

Zooms, Close-ups, and the Fixed Movie Camera: Analogy with the Art of Cinema in *In Our Time*

Ai Ogasawara

Although Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) expresses his distaste for movies in “On Writing,” saying “the movies ruined everything,” cinematic effects such as zooming and close-ups are clearly detected in his writing. These traits are prominent in *In Our Time* (1925) written in Paris in the 1920s when the movies became a part of popular culture there. We don’t know what movies Hemingway viewed in this era other than D.W. Griffith’s controversial film *The Birth of a Nation*, made in 1915, and which Hemingway watched before he left for Paris. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* is often credited with the invention of montage, from the French for “putting together,” a cinematic collage technique. From this movie, Hemingway might have learned something related to what Susan McCabe calls the “phenomenology of fragmentation” (6) which he came to fully understand later in Paris. Consequently, Hemingway composed his first collection of short stories *In Our Time* as an accumulation of fragments. Along with the fragmentary composition, however, point of view experiments in *In Our Time* were also crucial with regard to its cinematic prose; for because of his unique point of view techniques in *In Our Time*, the stories are successful in realizing dynamic simultaneous cinematic effects. It is these simultaneous cinematic effects that Hemingway learned under his then-mentor, Gertrude Stein.

Stein’s Cinematic Prose: Toward Dynamic Simultaneous Effects

The friendship between Hemingway and Stein started shortly after Hemingway arrived in Paris and lasted till the publication of Hemingway’s *The Torrents of Spring*. Hemingway and his first wife Hadley visited Stein’s apartment on 8 March 1922: “My wife and I had called on Miss Stein, and she and the friend who lived with her had been very cordial and friendly and

we had loved the big studio with the great paintings” (*MF* 13). As Hemingway recalls, they became very good friends for a while. Stein and her partner Alice B. Toklas were even asked to be Godmothers for the first son of the Hemingways. Their friendship ended, however, decisively with the publication of Hemingway’s *The Torrents of Spring*, published in May, 1926. *The Torrents of Spring* was essentially Hemingway’s first novel — although it was a parody — and in it, Hemingway made a mockery of Stein’s novel *The Making of Americans*, in which Stein was doing “what the cinema was doing.”

Because of the troubled course of their friendship, Hemingway never writes clearly about what he learned from Stein, especially regarding the dynamic cinematic aesthetic which is detected in his *In Our Time*. Learning under Stein, however, seems to be sufficient to explain the cinematic aesthetic that Hemingway must have learned. Stein was one of the literary contributors for the first film journal in English, *Close Up*, and was enthusiastic about bringing cinematic elements into her writing. She retrospectively announced in 1933 that “this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing” (“Portraits and Repetition” 177). Stein made this comment referring to her unconsciously writing her *Making of Americans* in 1903 cinematically. According to McCabe, the period Stein dubbed, roughly between 1903 and 1933, coincided with the beginnings of “series production”, the burgeoning of technical and artistic experiment in early film, and finally the demise of film as a silent medium (2).

As a part of this period of the early cinema, Stein was doing “what the cinema was doing” in her verbal portraits and *Making of Americans* that Hemingway proofread, and later made a mockery of in *The Torrents of Spring*. One of her verbal portraits “Cezanne” can be seen as a good example to understand Stein’s experiments, that is, doing “what the cinema was doing”:

“Cezanne”

The Irish lady can say, that to-day is every day. Caesar can say that every day is to-day and they say that every day is as they say.

In this way we have a place to stay and he was not met because he was settled to stay. When I said settled I meant settled to stay. When I said settled to stay I meant settled to stay Saturday.

She says that in these portraits and *Making of Americans*, “I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing. . . . In a cinema picture no two pictures are exactly alike each one is just that much different from the one before” (“Portraits and Repetition” 176–77). As a result, as Robert Haas puts it, Stein’s “prose takes on a cinematic style. Each statement made is uniquely felt, uniquely formed in the present, and is succeeded by another, slightly different, like the successive frames of a film that build an image which seems to prolong itself in the present for a given period of time” (Haas 49). Thus, by taking “cinematic” elements into her writing, Stein aimed to achieve a greater degree of simultaneity, as opposed to the traditional sequential narrative.

Although Hemingway was greatly influenced by Stein, Hemingway did not write exactly like Stein. What he learned, rather, was Stein’s experimental aims, that is, realizing dynamic simultaneous effects in writing which are distinct from the more time-bound narratives of the nineteenth century. To achieve these dynamic simultaneous effects in his writing, he experimented with point of view techniques in his stories.

Actually, it was a time of such experiments in viewpoint for many Modernist writers:

[Hemingway] is experimenting with point of view; he is working at getting into the mind of his character, just as were his contemporaries. Many of Hemingway’s stories, with the distinctive point of view, were written in the years between the celebrated examples of point of view innovation: Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses* in 1916 and 1919, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* in 1927, and Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* in 1929. (Ficken 95)

Consequently, these Modernist writers decisively departed from typical nineteenth-century time-bound narration. Hemingway also escaped from time-bound narration and aimed at simultaneous effects. As a result, his prose came to produce the same effects as a movie camera: a dynamic “zooming” style and a static “eyewitness” style.

The Point of View Techniques in *In Our Time*

In his detailed study of “Point of View in Nick Adams Stories,” Carl Ficken correctly asserts that Hemingway’s handling of point of view is rich in variety in the 1920s and hard to categorize using the traditional terms — first person, third person, and omniscient author (93–96). If one uses these traditional terms, one thing can be said narrowly: that is, Hemingway wrote no story from a completely omniscient point of view in the early 1920s. Although two stories in *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923) — “Up in Michigan” and “Out of Season” — are told through an “omniscient third-person narrator” (Ficken 94), all the other early stories and sketches in both *in our time* (1924) and *In Our Time* (1925) are written in the first person or in “some form of” third person (Ficken 94). However, even if a completely omniscient author was not an option for Hemingway, it is still difficult to define whether these stories and sketches are written either in the first or third person; as Ficken works hard to categorize the stories using the phrase “some form of.” The traditional labels hardly work especially with the stories in *In Our Time* due to Hemingway’s prominent experiments of point of view in them. For example, in “Big Two-Hearted River” — the story written in a form of third person, at one point, a reader suddenly hears the voice of Nick directly:

Nick knew the trout’s teeth would cut through the snell of the hook. The hook would imbed itself in his jaw. He’d bet the trout was angry. Anything that size would be angry. That was a trout. He had been solidly hooked. Solid as a rock. He felt like a rock, too, before he started off. By God, he was a big one. By God, he was the biggest one *I* ever heard of. (*IOT* 150–51; emphasis mine)

This foregrounding of the character’s consciousness has naturally confused critics; Smith states that the story is written from an omniscient point of view (*A Reader’s Guide* 85), while Wells refers to it told “in the third person” (131).

This paper, then, examines the point of view techniques in *In Our Time* not with the traditional terms — first person, third person, omniscient author — nor with Ficken’s four categories of narrator — Effaced Narrator, Author-Observer, Center of Consciousness, and Narrator-Agent (96). Rather, two cinematic categories of narrative method seem to better apply as stated above.

An “eyewitness” style seeks to present the world “as seen”; as if it is viewed from a fixed camera in which a viewer merely observes the action, but does not express his/her feelings nor see into the minds of the characters. A “zooming” style seeks to “zoom” in on the characters to foreground their point of view, and to represent their inner experiences and sensations.

A Static “Eyewitness” Style

All the stories and interchapters in *In Our Time* fundamentally present “what is seen.” Sentences often become too objective, as if a fixed movie camera projects a picture on the screen. Scenes are described in detail through the eyes of narrator or characters. The interchapters especially offer pruned mere observation by effaced narrators or an anonymous “I.” For example, Chapter X gives the narration by an effaced narrator:

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, the monos whacking him on the back of his legs with the rods. He cantered jerkily along the barrera. He stopped stiff and one of the monos held his bridle and walked him forward. The picador kicked in his spurs, leaned forward and shook his lance at the bull. Blood pumped regularly from between the horse’s front legs. He was nervously wobbly. The bull could not make up his mind to charge. (IOT 89)

A reader does not know “who” tells this sketch. These effaced narrators just portray “what is seen.” On the other hand, in some interchapters (Chapter I, III, IV, XI, XIII, and L’Envoi), “I” narrators appear; however, these narrators just depict what they see as well. For example, Chapter III, the full text:

We were in a garden at Mons. Young Buckley came in with his patrol from across the river. The first German I saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and fell down into the garden. Then three more came over further down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that. (IOT 29)

Again, we do not know who “I” am. In addition, this narrator never expresses his opinions or feelings: in the sketch, “what is seen” by the “I-viewer” is

solely described. As Zoe Trodd correctly claims, the so-called hard-boiled style with short sentences and long paratactic lets “events pile up and the result is a sense of eyewitness.” (14)

A Dynamic “Zooming” Style

A “Zooming” style is the way to narrow focus on characters in a similar way to a movie camera as it zooms in to close-up. In addition to interchapters, all the stories in *In Our Time* are told by effaced narrators or an anonymous I-narrator, except “My Old Man.” While representing the world as “seen” by these viewers, Hemingway also needed what is actually “seen and felt” by characters, like other major Modernist writers. To realize this focus on characters—that is, to accomplish both foregrounding character’s point of view, and representing inner experience and sensation, Hemingway utilizes three techniques: “soft focus,” “changing focus” and “sensory focus.”

“Soft focus”

“Soft focus” is a narrow focus on a character by providing a small inside view of them. Soft focus is primarily a way of photographing or filming materials so that the edges of the objects are not sharp or clear. In “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” “The End of Something,” “Indian Camp,” “A Very Short Story,” “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot,” and “The Revolutionist,” the narrator/observer does not provide the full thoughts and feelings of the characters, but allows a reader to know some of what they think and feel by providing a small portion of the inside view. Such a narrator is almost like an omniscient author-narrator, though he/she merely observes from a distant position most of the time and sometimes foregrounds—but not so clearly—the point of view of characters by offering a small inside view of them. In these stories, the reader is expected to understand the internal consciousness of characters through the combination of the observations of actions and the expression of a small inside view.

Actually, those small inside views are provided mostly to work to effectively heighten the meaning of the story. For example, in “The End of Something,” the narrator reveals very little of what Nick and Marjorie think and feel. Although Nick is the central character, since the story is about the breakup of

Nick and Marjorie, it is necessary for the reader to be able to see into the minds of both parties “even if only in such slight glimpses” (Ficken 100). The narrator suggests Marjorie’s love for Nick, reporting: “She loved to fish. She loved to fish with Nick” (*IOT* 32). The simple expression of her love toward Nick heightens the bitterness of the break-up for Marjorie. On the other hand, Nick, after saying “it isn’t fun any more” (*IOT* 34), “was afraid to look at Marjorie” (*IOT* 34). Nick’s feelings are not described any more as if Nick himself does not want to admit his feelings. He understands his cruel treatment of Marjorie and still does not want to face it.

In “Indian Camp,” the soft focus on the minds of Nick’s father — “he was feeling exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game” (*IOT* 18) — heightens the anti-climatic consequence of the seemingly successful operation on a Native American woman. Although Nick is again the central character of the story, his feelings are rarely described as well: he is too young to understand what is going on in front of him. The sharper focus on Nick’s thoughts in the final sentence — “he felt quite sure that he would never die (*IOT* 19) — intensifies Nick’s immaturity due to its impossible nature.

In “A Very Short Story,” “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” and “The Revolutionist,” both ironical tone and comic effect are heightened by mere observation of actions with minimal inside view of the characters. When the narrator tells the feelings of characters in these stories, he/she simply needs it to have some positive effects on the story. For example, in “The Revolutionist,” the young man’s refusal of Mantegna, the Italian painter, is depicted twice: “Mantegna he did not like” (*IOT* 81); “I spoke to him about the Mantegnas in Milan. ‘No,’ he said, very shyly, he did not like Mantegna” (*IOT* 82). Although “The Revolutionist” is told in the first-person, the narrator never describes his own thoughts and feelings. The story is rather mere observation of the young man who innocently believes in the revolution. The slight expression of the feelings of the young man plays a critical role in this very short story. For his distaste for “the Mantegnas in Milan” implies his naiveté in that he optimistically believes in the success of the revolution but hates the harsh reality of death. Although there were 7 of Mantegna’s paintings in Milan when the story was written, considering the intertextuality, as Tateo Imamura encourages, we are

probably safe in thinking that the young man in the story does not like “The Lamentation over the Dead Christ.” This painting depicts the pale-green dead body of Christ on a bed, with nail-holes in both hands and feet. Being different from the idealized Christ painted by other contemporary Renaissance painters, such as Masaccio or Piero della Francesca, Mantegna’s Christ shows the realistic dead body of Christ and gives no hope of the Resurrection. “The Lamentation over the Dead Christ” also appears in *A Farewell to Arms*. When Frederic Henry and his lover Catherine enter Switzerland illegally, they talk about paintings in the custom house:

“Do you know anything about art?”

“Rubens,” said Catherine.

“Large and fat,” I said.

“Titian,” Catherine said.

“Titian-haired,” I said. “How about Mantegna?”

“Don’t ask hard ones,” Catherine said. “I know him though — very bitter.”

“Very bitter,” I said. “Lots of nail holes.” (*FTA* 280)



Andrea Mantegna, *Cristo morto* [*The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*], from *Andrea Mantegna* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Arte, 1991) 56.

It is this bitterness they refer to that the young man in *The Revolutionist* does not look at: the bitter reality that the dead body of Christ in Mantegnas' painting represents. His slight expressions of distaste for "the Mantegnas in Milan" thus emphasize his innocence and idealism, and at the same time, heighten the ironic "realistic" ending in which he is put in jail in Switzerland.

"Changing focus"

"Changing focus" is accomplished by switching personal pronouns. It is the technique that I explained with the extract from "Big Two-Hearted River": "Nick knew the trout's teeth would cut through the snell of the hook. [. . .] By God, he was the biggest one *I* ever heard of" (*IOT* 150–51; emphasis mine). By the switching of pronouns from "he" to "I," the narrative momentarily immerses itself into the consciousness of the character, limiting viewpoint, and emphasizing the sensation and inner experience of the characters. In addition to "Big Two-Hearted River," in "Chapter VII," "Cross-Country Snow," and "Cat in the Rain," the narrative perspective switches quickly with changes of pronouns. These changes remind us of the movements of a movie camera, especially when it zooms in and out of the characters' internal worlds.

"Changing focus" has been recognized by Hemingway critics. For example, as Robert Scholes implies in his inspiring book, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*, the technique is noticeable in Chapter VII (Scholes 28–29). In the middle of the first sentence of the sketch, which is narrated by an effaced narrator, the narration abruptly focuses in on the consciousness of the soldier with the pronoun "he" switching with "me":

*While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody. (*IOT* 67)*

After the first sudden foregrounding of the consciousness of the soldier in the first sentence, a reader notices the two set changes in the sketch. The first set change occurs between the sentences “please please dear Jesus” and “the shelling moved further up the line.” By this set change, the pronoun “I” moves on to “we” as the shelling moved away: the soldier comes out of the trench he “lay flat” in and starts to work as a part of soldiers. Here, the focus of view moves from the soldier to the soldiers, zooming out. In this stage, the narration no longer reveals the internal consciousness of “I,” although the perspective still stays with “I” as a part of “we,” and the description of the day suggests his (their) relieved feelings by the phrase “cheerful and quiet.”

The second set change continuously occurs between the sentences “we went to work on the trench [. . .] and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet” and “the next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl [. . .]”. At this set change, the pronoun returns to “he” again. In the last stage, the effaced narrator observes the soldier from a farther position, without slipping into the consciousness of him. By these changes of pronouns — from “he” to “I” to “we” to “he” — the view that once suddenly foregrounded the consciousness of the soldier gradually zooms out. In the sketch, by the sudden incursion into the soldier’s consciousness, a reader closely feels the fear of the soldier. Because of this reader’s momentary identification with the soldier who entreats to God seriously to help him down in the trench, the ironic effect on the reader is heightened in the following scene which observes the soldier with a prostitute upstairs at the “Villa Rossa.”

Similarly, in “Cross-Country Snow,” we find the sudden focus into Nick: “The girl came in and Nick noticed that her apron covered swellingly her pregnancy. I wonder why I didn’t see that when she first came in, he thought” (*IOT* 109). Ficken claims: “that unquoted first person again brings the reader a little further within Nick’s mind, even though the rest of the story is so very objective” (104). This foregrounding of the consciousness of Nick, by a short I-narrative, calls the reader’s attention, since it signifies his obsession with pregnancy. As we will soon find out that Nick’s wife Helen is going to have a baby next summer. It means the end of Nick’s free days with his male friend George — free as “the wonderful flying” (*IOT* 107). George says: “Maybe we’ll never go skiing again, Nick” (*IOT* 112). Although Nick once answers “we’ve

got to. [. . .] It isn't worth while if you can't" (*IOT* 112), he does not forget to add: "There isn't any good in promising" (*IOT* 112). Nick knows that he and George will never go skiing together.

"Cat in the Rain" produces more complicated changing focuses. The story begins with an American couple staying at the hotel, and they are designated "the American wife" and "her husband." As the story advances, "the American wife" becomes "the American girl," and then "his wife"; on the other hand, "her husband" switches to "George." First, the narrator merely observes "the American wife" and "her husband" from the far position, without providing their inside views. The husband reads on the bed, while the wife stands at the window looking out and finds a cat in the rain. After she goes out once and comes back without the cat, the narrator starts to call her the "American girl." With this switching of names, the narrator looks into the minds of the wife/girl: "Something felt very small and tight inside the girl. [. . .] She had a momentary feeling of being of supreme importance" (*IOT* 93). The feelings are aroused when she is bowed to by the hotel owner. Actually, she is the central character of this story, and the narrator just provides the reader with a small inside view of the wife/girl. In this sense, the techniques "soft focus" and "switching pronouns" are combined in this story. Soft focus implies that the revealed feelings of the wife/girl are significant to interpret the story. Certainly, this story describes the young wife/girl who is dissatisfied with the life with her "reading" husband — possibly newly-wedded husband. She wants her husband to make her feel "of supreme importance." Or, as some critics have discussed, she may want to have a baby — tiny like a cat, or "something felt very small and tight inside." Her dissatisfaction comes to be revealed as she is called "girl"; here, the narrator's perspective goes with the girl's, and the husband begins to be called "George." Through her perspective, she is still young and called "girl"; her husband should be more attentive to her, however, she observes "George" always reading: "George was on the bed, reading"; "George was reading again" (*IOT* 93). George even says "Oh, shut up and get something to read" as the girl makes complains about many "wants": "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" (*IOT* 94). Then, the second view change occurs

in the story; this time, the narrator rather goes with George although his internal consciousness is never revealed. The American wife/girl is now called “his wife.” At the end of the story, a hotel maid comes to their room with a big tortoise-shell cat. The narrative perspective stays with George — “he” looked up from his book and looks at the maid in the doorway. We can not see how the American wife/girl reacts to the cat; nevertheless, the “big” cat is not likely the one that she wanted. Without the girl’s view, the anti-climax still works to convey the ironical tone: no one understands the wife/girl — neither the hotel owner nor her husband.

Thus, “changing focus” enables a sudden incursion into the characters’ consciousness, which is very similar to the cinematic technique of close-ups. The short film, “Grandma’s Reading Glass,” produced in 1900, was the first movie that used the close-up technique. Since then, the close-up technique has become one of the most important techniques of film. With the technique, a movie can show a character’s facial expression in detail, and this enables a viewer to feel the inner experience of that person.

“Sensory focus”

“Sensory focus” is a more gradual way to focus on the character — Nick — via an emphasis on the presentation of his sensations, enabling the incursion into the character’s consciousness to take place through these physical sensations. “Big Two-Hearted River,” “The Three-Day Blow,” “Indian Camp” and “The Battler” — none are I-narrative stories — the narrator describes Nick’s sensory perceptions effectively and makes the reader experience “what Nick feels.” For example, “Big Two-Hearted River” is an apt illustration of this technique. Although the story is told in the third person, the narrator describes Nick’s perceptions in detail, so that as the story proceeds, the reader comes almost to identify him/herself with Nick physically. Thus, the sensory focus enables the narrative to be “embodied.”

Ficken stresses that “Hemingway works at establishing the sensory perceptions of Nick” (101) in “The Three-Day Blow.” In this story, as Ficken points out, the narrative perspective never goes with Bill; it almost always stays with Nick: “the reader sees, as Nick sees” (Ficken 101). Although the story is told in the third person, with the focus on the descriptions of Nick’s bodily senses,

the consciousness and sensation of Nick start to be foregrounded. When Bill goes upstairs, Nick hears him “walking about overhead” (*IOT* 40); Nick sees Bill pouring whisky: “Bill reached down the whisky bottle. His big hand went all the way around it. He poured the whisky into the glass Nick held out” (*IOT* 41). We are also able to know the feelings of Nick: “He felt happy now” (*IOT* 48). After these sensory focuses, near the end of the story, the reader is convinced that the narrative passages are the expression of the consciousness of Nick without the subject word “he”: “Outside now the Marge business was no longer so tragic. It was not even very important. The wind blew everything like that away” (*IOT* 49).

In “Indian Camp,” the sensory focus is on the central character Nick. As we have investigated the “soft focus” technique, at one point of the story, the narrator reveals Nick’s father’s feelings: “He was feeling exalted and talkative as football players are in the dressing room after a game” (*IOT* 18). However, the sensory focus is just on Nick. He sees — or, does not see — his father performing a Caesarian to the Native American woman: an almost “barbarous” operation without anesthesia. “Nick watched his father’s hands scrubbing each other with the soap”; “He was looking away so as not to see what his father was doing”; “Nick didn’t look at it”; “Nick did not watch” (*IOT* 17). At the end of the story, his perception is focused again: “Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning” (*IOT* 19). As Tony Tanner explains, “it is a moment of intense awareness of the livingness of live things and the delights of the senses” (231). Hideo Kurabayashi observes that with the sentence describing Nick’s perception, the objective narrative suddenly turns into the subjective one (119). As Kurabayashi maintains, this sudden focus is for depicting the consciousness of Nick, who has witnessed the shocking death of the Native American’s husband. In the following sentence, the foregrounding of the consciousness of Nick successfully occurs: “he felt quite sure that he would never die” (*IOT* 19).

“Battler” provides examples of the successive combination of sensory focus and clear foregrounding of the consciousness. For example, at the beginning of the story, Nick is on the ground after being thrust off the moving train by a brakeman: “He felt of his knee. The pants were torn and the skin was barked. His hands were scraped and there were sand and cinders driven up under his

nails. [. . .]” (*IOT* 53). Then, the narrative focuses on Nick’s consciousness: “That lousy crut of a brakeman. He would get him some day. He would know him again. That was a fine way to act” (*IOT* 53). After this, the combination continuously appears: “Nick rubbed his eye. There was a big bump coming up. He would have a black eye, all right. It ached already. That son of a crutting brakeman” (*IOT* 53).

The Rhetoric of the Lens: Analogy with the Art of Cinema

These two ways of describing, that is, a static de-authored “eyewitness” style and a dynamic “zooming” style, are echoed in Hemingway’s words in his letter to Edmund Wilson on October 18, 1924:

I’ve worked like hell most of the time and think the stuff gets better. Finished the book of 14 stories with a chapter [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.* (SL 128; emphasis mine)

“Looking at it and then going in and living in it — and then coming out and looking at it again” — the phrase exactly explains the combination of an “eyewitness” style and a “zooming” style. Furthermore, he also likens the visual effects in *In Our Time* to that of a lens, zooming in/out: “Like looking with your eyes at something, say a passing coast line, and then looking at it with 15X binoculars.” This phrase clearly describes Hemingway’s focusing techniques. In addition to camera movement, however, Hemingway’s point of view techniques make these things possible in the narrative: speedy changes without lengthy explanation, quick focus on characters and to gain the effects of simultaneity. Thus, Hemingway is quite successful in realizing cinematic effects in *In Our Time*.

Hemingway tried to give “the picture of the whole” and thus aimed at a certain unity in *In Our Time* — in a time when God is dead, when the “all-seeing author eye” doesn’t work anymore. In *In Our Time*, after giving the honest representation of the fractured reality through its fragmented structure, Hemingway also needed the strategy to re-embody the reality without

synthesizing it. The solution was something related to movies and the camera — as seen in Hemingway’s use of the rhetoric of the lens in the letter.

There is no decisive evidence that Hemingway learned the cinematic techniques in writing from Stein or from a certain movie work. He rather expresses his distaste for movies in “On Writing”: “The movies ruined everything. Like talking about something good. That was what had made the war unreal. Too much talking” (*NAS* 237). Nevertheless, Hemingway was in Paris in the 1920s that was a part of “the period of the cinema,” as Stein dubbed, and was “bound to express what the world in which we were living is doing”:

I of course did not think of it [a continuous succession of the statement] in terms of the cinema, in fact I doubt whether at that time I had ever seen a cinema but, and I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one’s period and *this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema, and series production*. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing. (Stein, “Portraits and Repetition” 177; emphasis mine)

Hemingway was also a part of the period that created cinema even though he was not conscious of its influence. The successful cinematic effects in *In Our Time* all attest to this fact.

Notes

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