things to him,”²⁰⁰ is still tinged with naïvety, as his dialogue with the narrator makes clear:

‘But how is the movement going in Italy?’ he asked.
‘Very badly,’ I said.
‘But it will go better,’ he said. ‘You have everything here. It is the one country that every one is sure of. It will be the starting point of everything.’
I did not say anything.²⁰¹

The narration, which nearly anticipates Davidson’s assessment of Frederic Henry’s narration in *A Farewell to Arms*, informs us of the revolutionist’s fate before even relaying it in the last line:

He thanked me very much, but his mind was already looking forward to walking over the pass. He was very eager to walk over the pass while the weather held good. He loved the mountains in the autumn. The last I heard of him the Swiss had him in jail near Sion.²⁰²

While the revolutionist recovers, in one sense, from his “suffer[ing] very much under the Whites in Budapest,”²⁰³ his failure is in hitching his hope to the wrong horse—politics.

As if political revolution might undo his suffering, he devotes himself to it naïvely, talking little about his own suffering, and shyly avoiding paintings by Mantegna, the artist whose bloody depictions of Christ’s suffering on the cross Frederic Henry discusses in *A Farewell to Arms*. While politics form an easy path toward heresy, it is not necessarily the political nature of the revolutionist’s idealism that constitutes his failure. Rather, his naïve relation to suffering precludes his purgation. In “The Revolutionist,” the heresy is that of misdirected priorities.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 81.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid, 82.

²⁰³ Ibid, 81.

If we set aside the unique complexity of allusion in “The Battler,” there has been to this point a clear pattern of themes analogous to the circles of Hell in Dante’s *Inferno*: the limbo scenes in “Chapter II” and “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” the lust and gluttony of “The End of Something” and “The Three-Day Blow,” the prodigality, wrath, and blasphemy of “The Battler,” and the sullenness and heresy of “A Very Short Story,” “Soldier’s Home,” and “The Revolutionist.” At this point in the narrative, however, an important shift occurs. While the next several stories continue thematically in an *Inferno* arc, the corresponding vignettes take up *In Our Time*’s nascent purgatorial theme and develop it through a series of successive bullfighting sketches. While the ritualized and ordered violence of the bullfighting vignettes, taken together, produces an effect similar to *Purgatorio*’s displays of vice and virtue, the short stories, namely “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” and “Out of Season,” mimic *Inferno*’s complex understanding of violence, which takes very different forms in Dante’s Hell than modern readers might expect. In order to examine and appreciate these distinct but related and simultaneously occurring narrative developments effectively, it behooves us to address them separately first.

Chapter 8: Violence Against Art, Nature, and Self

As Barolini notes, the seventh circle of Dante's Hell is "subdivided into three rings, each of which houses two modalities of the same kind of violence."²⁰⁴ Thankfully, Hemingway simplifies things in *In Our Time*. The narrative has included all sorts of violence against others already, and the allusion to Capaneus in "The Battler" covers one aspect of violence against God. The other aspects of violence against God, violence against art and against nature, are represented in "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," while violence against self may be interpreted in the omitted suicide of Peduzzi in "Out of Season."

The titular characters of "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" are Hubert, a twenty-five-year-old poet and postgraduate studying law at Harvard, and Cornelia, a forty-year-old bride from an old Southern family. Both pride themselves in their purity, but pusillanimity might better describe their characters. They struggle to produce a child and become disenchanted with their marriage as they travel to Europe and move with a circle of likeminded expatriates: "They came to Paris and most of their friends from the boat came back too. They were tired of Dijon and anyway would now be able to say that after leaving Harvard or Columbia or Wabash they had studied at the University of Dijon down in the Côte d'Or."²⁰⁵ As the languidly dismissive "anyway" in this excerpt indicates, the narrative exercises judgment not through the insertion of a narrator but through particular word choice, as it did in "The Three-Day Blow."

²⁰⁴ Teodolinda Barolini, "Inferno 11: Aristotle, Pagan Authority of a Christian Hell," *Commento Baroliniano*, Digital Dante (New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2018), <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-11/>

²⁰⁵ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 87.

It is a clever irony in and of itself that the effete, post-war cosmopolitans of “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” are guilty of a form of violence. Mrs. Elliot’s “violence against nature” is more evident, as her lesbian relationship with her live-in girl friend is heavily implied, but Mr. Elliot’s “violence against art” is more significant: “Elliot...lived apart in his own room. He wrote a great deal of poetry during the night and in the morning looked very exhausted. Mrs. Elliot and the girl friend now slept together in the big medieval bed.”²⁰⁶ As Sinclair explains, Dante understood violence against human art as usury,²⁰⁷ which was a loaded term for him (and an obsession for Pound). Essentially, Dante’s usury is any dishonest way of making a living—everything from moneylending to overcharging for labor. Hemingway focuses on the hack artist. As a poet with an “income of nearly ten thousand dollars a year” (today’s equivalent would be over ten times that amount) who writes “very long poems very rapidly,”²⁰⁸ Hubert Elliot figures as a judgment on hack artists as well as the degraded society that produces and consumes them.

The main characters in “Cat in the Rain” resemble those in “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” in certain ways. An American husband and wife staying in an Italian seaside hotel, they—particularly the unnamed wife—experience an undefined but palpable dissatisfaction. The titular cat becomes a symbol of her unmet desires:

‘I want to have a kitty to sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her.’
‘Yeah?’ George said from the bed.
‘And I want to eat at a table with my own silver and I want candles. And I want it to be spring and I want to brush my hair out in front of a mirror and I want a kitty and I want some new clothes.’
‘Oh, shut up and get something to read,’ George said. He was reading again.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 88.

²⁰⁷ Sinclair, *Inferno*, 151.

²⁰⁸ Hemingway, *In Our Time* 85.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 94.

Their discontent, and particularly George's ineffectuality about it, contrasts with the paternal dignity of the keeper of their hotel, the *padrone*: "The wife liked him. She liked the deadly serious way he received any complaints. She liked his dignity. She liked the way he wanted to serve her. She liked the way he felt about being a hotel-keeper."²¹⁰ The story's resolution occurs when a maid, sent by the *padrone*, delivers a cat to their room.

The contrast between George and the *padrone* may be seen to parallel the vice and virtue theme developing simultaneously in the bullfighting vignettes. Hemingway's October 18, 1924 letter to Edmund Wilson is instructive to his technique in this instance:

Finished the book of 14 stories with a chapter on [of] *In Our Time* between each story—that is the way they were meant to go—to give the picture of the whole between examining it in detail. Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coast line, and then looking at it with 15x binoculars. Or rather, maybe, looking at it and then going in and living in it—and then coming out and looking at it again.²¹¹

Or, as Pound would put it in his *Cantos*, "not as land looks on a map / but as sea bord seen by men sailing."²¹² If the bullfighting vignettes represent vice and virtue from a coastline view, "Cat in the Rain" is the lived experience. Lived experience, of course, is a major component of Hemingway's fiction. Nowhere is this truer than the next story, "Out of Season."

As Hemingway writes in a December 24, 1925 letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald concerning *In Our Time*, "The only story in which Hadley figures is Out of Season which was an almost literal transcription of what happened."²¹³ Incidentally, in the same letter he also asserts that "Cat in the Rain" was not about himself and Hadley (not all critics

²¹⁰ Ibid, 92.

²¹¹ Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 128.

²¹² Pound, *The Cantos*, 324.

²¹³ Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 180.

believe him). At any rate, the letter's account of "Out of Season" is quite instructive regarding both Hemingway's fiction technique and the outline of the story:

when I came in from the unproductive fishing trip I wrote that story right off...I meant it to be a tragic about the drunk of a guide because I reported him to the hotel owner—the one who appears in *Cat in the Rain*—and he fired him and as that was the last job he had in town and he was quite drunk and very desperate, hanged himself in the stable. 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.²¹⁴

One of the great examples of Hemingway's omission technique, "Out of Season" demonstrates a tragic sensibility as opposed to a tragic plot. It features yet another discontented young couple, these ones fumbling around their frustrations with one another and their drunk guide throughout a frustrating and fruitless fishing trip during the wrong time of the year.

Ellen Andrews Knodt has written illuminatingly on the story's deeply buried allusion to the Italian renaissance theater tradition of *commedia dell'arte*. While Knodt observes possible "parallels in 'Out of Season' to Dante's guide leading him to a melancholy river," she rightly concludes for a variety of reasons—such as their dress and behavior—that both the guide and the young couple fit better within the *commedia dell'arte* tradition:

The husband's use of the Italian word 'vecchio' to describe Peduzzi creates an integral part for him in this story...a *vecchio* is [a] comic stock character who often comes between two lovers (the '*innamorati*'), causing all sorts of comic complications before the two lovers unite in the end with 'forgiveness for any wrongdoings.'²¹⁵

While Peduzzi's omitted act of violence against himself makes "Out of Season" a natural fit as the last story before Nick Adams' reappearance and symbolic exit from Hell in

²¹⁴ Ibid, 180-81.

²¹⁵ Knodt, "Hemingway's *Commedia Dell'arte* Story," 112.

“Cross-Country Snow,” it is equally fascinating to observe Hemingway’s continual use of indirect allusion to create a diverse palimpsest of myth even in the context of a supposedly literal transcription of his lived experience. With this in mind, we should note one more possible allusion, in the story’s title, to a statement on Dante from Ralph Waldo Emerson: “In season or out of season we must all read Dante.”²¹⁶ Emerson also offered a perspicacious remark on Dante’s layering of myth upon his own life experience: “Dante’s praise is that he dared to write his autobiography in colossal cipher, or into universality.”²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Qtd. in Joseph Chesley Mathews, “Emerson’s Translation of Dante’s Vita Nuova,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* vol. 11 (1957): 185.

²¹⁷ Mathews, “Emerson’s Translation,” 193.

Chapter 9: Vice and Virtue in *El Toreo*

In referring to *In Our Time*'s vignettes as “tools of self-instruction,”²¹⁸ Charles A. Fenton may have meant Hemingway's self-instruction as a writer, but he also touched on a significant point about the vignettes themselves—particularly the bullfighting vignettes. In Chapters IX through XIV, art and material coincide on multiple levels. As much as Hemingway may have sought to bring the art and tradition of bullfighting into conversation with the more canonical traditions in *In Our Time*'s mosaic miniature epic, he also may have found these vignettes especially useful as an expression of the purgatorial motive and mentality that runs through his project. In other words, the ritualized confrontation with death in *el toreo* offers a form for *In Our Time*'s modernized rendition of *Purgatorio*'s carefully ordered displays of virtue and vice.

According to Matthew Stewart, Hemingway understood bullfighting as “part art and part moral testing ground, an occasion contrived for the enactment of the stoical virtues he valued...he came to view it as an embodiment of the values he prized in the art of writing.”²¹⁹ Stewart connects Nick Adams' deliberate, disciplined action in “Big-Two Hearted River” to the “sort of self-fulfillment by trial...seen in ‘Chapter XII,’ one of the six successive bullfight vignettes and the only one in which the torero succeeds unequivocally”²²⁰ and contrasts these episodes with “the other vignettes [which] prove that bullfighting is subject to ignobility, defeat, and loss just like any other human endeavor,” hinting at the purgatorial quality the bullfighting vignettes acquire in *In Our Time*. Likewise, writing in *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway describes the experience

²¹⁸ Qtd. in Matthew Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition in Ernest Hemingway's In Our Time* (Rochester: Camden House, 2001), 28.

²¹⁹ Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 100.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 99.

of good bullfighting in classically cathartic terms: “a growing ecstasy of ordered, formal, passionate, increasing disregard for death that leaves you, when it is over, and the death administered to the animal that has made it possible, as empty, as changed and as sad as any major emotion will leave you.”²²¹ Yet while good bullfighting may give the purgative effect of catharsis, it is the juxtaposition of the good and the bad—and the emphasis on the art and discipline, or lack thereof, that distinguish them—that completes *In Our Time*’s purgatorial representation.

Thematically, “Chapter IX” works as a sort of preface to the rest of the bullfighting vignettes. It features a fight in which the first two matadors are injured, leaving the third, a “kid,” to handle their remaining bulls and his own in an extreme challenge of physical and spiritual endurance:

The kid came out and had to kill five bulls because you can’t have more than three matadors, and the last bull he was so tired he couldn’t get the sword in. . . . He tried five times and the crowd was quiet because it was a good bull and it looked like him or the bull and then finally he made it.²²²

Despite his valor and endurance, the young matador is so reduced by the experience as to earn the crowd’s ire: “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.”²²³ In one way or another, all three matadors fail, the varying merits of their efforts not affecting the outcome any more than one’s efforts in life may affect the inevitable outcome of death.

The only sense in which the young matador’s display of resilience makes a difference is in our appreciation of it. We need not know much about bullfighting to

²²¹ Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 207.

²²² Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 83.

²²³ *Ibid.*

recognize the human drama of his struggle. Moreover, our recognition and appreciation are encouraged through subtle tips of the narrative hand. The young matador we see is not an arrogant adolescent deserving of a comeuppance, but a “kid” so tired that “[h]e couldn’t hardly lift his arm” and “it looked like him or the bull.”²²⁴ It would be natural to feel enough sympathy for him that the major emotional movement we experience comes not from seeing his complete exhaustion at the end of the vignette, but from the crowd’s cruel treatment of his collapse. Hemingway’s representations of bullfighting are not limited to binaries of triumph or failure, heaven or hell, but rather contain the full purgatorial quality of life.

“Chapter X” centers on a fatally injured picador horse as it is coaxed into continuing its role in the bullfight even after its fate is sealed: “They whack-whacked the white horse on the legs and he kneed himself up. The picador twisted the stirrups straight and pulled and hauled up into the saddle. The horse’s entrails hung down in a blue bunch and swung backward and forward as he began to canter.”²²⁵ Stewart assigns the greatest bravery to the picador for “remounting and performing his assigned task,”²²⁶ explaining away the narrative’s primary focus on the horse as evidence that most of Hemingway’s bullfighting vignettes “are written in the same ironical key that dominates his vignettes on war and crime.”²²⁷ Yet Stewart’s interpretation ignores both the commonplace nature of such an occurrence in bullfighting as well as the potentially meaningful implications of

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid, 89.

²²⁶ Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 101.

²²⁷ Ibid, 100.

focusing on the horse's resilience in the face of what Hemingway called "a death's business for horses."²²⁸

In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway makes clear his thoughts on the role of horses in bullfighting: "[i]f picadors had to own their own horses and were well paid they would protect them and the horse part of bullfighting would become one of the most brilliant and skillful of all rather than a necessary evil."²²⁹ Instead, "[t]he role of the horse has become that of providing something the bull will charge so that his neck muscles will be tired and of supporting the man who receives the charge."²³⁰ He also notes that horse contractors are required to "have available thirty-six horses for each fight"²³¹ and laments the financially incentivized cruelty that leads mortally wounded horses to be pressed back into service: "they can give the gift of death to any horse that is badly wounded, but I have never seen them kill a horse that could possibly be gotten on his feet and made to move."²³²

With this in mind, we may reevaluate the horse who, although "nervously wobbly" with "blood pump[ing] regularly from between [his] front legs," manages to balk the bull: "The bull could not make up his mind to charge."²³³ Perhaps not coincidentally, this image seems to recall a similar one from "The Battler," when Ad credits his slow heart for his ability to outlast opponents in the boxing ring and has Nick Adams count his pulse for proof: "The little man's wrist was thick and the muscles

²²⁸ Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*, 189.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

²³² *Ibid.*, 187.

²³³ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 89.

bulged above the bone. Nick felt the slow pumping under his fingers.”²³⁴ To focus on the horse’s outcome, or even the cruelty of its circumstances, would be to miss the point. In the crystallized moment of “Chapter X,” we see two animals facing unavoidable death: one gets up from a killing blow and faces down death memorably; the other balks.

“Chapter XI” presents the most abject failure, in bullfighting terms, in this group of vignettes. A poor performance from the matador earns derision from the crowd and an undignified death for the bull:

[T]he bull was tired from so much bad sticking and folded his knees and lay down and one of the *cuadrilla* leaned out over his neck and killed him with the *puntillo*. The crowd came over the barrera and around the torero...and some one cut off his pigtail and was waving it.²³⁵

There is no dignity for anyone involved, but there is a striking moment in the vignette’s closing lines which indelibly colors our impression of the failed matador: “Afterwards I saw him at the café. He was very short with a brown face and quite drunk and he said after all it has happened before like that. I am not really a good bull fighter.”²³⁶ The matador’s words have a confessional quality, and the narrative perspective once again engenders empathy via intimacy, this time by moving quickly from the narrator’s “I” to the matador’s, omitting any spacing or quotation marks to set his words apart. Moreover, his drunkenness is of a different sort than that of Peduzzi in “Out of Season,” whose wet-eyed inebriation corresponds with self-delusion.²³⁷ Particularly after the extended consideration given to the theme of truthfulness in “Soldier’s Home,” the matador’s

²³⁴ Ibid, 56.

²³⁵ Ibid, 95.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ “It was good marsala. His eyes glistened. Days like this stretched out ahead” (Ibid, 102).

honesty in disgrace is bracing, and it sharply contrasts the stories juxtaposed with this vignette.

“Chapter XII” represents, as Stewart has noted, the only unequivocal success in this group of vignettes, and its narrative method uses poetic techniques of sound and rhythm²³⁸ to mimic the immediacy and catharsis of the experience Hemingway describes in *Death in the Afternoon*: “He drew out the sword from the folds of the muleta and sighted with the same movement and called to the bull, Toro! Toro! and the bull charged and Villalta charged and just for a moment they became one.”²³⁹ As this topic has been well covered already,²⁴⁰ I shall note instead the formally significant juxtaposition of this cathartic vignette with the story “Cross-Country Snow,” which alludes to Dante’s exit from Hell at the end of *Inferno*, and his preparation to enter Purgatory. The bullfighting vignettes that follow “Cross-Country Snow,” Chapters XIII-XIV, also signify an important thematic shift. Therefore it behooves us to examine “Cross-Country Snow” before considering *In Our Time*’s remaining vignettes and stories.

²³⁸ Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 103.

²³⁹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 105.

²⁴⁰ See also Wendolyn Tetlow, *Lyrical Dimensions*, 42.

Chapter 10: Catharsis

Just as “The Battler” represents Nick Adams’ journey through the dark wood, “Cross-Country Snow” signifies his passage out. The story shows Nick and his friend George skiing down an icy, gale-scoured mountain, their movements alluding to Virgil and Dante’s passage through the bottom of Hell in *Inferno* XXXIV. Whereas Virgil and Dante make a 180 degree turn to climb down through the bottom of Hell and up into the opposite hemisphere,²⁴¹ Nick experiences an upside-down tumbling fall—“he went over and over in a clashing of skis...then stuck, his legs crossed, his skis sticking straight up and his nose and ears jammed full of snow”²⁴²—followed by a sharply pivoting Christy turn: “He held to his left...keeping his knees locked tight together and turning his body like tightening a screw brought his skis sharply around to the right.”²⁴³

Nick and George ski on to where “the road dipped sharply to a stream and then ran straight up-hill,” arriving at a “long, low-eaved, weather-beaten building,” “quite dark”²⁴⁴ inside. This building, an inn, strongly resembles the corresponding scene of *Inferno*, the bare transitional place between Hell and Purgatory (“no palace hall where we were...ill-floored and scant of light”²⁴⁵) from where Virgil and the pilgrim follow “the sound of a stream” and enter “on that hidden road to return into the bright world.”²⁴⁶ Nick and George likewise depart to a “brighter” world—Helen, Nick’s wife or girlfriend, is

²⁴¹ Dante, *Inferno*, 425.

²⁴² Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 107.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 108.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 108-09.

²⁴⁵ Dante, *Inferno*, 425.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 427.

pregnant and they are returning to America—taking a road that runs “up the hill into the pine trees,” an image that repeats in Nick’s purgatorial hike in “Big Two-Hearted River.”

Before departing, Nick and George sit and talk about skiing, fishing, parenthood, and change over a bottle of wine and an apple strudel:

‘It’s hell, isn’t it?’ he said.
‘No. Not exactly,’ Nick said.
‘Why not?’
‘I don’t know,’ Nick said.²⁴⁷

While this drinking and talking scene recalls “The Three-Day Blow,” Nick and George’s maturity contrasts their younger counterparts. Instead of “conducting... conversation on a high plane,”²⁴⁸ they are understated:

‘There’s nothing really can touch skiing, is there?’ Nick said. ‘The way it feels when you first drop off on a long run.’
‘Huh,’ said George. ‘It’s too swell to talk about.’²⁴⁹

Moreover, whereas the younger Nick willfully deceives himself—“He felt happy. Nothing was finished. Nothing was ever lost”²⁵⁰—in “Cross-Country Snow” he consciously avoids making promises he cannot keep:

‘I wish we could make a promise about it,’ George said.
Nick stood up. He buckled his wind jacket tight. He leaned over George and picked up the two ski poles from against the wall. He stuck one of the ski poles into the floor.
‘There isn’t any good in promising,’ he said.²⁵¹

Indeed, we might consider Nick buckling his wind jacket as a symbol of his maturation—his experience now acts as protection against the flightiness his younger self embraced in “The Three-Day Blow,” before his metaphorical journey through Hell.

²⁴⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 111-12.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 45.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 109.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 48.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 112.

Following the symbolic exit from Hell in “Cross-Country Snow,” “Chapter XIII” serves to reinforce by contrast the purgative values established thus far. Taking as its setting the fiesta preceding a bullfight, “Chapter XIII” is narrated by a nameless one of the three bullfighters set to participate in the afternoon’s fight. The narrator and one of his fellow matadors, Maera, are disgusted to spot their third, Luis, drunkenly participating in the fiesta’s revelries instead of preparing for his place in the fight: “For Christ’s sake you’ve got bulls this afternoon. He didn’t listen to me, he was listening so hard for the music to start. I said, Don’t be a damn fool Luis...I grabbed his arm and he pulled loose and said, Oh leave me alone. You’re not my father.”²⁵² Even in the fiesta’s atmosphere of sanctified experience, Luis profanes himself by failing to observe the rites and discipline of his role.

The Sun Also Rises expounds on this notion of fiesta as a sanctified experience: “Everything became quite unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences. It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta.”²⁵³ And yet, Luis’ failure to consider the consequences of his actions produces dire consequences. Maera seems to suggest as much in his prophetic words, which conclude “Chapter XIII”:

‘Yes, Maera said, and who will kill his bulls after he gets a *cogida*?’
‘We, I suppose, I said.’
‘Yes, we, said Maera. We kill the savages’ bulls, and the drunkards’ bulls, and the *riau-riau* dancers’ bulls. Yes. We kill them. We kill them all right. Yes. Yes. Yes.’²⁵⁴

Maera’s misgivings prove fateful indeed in “Chapter XIV” when he is gored and killed during a bullfight—perhaps against one of Luis’ bulls that same afternoon: “Maera felt

²⁵² Ibid, 113.

²⁵³ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 154.

²⁵⁴ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 113.

everything getting larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then it got larger and larger and larger and then smaller and smaller. Then everything commenced to run faster and faster as when they speed up a cinematograph film. Then he was dead.”²⁵⁵

Matthew Stewart’s summary of these vignettes represents a common interpretation of *In Our Time*—that it is an essentially amoral text:

Taken together, these vignettes imply that there are those who debase their calling, while others are there to assume responsibility, and that the world of bullfighting, like the world at large, is equally capable of destroying the good and the bad. Maera’s good conduct gains him nothing.²⁵⁶

Yet the understanding of the narrative’s purgatorial motive and mentality that we have established undermines this reading. It is true to Hemingway’s vision that the world kills both the good and the bad indiscriminately, but it is wrong to suggest Maera gains nothing from his ethical conduct. To the extent that we have established that *In Our Time* uses narrative perspective and technique to indicate judgment concerning the events it narrates, we may observe in the intimate treatment of Maera’s death in “Chapter XIV” an unambiguous sense of narrative sympathy for his character, which stands in sharp contrast to the disgust shown for unethical characters: “Maera lay still, his head on his arms, his face in the sand. He felt warm and sticky from the bleeding. Each time he felt the horn coming.”²⁵⁷

Contrary to Stewart’s assertion, the world’s amorality is not some point Hemingway looks to make. Instead, it is an existential condition against which Hemingway’s characters must develop and define their own values through choice and action. And to the extent that Hemingway uses narrative technique to exercise judgment

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 131.

²⁵⁶ Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 102.

²⁵⁷ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 131.

regarding those values—judgment that, in *In Our Time*, reflects a purgatorial motive and mentality—his readers also participate affectively in a sort of purgative or cathartic experience: one guided by purgatorial ethics (what does the combination of motive and mentality imply if not a system of ethics?) and resulting in catharsis, which is perhaps the closest thing to redemption that flawed individuals in a flawed world can achieve. That is the theme, at least, that comes to the fore in *In Our Time*'s final stories: “My Old Man” and “Big Two-Hearted River.”

Written in 1922, “My Old Man” is one of the oldest stories in *In Our Time*, and its style reflects Hemingway's pre-Pound influences, namely that of Sherwood Anderson, as Stewart notes.²⁵⁸ Adding that this influence puts the story at odds with the rest of *In Our Time* stylistically, Stewart suggests that “*In Our Time* might be a stronger volume without ‘My Old Man,’” even though “the story does maintain topical and thematic consistency with the stories that immediately precede it.”²⁵⁹ It would be better to argue that “My Old Man” offers an interesting study of the capacity of *In Our Time*'s mythical method to absorb not only a diversity of traditions, but also a diversity of styles. Moreover, while it lacks the sort of indirect-but-recognizable Dantean allusions seen in the Nick Adams stories, “My Old Man” nevertheless acquires a complex but discernable set of *Divine Comedy* allusions by dint of its association with the novel's established pattern of reference. *In Our Time*'s arrangement puts this story in the right place at the right time.

Focusing on the maturation, i.e. disillusionment, of an American boy, Joe Butler, living in Europe with his father, a likeable but flawed jockey who participates in race

²⁵⁸ “‘My Old Man,’ more directly than any other story in the volume, shows the influence of Sherwood Anderson” (Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 83).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 82.

fixing, “My Old Man” is narrated by an older Joe Butler with a “sort of retrospective judgment”²⁶⁰ very much in keeping with the Dantean perspective Arnold Davidson defines. Moreover, the application of sympathetic retrospective narrative judgment to a flawed father figure who is associated with racing imagery creates a clear allusion to *Inferno*’s representation of Dante’s mentor Brunetto Latini. Despite being placed among those guilty of violence against nature because of his homosexuality, Latini appears in a movingly sympathetic racing metaphor: “Then he turned about and seemed like one of those that run for the green cloth in the field at Verona, and he seemed not the loser among them, but the winner.”²⁶¹ Furthermore, it is significant to note that Joe’s disillusionment comes less from the fact of his father’s participation in race fixing than the sort of aesthetic crime of preventing the magnificent horse Kzar from winning:

I felt all trembly and funny inside...I’d forgot how much my old man had bet on Kircubbin. I’d wanted Kzar to win so damned bad. But now it was all over it was swell to know we had the winner.
‘Wasn’t it a swell race, Dad?’ I said to him.
He looked at me sort of funny with his derby on the back of his head. ‘George Gardner’s a swell jockey, all right,’ he said. ‘It sure took a great jock to keep that Kzar horse from winning.’
Of course I knew it was funny all the time. By my old man saying that right out like that sure took the kick all out of it for me and I didn’t get the real kick back again ever.²⁶²

While the story’s placement toward the end of the narrative arrangement would suggest the fraud of race fixing as its sin, the sort of offense Joe articulates seems more in line with usury, i.e. violence against nature, than any type of fraud Dante enumerates.

As one might expect from its placement after the narrative’s symbolic exit from Hell, there is also a significant purgatorial strain in “My Old Man.” Joe’s father, “cut out

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 81.

²⁶¹ Dante, *Inferno*, 199.

²⁶² Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 123-24.

for a fat guy,” keeps down his weight by running with a discipline and joy—“When my old man grinned, nobody could help but grin too. We’d keep right on running out toward the mountains”²⁶³—that recalls the zealous souls in *Purgatorio* XVIII:

[S]uch a throng came bending their way round that circle, whom, by what I saw of them, right will and just love were driving on. Soon they were upon us, for all that great crowd kept running. . . the rest cried behind ‘that zeal in well-doing may make grace come green again.’²⁶⁴

To be sure, Mr. Butler remains a flawed character throughout the story. As Stewart notes, even his decision to win a race he was supposed to lose is a form of odds manipulation to his own advantage, and even after two-timing the race-fixers and moving to a new town, he continues betting on fixed races in order to finance buying his own horse.²⁶⁵ Once he does get his own horse, however, he begins training again in an attempt to finally win fair and square, and the narrative assumes a palpable sense of “zeal in well-doing”:

The whole thing was different now, ‘cause down in Milan, even big races never seemed to make any difference to my old man, if he won he wasn’t ever excited or anything, and now it was so I couldn’t hardly sleep the night before a race and I knew my old man was excited, too, even if he didn’t show it. Riding for yourself makes an awful difference.²⁶⁶

The aura of redemption the father gains in his son’s eyes is compelling enough that when he and his horse are killed in a racing accident, it is a moment of major emotion: “I couldn’t help feeling that if my old man was dead maybe they didn’t need to have shot Gilford. His hoof might have got well. I don’t know. I loved my old man so much.”²⁶⁷

Thus “My Old Man” represents the purgatorial quality of life both in the ethics that guide its narrative and in the catharsis that narrative achieves in lieu of religious redemption.

²⁶³ Ibid, 115.

²⁶⁴ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 237.

²⁶⁵ Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 81.

²⁶⁶ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 127.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 128.

“Big Two-Hearted River” is without doubt *In Our Time*’s best-known story, and it is among the most frequently discussed of all Hemingway’s short stories. Featuring Nick Adams’ return to the northern Michigan woods of his childhood, presumably some time after the events of “Cross-Country Snow,” “Big Two-Hearted River” provides a masterful bookend to the novel’s first stories covering Nick’s youth. The story’s uncomplicated plot belies its rich sub-surface structure, as Matthew Nickel describes: “inexperienced readers may characterize the story as...detailed but devoid of drama. The descriptions of fishing and camping are vivid and meticulous...but the reader familiar with Hemingway’s method knows that the true drama lies beneath the surface.”²⁶⁸ The action of the story comes not from a traditional pattern of conflict and resolution, but from the vitality of its representation of Nick’s peaceful, enjoyable, even restorative experience on a solitary fishing trip.

As Debra Modellmog explains, restoration is the standard interpretive paradigm of this story: “That Nick takes his trip to upper Michigan to restore both his mind and spirit debilitated by war has, of course, been the accepted reading of ‘Big Two-Hearted River’ ever since critics began to assess the story formally.”²⁶⁹ And yet, most critical interpretations have focused on the story’s wasteland theme to the exclusion of other potential allegorical readings. Ironically, the obviousness of its Fisher King metaphor has become something of a red herring, as Peter Hays unintentionally demonstrates:

After Malcolm Cowley’s 1943 revelation that Hemingway had used the same mythic materials that T.S. Eliot had in *The Waste Land* to create a Fisher King motif in the *Sun Also Rises*...critics have found referential details in “Big Two-

²⁶⁸ Ibid, 84.

²⁶⁹ Modellmog, “Unifying Consciousness,” 600.

Hearted River,” opening on a burnt-over, war-like landscape, featuring a wounded fisherman, and, lest we miss the allusion, even a kingfisher.²⁷⁰

One gets the sense that Hemingway’s reputation for using “direct literary allusion less skillfully and less naturally” than his high-modernist peers has preceded him in the eyes of his critics.

And yet, the story’s apparently simple wasteland allegory has not been entirely satisfactory to explain the gravity it exudes. Such narrative attention is given to Nick’s somatic experience as to make critics suspicious of what might be concealed beneath the surface, and the narrative’s apparent reticence regarding Nick’s internal state has led many to assume the worst. Philip Young’s influential trauma reading is a typical example, characterizing Nick as “a sick man...in escape from whatever it is that made him sick,” in whom “a terrible panic is just barely under control.”²⁷¹ The fact that this interpretation does not comport with Nick’s evident contentment has led some critics to seek alternate or complementary explanations, and many have tended toward extremes. Modellmog’s optimistic argument for Nick as *In Our Time*’s author represents one pole, whereas Jacqueline Vaught Brogan’s rather pessimistic assertion of the “‘dissection’ Hemingway makes of both his main character and his ‘time’” represents the other:

The almost ruthless ‘dissection’ of Nick’s emotional sterility, versus the demonstration of the author’s versatility, seems especially clear...What does follow logically, from *In Our Time* as a whole, and from Nick’s own somewhat contorted chronological development within it, is that he is likely to remain emotionally repressed, intellectually scarred, truly damaged like others of ‘our time.’²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Hays, “‘Now I Lay Me,’ Prayer, and The Fisher King,” 108.

²⁷¹ Young, *Reconsideration*, 45-47.

²⁷² Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, “Hemingway’s *In Our Time*: A Cubist Anatomy,” *The Hemingway Review* vol. 17, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 40-41.

In this light, this essay's reading of an overarching Purgatory allusion in "Big Two-Hearted River" might be a compelling alternative.

This is not to say that no Dante-adjacent themes whatsoever have been discussed in "Big Two-Hearted River." For example, in the same dissertation in which Matthew Nickel laments the "deficiency of full-length studies examining intersections between Hemingway and Dante,"²⁷³ he not only recognizes that we "might even consider 'Big Two-Hearted River' a companion piece to [*The Waste Land*] with most of the inner monologue turned off, exemplifying modern man's spiritual pilgrimage...out of the wasteland through an actual pilgrimage up a two-hearted river," but also observes how "belabor[ing] the resonance between Eliot's work and Hemingway's fishing story" has led critics to discount the fact that "Ezra Pound was far more important to the young writer, not only by introducing *The Waste Land* to Hemingway in 1923 shortly after it was published, but also by giving to Hemingway an artistic vision that seems to culminate in 'Big Two-Hearted River.'"²⁷⁴ Indeed, it is a testament to both the commonplace nature of the story's Fisher King interpretation and the strength of Hemingway's iceberg theory that several critics have come quite close to the same conclusions I draw without actually explicating the story's *Purgatorio* metaphor.²⁷⁵

Just as Nick's movements in "The Battler" follow a descent-and-rise pattern corresponding with Dante's *Inferno*, his hike in "Big Two-Hearted River" mimics the pilgrim's journey in *Purgatorio*: his purgative ascension of the mountain to his purifying baptism in the Earthly Paradise's twin rivers, Lethe and Eunoe. Bearing in mind

²⁷³ Nickel, "Hemingway's Dark Night," 135.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁷⁵ For example, see also H.R. Stoneback's "Pilgrimage Variations: Hemingway's Sacred Landscapes," *Religion and Literature* vol. 35, no. 2-3 (2003): 49-65.

Hemingway's disclosure that the river in his story is actually based on "the Fox above Seney,"²⁷⁶ his choice of the name "Two-Hearted" may have been made with a Purgatory allusion in mind. Furthermore, quite a lot of indirect allusion to *Purgatorio* accompanies Nick Adams' movements in "Big Two-Hearted River."

For example, just as Virgil anoints Dante's pilgrim with dew in *Purgatorio* I and girds him with a "slender reed" for the ascension,²⁷⁷ Nick places fern sprigs under his bag's shoulder straps—"He broke off some sprigs of the heathery sweet fern, and put them under his pack straps. The chafing crushed it and he smelled it as he walked"—and gets covered in dew walking through a meadow: "He walked upstream through the meadow. His trousers were soaked with the dew as he walked."²⁷⁸ Also in canto I, the pilgrim looks to the sky and sees Venus and the constellation Pisces, "the Fishes," whereas Nick recollects the nickname of an old friend's girlfriend, "the Blonde Venus,"²⁷⁹ and observes the river's trout with almost celestial imagery: "many trout in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorted as he watched far down through the glassy convex surface of the pool."²⁸⁰ Those same trout are juxtaposed with the shadow of the kingfisher, which, seen flying away in the sun as Nick arrives—"As the shadow of the kingfisher moved up the stream, a big trout shot upstream in a long angle... then lost his shadow as he came through the surface of the water, caught the sun"²⁸¹—might also

²⁷⁶ Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 153.

²⁷⁷ "Both hands extended on the watery grass... there to my visage he anew restored that hue which the dun shades of Hell conceal'd... There he girded me as the other had bidden" (Dante, *Purgatorio*, 25).

²⁷⁸ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 136-37.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

recall the “divine bird,” i.e. angel, that ferries souls to Purgatory.²⁸² Finally, Nick’s reaction to the trout—“Nick’s heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling”²⁸³—echoes that of Dante seeing Beatrice for the first time in canto XXX: “And my spirit, which now so long had not been overcome with awe, trembling in her presence...through hidden virtue that came from her, felt old love’s great power.”²⁸⁴

For the uninitiated, Hemingway’s implicit equation of fishing with divine love may seem unserious. Interestingly, Nick takes up this point explicitly in the original ending to “Big Two-Hearted River,” which was posthumously published in *The Nick Adams Stories* under the title “On Writing”: “Ezra thought fishing was a joke. So did most everybody. He’d been married to it before he married Helen. Really married to it. It wasn’t any joke.”²⁸⁵ (We may be assured that this Ezra is in fact Ezra Pound.²⁸⁶) Just as the *Divine Comedy*’s stars, the guiding lights of heaven, symbolize virtuous desire, so do Hemingway’s celestially imaged fish signify a form of love more accessible to virtue than *eros*. Moreover, Hemingway’s conscientious engagement with the natural world in his representation of Nick’s purgatorial experience may be understood as rooted in the thinking and influence of both Dante and Pound.

As John Sinclair explains, the “interplay...of ‘natural’ love, shared with the stones and the beasts and innocent, and love deliberate, committing the soul to good or to

²⁸² Dante, *Purgatorio*, 35.

²⁸³ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 134.

²⁸⁴ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 395.

²⁸⁵ Ernest Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 234.

²⁸⁶ Alex Shakespeare, “The Names of Rivers and the Names of Birds: Ezra Pound, Louis Agassiz, and the ‘Luminous Detail’ in Hemingway’s Early Fiction,” *The Hemingway Review* vol. 30, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 38.

evil,²⁸⁷ is a significant aspect of Dante’s purgatorial vision, wherein souls are purged of sinfulness—rather than punished for sin—and their desires are reoriented toward virtue. Love, Sinclair adds, is the active ingredient in Dante’s moral vision: “love, in the sense of desire and endeavor after good or supposed good of any kind, is the cause of all virtue and of all sin.”²⁸⁸ Whereas love perverted (i.e. excessive, deficient, or misguided) is the central characteristic in Dante’s Hell, Purgatory is preoccupied with reorienting love towards virtue—hence the emphasis on “zeal in well-doing” as a purgatorial ethic. Dante invokes ethics as a worldly system by which the soul’s “noble faculty” of free will may guide love’s natural inclinations, as Virgil indicates to the pilgrim in canto XVIII: “Those who in their reasoning went to the root recognized this innate freedom and therefore left ethics to the world. Admitting then that every love that is kindled in you arises of necessity, the power to control it is in you; that noble faculty Beatrice means by freewill.”²⁸⁹ In other words, ethics provide a system for enacting the purgatorial motive and mentality, and the natural world, as the sacred place of human origins, naturally facilitates the practice and inculcation of such ethics.

As early as 1914, Pound was writing about “origins,” as defined by Dante, in terms that seem to anticipate the sort of zeal in well-doing Nick Adams experiences in “Big Two-Hearted River”:

A return to origins invigorates because it is a return to nature and reason. The man who returns to origins does so because he wishes to behave in the eternally sensible manner. That is to say, naturally, reasonably, intuitively. He does not wish to do the right thing in the wrong place, to ‘hang an ox with trappings,’ as Dante puts it. He wishes...harmony, the fitting thing.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Sinclair, *Purgatorio*, 241-42.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 230.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 235-37.

²⁹⁰ Ezra Pound, “The Tradition,” *Poetry* vol. 3, no. 4 (Jan. 1914): 139.

Indeed, this seems to be the very spirit of the deep contentment, even edification, Nick feels simply from setting up his campsite:

Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. This was different though. Now things were 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.²⁹¹

The natural world in “Big Two-Hearted River” represents a natural and readily available system of ethics wherein it is easy and natural to align one’s desires with virtue. In contrast to the spiritual ennui of Harold Krebs in “Soldier’s Home,” who struggles to balance recovering from the experience of war, pleasing his family, telling the truth, and living without consequences in his home town, Nick Adams finds a simple but deep fulfillment in the understanding that the right way to make a campsite or handle a trout is also the righteous thing to do.

Whereas Sicari observes that this conceptualization of nature is “a place of fundamental difference between Pound and Eliot, for Eliot denies that nature can yield knowledge or experience of the supernatural,”²⁹² we may observe a clear sense of harmony between Hemingway’s view—“Nobody had ever written about country like that. He felt almost holy about it”²⁹³—and Pound’s:

Pound believes that by bridging the gap between nature and humanity, by bringing the natural and the human worlds into intimate contact, one becomes open to the perception of the divine; the holy inheres in nature, and we must return to our place in a natural order if we are to see the manifestation of the holy.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 139.

²⁹² Sicari, *Pound’s Epic Ambition*, 225.

²⁹³ Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories*, 239.

²⁹⁴ Sicari, *Pound’s Epic Ambition*, 225.

Moreover, Pound's indebtedness to Dante on this subject leaves little room for doubt as to the lineage of influence in Hemingway's purgatorial vision: "He reads Dante in just this way, as one who returns to Eden (our natural origin) so he can ascend to heaven; Pound sees in Dante a relation between the return to nature and the vision of the holy."²⁹⁵ Not coincidentally, Pound also makes the last canto of his 1925 *Draft of XVI Cantos* a vision of Purgatory, as William Cookson describes: "Pound wakes to a Purgatorial landscape—a Dantescan passage, the images clear-cut."²⁹⁶

Despite their many similarities, there are significant points of departure between Pound and Dante's purgatorial visions and that which Hemingway expresses in "Big Two-Hearted River." In particular, Pound and Dante both exhibit major political investments which have no equivalent in *In Our Time*. Canto XXXII of Dante's *Purgatorio* makes eminently clear the degree to which his understanding of redemption, civics, and authorship are interconnected, as Beatrice's admonishment to the pilgrim demonstrates: "Short while shalt thou be here a forester, and shalt be with me forever a citizen of that Rome of which Christ is Roman; therefore, for that world's good which liveth ill, hold thine eyes now...and what thou seest, having returned to earth, take heed thou write."²⁹⁷

Likewise, as Sicari explains, Pound's wanderer in *The Cantos* seeks "to escape the confines of a corrupt culture and return to a natural and original health"²⁹⁸ not only for his own restoration, but also as a means of cultural revitalization:

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Cookson, *Guide to the Cantos*, 22.

²⁹⁷ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 423.

²⁹⁸ Sicari, *Pound's Epic Ambition*, xi.

With Dante as his chief model, he understands origins as the basis for healthy human action that can transform the world into a true and satisfying home for all humanity. In Pound as in Dante, nostalgia is made the motive for a political program that has as its goal the recovery of 'home.'²⁹⁹

While Pound's embrace of fascism had not yet reached at this point the nadir it would during the Second World War, Sicari nevertheless argues that "Pound's enthusiasm for Italian Fascism springs from decisions first made and poses first struck in the poetry," suggesting that "his continuing development and deployment of the wandering hero is in preparation for his reception of Mussolini and for his own role as Fascist poet."³⁰⁰ And while it did not much affect their friendship in 1925, Hemingway's low opinion of Mussolini³⁰¹—he was especially unimpressed with the Roman posing that so attracted Pound—doubtless influenced his divergence from Pound on the issue of politics in art.

By contrast, in "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick Adams achieves a vastly different, deeply personal vision of home: "It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it."³⁰² In fact, Nick's ethical focus goes hand in hand with an abiding ambivalence about society at large, as indicated in his careful handling of the trout he catches:

He had wet his hand before he touched the trout, so he would not disturb the delicate mucus that covered him. If a trout was touched with a dry hand, a white fungus attacked the unprotected spot. Years before when he had fished crowded streams, with fly fishermen ahead of him and behind him, Nick had again and again come on dead trout, furry with white fungus, drifted against a rock, or floating belly up in some pool. Nick did not like to fish with other men on the river. Unless they were of your party, they spoiled it.³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 11.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 67.

³⁰¹ See Hemingway's reportage from the 1923 Conference of Lausanne, "Mussolini, Europe's Prize Bluffer," *The Toronto Daily Star*, January 27, 1923.

³⁰² Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 139.

³⁰³ Ibid, 149.

Hemingway's decision to excise the original ending to "Big Two-Hearted River" is all the more significant in this context. Instead of situating Nick as a writer who has had a part of the divine vision, which he now must share with the world for its betterment, the narrative is allowed to focus on Nick's restorative experience of zeal in well-doing—"just the straight fishing."³⁰⁴ That is perhaps the best lesson to be found in Dante's *Purgatorio*: "zeal in well-doing may make grace come green again."³⁰⁵ Even if one cannot expect grace in the modern world, ethical practice allows one to partake of the next best thing available: cathartic experience.

Hemingway's decision to place "Chapter XV" between parts one and two of "Big Two-Hearted River" was a canny one for a number of reasons that may not immediately be apparent. This vignette, a journalistic account of the hanging of Chicago mobster Salvatore "Il Diavolo" Cardinella, provides an effective bookend to the Genesis themes that mark *In Our Time*'s first vignettes and stories. Cyclicity is the definitive theme of this vignette, encapsulating the duality of Cardinella's name (Salvatore, after Christ the Savior) and nickname (Il Diavolo, or "the devil"), as well as the creation-and-destruction metaphor associated with fatherhood through the Fisher King metaphor in "Indian Camp," echoed in the words of the priest to Cardinella just before his execution: "Be a man, my son."³⁰⁶ Moreover, its first line, "They hanged Sam Cardinella at six o'clock in the morning in the corridor of the county jail," may allude to the fact that Dante's pilgrim arrives in Purgatory around six o'clock on Easter morning, the day of Christ's

³⁰⁴ Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 133.

³⁰⁵ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 237.

³⁰⁶ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 143.

resurrection.³⁰⁷ The same themes carry into *In Our Time*'s final vignette, "L'Envoi," which also punctuates the novel with a political critique that further distinguishes Hemingway's work from its influences.

Given that it follows the purgatorial vision of "Big Two-Hearted River" and focuses on a king, we may regard "L'Envoi" as the closest *In Our Time* comes to a *Paradiso* allusion. Yet there is a strong ironic tone in this vignette's depiction of kingship and governance: "It was very jolly. We talked for a long time. Like all Greeks he wanted to go to America."³⁰⁸ Hemingway's wisecracking Greek king, confined to his garden and wishing to go to America, is a far cry from "the spirits of people who have been responsible for good government"³⁰⁹ Pound sees in the divine vision of Dante's *Paradiso*. Indeed, the use of "L'Envoi" as *In Our Time*'s final episode strikes a clever chord on several levels.

Not only does the vignette finish "the snapshot chronicle of the Greco-Turkish War that [Hemingway] began in 'On the Quai at Smyrna,'" but it also situates its hollow king as both an ironic remark on tradition in the modern era and a reassertion of the ethical vision *In Our Time*'s purgatorial representations build, as Stewart explains:

The need for kings has apparently gone the way of God 'in our time'...Seen in relation to the other vignettes, 'L'Envoi' summarizes the nature of the modern world, which can no longer believe in traditional forms of greatness...Greatness will have to be deliberately achieved in the postwar world of Hemingway's fictions, and it will be measured by a new set of standards that have their source in private, self-generated judgments rather than in the conventional public realm. Greatness, or its modern substitute, merit, will come not as a birthright but as the product of the sort of self-testing and self-knowledge that Nick begins to demonstrate in 'Big Two-Hearted River.'³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Sinclair, *Purgatorio*, 28.

³⁰⁸ Hemingway, *In Our Time*, 157.

³⁰⁹ Sicari, *Pound's Epic Ambition*, 10.

³¹⁰ Stewart, *Modernism and Tradition*, 98-99.

Moreover, this representation of kingship—“a figurehead whose primary goal ‘is not to be shot [him]self’”³¹¹—also represents a clever allusion to Sir George Frazer’s conceptualization of the sacrificial king in *The Golden Bough*. Lastly, Stewart notes, there is a lighthearted but meaningful play on words involved in the vignette’s title, which refers both to the nameless narrator’s function as an envoy to the king, and the poetic term *l’envoi*, which “signifies a short and pithy last stanza summarizing a relatively long poem.”³¹² This final poetic gesture not only highlights the ways in which “L’Envoi” summarizes the themes of the entire novel, but also underscores *In Our Time*’s unique relation to the epic poetic tradition of its influences.

³¹¹ Ibid, 98.

³¹² Ibid.

Conclusion

This essay occupies a peculiar position. Its explication of *In Our Time*'s allusions to Dante's *Divine Comedy* represents a substantial venture into uncharted territory. Until now, no one has asserted a comprehensive reading of *In Our Time*'s "major form" of mosaic allusion, the "mythical method" by which Hemingway renders that form, or the central place Dante holds in the novel's narrative vision. Doubtless my reading will prove partial and flawed at best, but I hope this endeavor may contribute productively to ongoing discussions of *In Our Time*'s significance as a modernist text and Dante's role in Hemingway's thinking. Dante's influence on Hemingway's work has been a topic of increasing speculation in recent years, thanks in large part to the work of scholars such as Hilary Justice. Demonstrating patterns of reference to Dante in several of Hemingway's works, Justice and others have fundamentally improved our understanding of "Hemingway's Dante" and done much to make this essay possible.

It is interesting and gratifying to note that, while this essay makes several new claims about *In Our Time*, many of its conclusions accord with—and in some cases are anticipated by—established arguments from a number of authoritative critics. Indeed, as much as this essay breaks new ground, it also brings ongoing critical discourses into conversation with each other. Through this discussion, lines of inquiry concerning *In Our Time*'s method of formal unity, the nature of its narrative consciousness, and the depth of Hemingway's indebtedness not only to Dante, but also to his high-modernist peers who cite Dante's influence, have informed one another productively enough to advance a new set of postulates for further consideration.

In Our Time employs a mythical method that is primarily informed by the epic tradition of the composite wandering hero, especially as it is represented in the work of Hemingway's mentor, Ezra Pound. Other major influences include T.S. Eliot, particularly his method of narrative consciousness, and Dante Alighieri, whose *Divine Comedy* composes the majority share of *In Our Time*'s palimpsestic major form, and whose model of narrative judgment best explains the novel's manipulation of narrative perspective. The vision that emerges from the confluence of these forces of modernity, antiquity, and individuality may best be understood as a sort of purgatorial motive and mentality which in many ways anticipates the ethic we now know as the Hemingway code. Prioritizing ethics over morality, catharsis over redemption, and above all zeal in well-doing, the Hemingway code represents for its author a step toward making the modern world possible not only for art, but also for living, perhaps even living well.

In a March 31, 1925 letter to his publisher, Horace Liveright, Hemingway makes an interesting observation about his book's relation to other "modern" literature:

The classic example of a really fine book that could not sell was E.E. Cumming's *Enormous Room*. But Cumming's book was written in a style that no one who had not read a good deal of 'modern' writing could read. That was hard luck for selling purposes. My book will be praised by highbrows and can be read by lowbrows.³¹³

In the same letter, he enclosed the newly written story "The Battler" and the signed publishing contract for *In Our Time*. Reading the letter now, it has a fateful feeling about it. On the one hand, *In Our Time* was a reasonable success. It was not the sensation that *The Sun Also Rises* was, and Hemingway's high hopes for its commercial performance were not met, but it earned a measure of highbrow praise that most authors would be glad

³¹³ Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 155.

for a first book to receive, and it is still read by lowbrows today. The great appeal of this book is that it does just what Hemingway promised—it is an exquisitely wrought modernist compression of the epic tradition, and it is much easier to read than *The Cantos*, *The Waste Land*, or *Ulysses*.

On the other hand, one cannot help but imagine that, given all he accomplished in this book, part of Hemingway's disappointment might have come from expecting a certain sort of highbrow praise that never came. Despite my best efforts, I have not yet found written evidence of Hemingway's discussing *In Our Time*'s mythical method with anyone. But we know that he returned to these themes continually throughout his career, as Hilary Justice and others have shown. In his most overtly Dantean novel, the critically panned *Across the River and into the Trees*, the phrase "in our time" appears at least three times. A fourth almost comes in this exchange between Colonel Cantwell and Renata:

'You ought to write,' the girl said. 'I mean it truly. So someone would know about such things.'
'No,' the Colonel disagreed. 'I have not the talent for it and I know too much. Almost any liar writes more convincingly than a man who was there.'
'But other soldiers wrote.'
'Yes. Maurice de Saxe. Frederick the Great. Mr. T'sun Su.'
'But soldiers of our time.'
'You use the word our with facility. I like it though.'
'But didn't many modern soldiers write?'
'Many. But did you ever read them?'
'No. I have read mostly the classics and I read the illustrated papers for the scandals. Also, I read your letters.'
'Burn them,' the Colonel said. 'They are worthless.'³¹⁴

Maybe Michael Reynolds was right—"Maybe Cantwell was serious when he told Renata:

'I am Mister Dante. For the moment.'"³¹⁵ Maybe both were more right than we knew.

³¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *Across the River and into the Trees* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 128.

³¹⁵ Reynolds, *Hemingway's Reading*, 30.

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