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**The Optical Experiments of *in our time*:
Hemingway's Literary Vignettes,
Photography and Relativity Theory**

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Abstract: The article examines the influence of Einstein's relativity theory on Hemingway's *in our time*. There seems to be no direct reference in Hemingway's text, but Einstein's concepts, given their popularity and omnipresence, could work in more subtle ways, influencing the optical imagery in literary fiction. The article examines the use of vignettes, photographic aesthetics, and the representation of history, arguing that relativity theory could influence *in our time* indirectly through various tropes, themes, and areas of discourse.

Keywords: Hemingway, Einstein, vignette, photography, relativity theory

**Within a Larger Contextual Framework:
Hemingway's *in our time* as Suspended
Between the Literary, the Photographic, and the Relativistic**

The usually chosen contextual framework for the analysis of Hemingway's early fiction is the author's experience gathered on the Italian front in 1918, and the influence of the Paris literary and artistic Bohemia meeting in Gertrude Stein's salon, that Hemingway joined in 1922. The choice of such a frame of reference usually centers the discussion on the writer's works on these elements, which make the texts representative of the unique outlook on the world of the Lost Generation. While the aforementioned analytical approach is fully justified and appears obvious in many cases, broadening the perspective on Hemingway's early fiction to include less evident sources of impact can offer a new viewpoint on frequently analyzed and well-known texts by the author. These include the broadly understood visual culture of the modernist era, with photography in the first place, and the vibrant scientific landscape of the time, that, especially in the 1920s, is dominated by Relativity Theory related discoveries in the field of physics.

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scientific landscape of the time, that, especially in the 1920s, is dominated by Relativity Theory related discoveries in the field of physics.

In the light of the above discussed, the major objective of this article is to analyze one of Hemingway's earliest publications, *in our time*, within the contextual framework provided by photography and science. This will involve tracing evidence of both the pictorial and the relativistic in Hemingway's collection of literary vignettes. "As a journalist, Hemingway helped to break down the distinction between watching and acting" states North (204) in his *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word*, bringing to the fore the essence of the new literary perspective on reality offered by Hemingway. But it is not only the boundary between witnessing something and being involved in action that the writer skillfully removes to obtain a new, more encompassing point of view. With a keen eye for detail and a unique ability to extract the essence of the scene observed, Hemingway blurs the distinction between the text and image as well. The extraordinary blend of the verbal and the photographic to be found in *in our time*, along with the distant echoes of the new, altered perception of time stemming from the Theory of Relativity add an interesting, cross-field dimension to Hemingway's collection of literary vignettes. The extraordinary relationship between the visual, the textual, and the relativistic *in in our time* that constitutes the major thematic axis of the study in focus will be analyzed with reference to the story behind the creation of the vignettes, to provide a more comprehensive outlook on the topic in focus. Since the common denominator of the diverse influenced discernible in Hemingway's short experimental literary forms.

How to Reassemble Things: Hemingway's Stolen Valise

"I had never seen anyone hurt by a thing other than death or unbearable suffering except Hadley when she told me about the things being gone. She had cried and cried and could not tell me. I told her that no matter what the dreadful thing was that had happened nothing could be that bad, and whatever it was, it was all right and not to worry"—writes Hemingway in *A Moveable Feast* (74), recounting from a three-decade perspective a legend-shrouded story on his stolen Paris valise. Irrevocably lost during Hadley's train journey to Switzerland, the suitcase allegedly contained a draft of Hemingway's first novel and all the manuscripts of the writer's early short stories, except for "My old man" already presented to the editor of *Cosmopolitan*, and "Up in Michigan," formerly discussed with Gertrude Stein, deemed "inacprochable" by Hemingway's Paris mentor, and thus hidden from potential readers in the drawer of the author's desk (Werlock 665).

For the career of a 23-year-old beginner author endeavoring to pave his way from journalism to fiction writing, the loss of almost all the manuscripts marking his early steps on the new, fresh ground of fictional narrative might have proven disastrous. Uncertain about the future of his writing, young Hemingway turns with his disillusionment to Pound. "I suppose you heard about the loss of my Juvenilia?" asks Hemingway in a letter from 23 January 1923 encapsulating in one, terse paragraph the story on Hadley's reckless decision to pack the whole

of his writing output, including the carbon copies and the duplicates of his early texts in one, as it later turned out, ill-fated valise (Baker 77). Fourteen years his senior and already an acclaimed poet, Pound encouraged Hemingway to “make it new” long before the famous three-word modernist manifesto resonated in both literature and art becoming a symbolic, imperative formula stimulating the search for a change. “The *point* is: how much of *it can you remember*.... If the middle, i.e., *FORM*, of a story is right one ought to be able to reassemble it from memory.... As has been remarked: memory is the best critic” writes Pound (as quoted in Hagemann 207) in response to Hemingway's letter. This cold and balanced advice diverges attention of the young, novice writer from the sense of helplessness in the face of loss to a newly arisen opportunity to filter the already created compositions through the machinery of memory. What should arise from that process, according to Pound, is a refined, pure literary form, the core of the composition's structure purified from unnecessary, excessive elements. Ultimately, as Pound suggests, the only thing that was lost, was the time Hemingway should take “to rewrite the parts [he] can remember” (Hagemann 207).

Whether Hemingway introduced only superficial changes to once developed and written down literary ideas or approached them as preliminary, noncommittal drafts subjecting the initial concepts to an extensive structural and stylistic rearrangement remains uncertain. Notwithstanding the nature of the changes implemented and the scope of the adjustments, it may be assumed that the total eradication of the effects of Hemingway's rudimentary steps in fiction writing allowed the author's first literary attempts to crystallize and grow mature the moment they materialized on paper for the second time. “Am now working on new stuff” declares Hemingway in the previously quoted letter to Pound. This simple, yet bold statement, acts as a certain form of closure, not only to a succinct, barely two-paragraph account on the heart-wrenching consequences of the valise theft but also to the three-year-long introductory period to professional fiction writing.

Between Text and Image: Literary Vignette

The “new stuff” Hemingway was working on at the beginning of year 1923 were presumably short pieces of innovative prose commonly referred to as *vignettes*. Although the term appears relatively frequently in the context of short fiction analysis, it seems to lack clearly delineated boundaries. Most commonly used as a synonym for a “miniature,” a vignette is rare to be defined explicitly in publications from the field of literary studies. Functioning in the categories of a supplementary term useful for the description and analysis of extraordinarily short literary texts that fall outside of the genre of poetry, the notion of vignette serves as a descriptive tool, rather than a fully-fledged literary term. Its character is therefore largely discursive, which makes it subject to transfigurations resulting from various interpretations and/or semantic contaminations depending on the contextual landscape to which it is applied.

And so, in the *Oxford Dictionary of Chinese literature* (2018) the term *vignette* is used as an auxiliary tool supplementing the definition of *xiaoping*

wen, a literary genre characterized by brevity and conciseness, particularly popular in sixteenth-century China. In like manner, the notion of vignette is applied in the description of *hsiao-p'in* by Ye (xiv) who discusses another short literary form, “usually informal in structure and mostly casual and spontaneous in mood and tone” that, along with the previously mentioned *xiaoping wen*, became popular in China in the late Ming period. An interesting example of the implementation of the concept of a vignette into the theoretical analysis of brief narrative forms has been provided by Mülli (2021). The author’s extensive study in the field of cultural anthropology includes the exploration of textual miniatures known as *ethnographic vignettes*. These are also referred to in the book as *ethnographic portraits* or *ethnographic highlights*. Instead of providing an explicit definition of a vignette, Mülli explains the notion by discussing the derivation of the word:

Etymologically, the word vignette derives from the diminutive form of *vine*, the French word for vine. Vignette thus means small vine. This type of border ornament was frequently used in portrait paintings of the 19th century. Likewise, the title page of a book or the beginning or end of a chapter was adorned with ornamental pictorial representations. The analogy of these paintings to the text passages that constitute ethnographic vignettes results in their vivid and brisk writing style. (32)

While tracing back the history of a vignette, Mülli emphasizes its firm anchorage in visual imagination and, hence, pictorial expression. As a result, the author unveils the visual quality within the minimalist prose forms, as their source is primarily to be sought in the ambiguous sphere in-between the textual and the graphic. This peculiar state of suspension makes a vignette lack clearly delineated (generic) boundaries, adds flexibility to its form, and opens numerous paths regarding its possible content. Always close to the text, but with meanings codified in graphics, vignette offers multiple compositional opportunities, does not require any overdone, artificial faithfulness to the form, and ensures artistic autonomy of the writer provided they embrace the doctrine of minimalism.

An analogous outlook on a vignette has been presented by Hatton and Ladd (2002). Although in their *Teaching Idea Development: A Standards-Based Critical-Thinking Approach to Writing* the authors do not explore the etymology of the word, their considerations on the short literary form essentially focus on its pictorial dimension. As Hatton and Ladd notice (100), the core of a vignette as a literary form lies in its imagist quality. This, in turn, places it close to photography and, by analogy, to visual arts:

Through the eye of a camera, the photographer captures moments in time to be saved for posterity. Writers, too, capture moments for an audience. Their pens may lead readers into battles, transport them across space and time, or trigger the recall in the mind’s eye of some scene or event. The vignette is a writer’s photograph. Through it, writers add dimension to reader’s understanding. (Hatton and Ladd 100)

Paradoxically, in both photography and optics vignetting, understood as the blurring or darkening of the picture's peripheral area while at the same time maintaining the desired optimal saturation of the central part of the image with light, is usually considered an unintended and unwanted effect. The overshadowing or dimming of the photo's edges can result from bad lighting, insufficient quality of the photographic equipment, or mechanical obstacles causing the narrowing of the optical field of view. Nevertheless, the peculiar poetics of differentiated focus stemming from the distribution of light, always happening according the same, predictable pattern, may appear as an attractive tool allowing to obtain a suggestive artistic effect. *The Universal Text-Book of Photography*, a manual published as early as in 1863, includes a separate chapter devoted to the art of vignetting. The section opens with the following paragraph:

There is great improvement made to some photographs by being vignetted; but very few persons take any care with them. To vignette properly requires some artistic feeling, or the vignette may be used injudiciously. Some photographs want vignetting one shape and some another; so that without a person has a complete set of vignettes or makes them himself to suit the subject, he is very liable to err. (Disdéri 27)

Vignetting is therefore not only a part of the craft of photography; it is something more than just a technique of image processing, as it goes beyond the scrupulous application of the highly specialized rules governing picture taking and picture printing. Although the above quoted excerpt from Disdéri constitutes a concise, but comprehensive argument for the artistic dimension of a vignette, it is worth to supplement it with a brief reference to Wheeler's remarks on both the technical and artistic aspects of photography. In his guide published at the beginning of the twentieth century Wheeler (76) states that "the perfect vignette" is the one "where the whole charm of the picture lies in its tranquil softness," and it is "the delicate softness of the edges" that should be regarded as "a chief feature of a vignette." Dimming the edges and saturating the centre of the image with light necessarily means taking aesthetic responsibility for the effect obtained. Moreover, the exposition of the heart of the picture always happens at the expense of the peripheral space which, submerged in shadows, appears as the area of lesser importance. Vignetting should therefore be always well-founded in terms of picture poetics, and applied in the process of image refining exclusively for justifiable reasons.

Although the above discussed provides only a simplistic analysis of both the textual and pictorial anchorage of a vignette, the aforecited fragments offer a cross-sectional outlook on the issue in focus. The diversification of the spectrum of possible perspectives on a vignette however, does not mean that the variegated viewpoints cannot be brought down to the common denominator. The major trails extracted from the quoted resources lead to the austere minimalism of (a loosely defined) form and vividly sketched, transparent content. These, if not only perceived as a desired effect of the creative process but also viewed in broader categories of a stylistic and compositional dominant, appear as a certain form of an artistic dogma. As such, the echoes of a vignette speak through the imagist compositions

of Ezra Pound who, acting as a mentor for young Hemingway, certainly exercises a great impact on both his early and, as it later turns out, mature writing.

Trying to Make It New: Hemingway's Inspiration with Imagism

If it can be assumed after Denecke (49) that “Japanese literature began as a *continuation* of Chinese literary production, supplemented by literary production in vernacular genres that had no Chinese precedent” then, for the purpose of this paper it is possible to build a conditional linkage between the aforementioned Chinese genres such as *hsiao-p'in* and *xiaoping wen* on the one hand, and Japanese short poetic forms or prose poetry represented by haiku on the other. As O'Reilly (192) notices “the key to the vignette literary tradition in Japan was to entertain, and making an (often melodramatic) impression on the reader was an excellent path to popularity.” And indeed, Pound's fascination with Japanese short poetic forms saturates the imagist movement with a density of partly-hidden affects stemming from the greatest possible aggregation of meaning in the most transparent, compellingly bare form. Immersing himself in the distant, cold beauty of the usual, palpable, and within the reach, Pound discovers the unexpected, strikingly visual quality within the ordinary and seemingly non-poetical. Of course, the poet's translations of both Chinese and Japanese poetry into English frequently raise controversy since Pound's approach towards the interpretation process is oftentimes excessively autonomous. This, however, shall not prejudice the general artistic value of the outcomes of Pound's translation effort; overall, the extravagant interference with the text translated can be viewed in the categories of “Make it New,” the modernist imperative Pound was absorbed by substantially before the 1934 publication of the collection of essays compiled under the same title. While not always loyal to the text, Pound remains invariably faithful to the (poetic) image. According to Houwen (43), his distinct awareness of *hokku*'s hidden pictorial potential offers a breeding ground for establishing a firm and lasting connection between the brief, austere minimalist poetic form and visual art. This peculiar linkage, not always obvious and frequently difficult to obtain, becomes for Pound the core of literary creation.

Young Hemingway quickly discovers that his own literary principles, not fully specified and still rather obscure in the early 1920s, take the desired, clear shape when articulated within the framework of Pound's artistic credo. His poetic manifesto expressed in “A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste” (1913) and “A Retrospect” (1918) offers the emerging writer a well-defined but still widely open space within which he can define himself for the very first time as a professional fiction writer and simultaneously secure the freshly taken position.¹ Additionally, with

1 This statement by no means constitutes an attempt to deconstruct the well-known and universally accepted fact that it was Gertrude Stein whose mentorship exercised the greatest impact on young Hemingway and his (early) writing career. “She herself wanted to be published in *Atlantic Monthly*, she told me that I was not a good enough writer to be published there or in *The Saturday Evening Post* but that I might be some new sort of writer in my own way but the first thing to remember was not to write stories that were inaccrochable”—writes Hemingway (15) in a section entitled “Miss Stein instructs” of *A moveable feast*. These words, written from the

his still fresh experience in journalism, which provides him with the capital of terse, athletic style and a reservoir of dozens of striking images from the front, Hemingway quickly acknowledges the untapped potential resulting from the juxtaposition of the rough poetics of maximally reduced form with the sharp, pictorial content. By drawing inspiration from Pound's imagist poetry while recognizing the value of his own unique writing experience Hemingway learns to create narratives which, with their perfectly balanced center of gravity resemble austere architectonic constructions. These should of course be strong enough to carry the semantic weight of a vast body of submerged meanings but at the same time so light and transparent that the whole composition would retain the same dignity that characterizes the movement of an iceberg.² To "strip language clean, to lay it bare down to the bone" (Hemingway quoted in Putnam 128) becomes thus a simple yet strong tenet, something Hemingway partially draws inspiration from Pound, builds an altar for, and transforms into his own artistic religion.

**The New Appearance of Space, the New Quality of Time:
Hemingway's *in our time*
Against the Background of the Scientific Landscape of the 1920s**

Six of Hemingway's vignettes had been finished by the beginning of March 1923 and, along with one poem, appeared in Jane Heap's *Little Review* in the fall of the same year (Reynolds 26). The great outburst of literary inventiveness that would never occur again with such intensity in Hemingway's career is yet to come with the first half of 1924. Nevertheless, it is the brief, terse narratives, seemingly of disproportionate importance with regard to the development of serious prose writing that, created early in 1923, constitute a palpable sign of the author's professional beginnings in fiction writing, at the same time serving as a representative sample of the young author's distinctive, unconventional writing style. Nowhere else would Hemingway's "barbaric" poetics be so intense and uncompromising as in the collection of these short prose pieces the author himself used to call the "unwritten

perspective of an already accomplished and mature writer are obviously sarcastic in tone as is the whole chapter on Stein. This is where Hemingway manifests his ill-fated tendency to destroy long-lasting friendships while at the same time totally dismantling his past with an exaggerated sense of bitterness. Although many of the formerly cordial relationships in Hemingway's life did not stand the test of time, the friendship with Pound constitutes an interesting exception to that rule. Cohassey (1), whose book explores "the most unlikely friendship" writes: "Friendships did not last long in Ernest Hemingway's turbulent life. Hemingway's admiration for poet Ezra Pound, however, survived fiery temperaments and divergent political outlooks". And indeed, there was something in the connection between Hemingway and Pound that allowed to maintain the bond over the years. Whereas the young writer's relation with Stein, especially in the first half of the 1920s, was based on a peculiar form of matriarchal mentorship requiring artistic allegiance and obedience, Pound offers Hemingway a way more equal relationship, in which he plays the role of an inspiring facilitator, rather than plaudit-seeking master.

- 2 Hemingway (192) in *Death in the Afternoon*: "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."

stories” (Reynolds 27). And it was within the seemingly tight framework of the miniatures where Hemingway manifests the stylistic path taken and defines his artistic identity as a writer.

The first six vignettes are soon followed by a number of texts of the same kind to be finally collected and published in the spring of 1924 by Three Mountain Press under the title *in our time* (Leff 13). The “new stuff” with a modest circulation of 170 copies appears as genuinely new in all aspects. Thirty-pages long collection of succinct, condensed narratives exploring the themes of war, loss, brutality, physical and psychological pain fit into the canonical modernist literary discourse of the Lost Generation. Firmly anchored in Hemingway’s journalist experience, the vignettes strike the reader with the vividness of literary imagery, intensity of emotions, and unparalleled content compression, which, cleaving into manifold truths, frequently lends itself to symbolic reading. Seemingly closed narrative structure of particular vignettes opens up for diverse interpretational approaches, gradually unveiling the intricate layers of meaning. This in turn requires the reader’s active participation in the process of meaning disclosure by progressive decoding of symbolic senses ascribed to at first sight unequivocal textual structure of vignettes.

The entire collection and its composing parts bear the hallmark of literary experiment. The innovativeness of *in our time* cannot be of course compared to that of the texts which have its roots in the leading avant-garde movements flourishing in Paris of the 1920s, such as dada or surrealism. On the background of the profound distortion of reality in Tristan Tzara’s poems, the bizarre imagery of Max Ernst’s collage novels or the fantastic worlds dreamt by André Breton in his works, Hemingway’s *in our time* is a well balanced compromise between the bare, but rather classical poetics of the text, and the moderate, elegant originality of its form.

This is how the collection appears if analyzed within the already thoroughly discussed literary and, if viewed more broadly, cultural context of the decade. Its place in the artistic landscape of the 1920s in general, and Hemingway’s literary oeuvre in particular, seems to be well-defined and fixed. But is it really unambiguous? Exploring the experimental quality of *in our time* only within the tight framework of modernist literature and art to a considerable extent impedes adopting a broader, more encompassing perspective on Hemingway’s unique minimalist compositions. To see both the universal and the experimental aspect of the vignettes in full light would perhaps require placing Hemingway’s collection within the broadest socio-cultural context possible. This of course would mean conducting a detailed, comprehensive study exploring the nature of Hemingway’s experience gathered prior to 1923, the socio-political background to the events referred to in particular vignettes, a complex and at the same time highly diversified network of relationships young Hemingway was entangled in, explicit and less apparent influences coming from his family and friends left behind in America on one hand and the Paris community of expatriate writers on the other, the general socio-cultural climate of the decade, and many more. Such a nuanced study goes far beyond the research possibilities offered by the length of a single paper. Nevertheless, a balanced attempt to widen the perspective on the contextual

background for Hemingway's *in our time* with some new aspects appears feasible within the framework of the research in focus.

In order to achieve a larger, more capacious frame of reference for the analysis of the vignettes' experimental dimension, it is necessary to move the conventionally accepted contextual boundaries to include in the field of considerations also the scientific landscape of the 1920s. Additionally, by means of a similar gesture of re-edging of the existing structures within which to analyze the collection, the notion of literary experiment should be expanded to encompass the semantic load ascribed to it in the area of science. The lens applied to Hemingway's prose miniatures in such a two-vector interpretational process, is therefore a diverging lens, causing the otherwise coherent interpretational line to bifurcate in order to penetrate the area of literature and science at the same time. In a like manner, ascribing to the notion of literary experiment the connotations it carries in the area of exact sciences leads to meaning dispersal. This small-scale poliperspective on the experimental dimension of *in our time* is aimed at broadening of the already existing interpretational framework to Hemingway's vignettes with a relatively rarely discussed possible influence on the collection from the area of science.

Between Joyce and Einstein: Year 1 p.s.U.

Hadley's reckless decision to pack all of her husband's early works into one valise, and her failure to supervise the luggage resulting in the irretrievable loss of the texts, must have been particularly painful for Hemingway not only due to the fact that the missing works constituted a promising literary capital. In December of 1922 Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and the Damned* is still very fresh, the uproar caused by the publication of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" does not fade, and after the obscenity trial and numerous, still developing turbulent discussions, Joyce's *Ulysses* is finally published by Sylvia Beach to invariably shock the audience. By printing his calendar of the new era in the 1922 spring issue of the *Little Review* Ezra Pound could not have acted more relevantly. Contributing the calendar anonymously to the magazine Pound appears as a transcendent self of the new epoch speaking in the name of the whole generation, which, after the release of *Ulysses* can reorganize its life according to the new principles. This bold gesture of radical, revolutionary break with the past is also a proof of the exceptional sensitivity of the modernist barometer to any internal or external fluctuation, abrupt or more measured turn into a new direction, a pronounced or barely palpable shift in the balance of power. In a note to calendar Pound ("The Little Review Calendar" 40) writes: "The Christian era came definitely to an END at midnight of the 29-30 October (1921) old style." The new style is the one that bears no status quo, incessantly pushes the boundaries, and frantically improvises the present to inscribe the future into now. The ground of literature in the year 1922 is more than fertile, and Hemingway must have been highly aware of that.

Eric Burns, an American journalist popularizing historical knowledge, considers 1920 as a vivid entry into the vibrant decade. In the introduction to his comprehensive, cross-sectional study Burns writes:

Nineteen twenty, and the nine years to follow, make up the only such period in the country's history to have its own clear identity, a widely applied nickname: the Roaring Twenties. But although the year that is the subject of this book was a preview of a decade, it turned out to be more than that: it would be a preview of the entire century and even the beginning of the century to follow, the one in which we live today. The year was like the trailer for a movie, and the movie was an epic beyond the scope of a director even as skilled as D.W. Griffith, a film of such sweeping proportions that it seemed there would never be the last reel. The birth of an even greater nation. But it did not start out that way. Nineteen twenty was not the happy-go-lucky year of popular myth. (xiii)

And indeed, from the socio-political and economic perspective it definitely was not. It is also hard to argue with the author's statement that 1920 serves as a "trailer" to the new era, a period significantly different from the one preceding it. But was nineteen twenty really "the year that made the decade roar"? Here Burns seems to be mistaken by two years; the year that boosted modernist progress and made the spirit of the new era spread in all possible directions was 1922, "Year 1p.s.U."³

The atmosphere of general arousal drawing on invigorating, in many respects formerly unknown experience, permeates not only the field of art. What in the realm of literature in 1922 symbolically reaches a crescendo in the publication of *Ulysses*, in the area of exact sciences culminates in two Nobel Prizes in physics awarded in the same year to Albert Einstein "for his services to theoretical physics, and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect," and to Niels Bohr on the ground of "his services in the investigation of the structures of atoms and of the radiation emanating from them" (Rosen 355). Although Einstein was considered for the prize a year earlier, it was not until 1922 when the decision was finally reached. And since none of the 1921 nominations for the prize in the field of physics was compliant with the criteria established by Alfred Nobel, 1922 becomes the year in which The Nobel Committee announces the 1921 Nobel Prize in physics awarded to Einstein, and the 1922 prize to Bohr. This extraordinary situation becomes a symbolic reflection of the general turmoil in science caused by its rapid multidirectional progress. Especially physics, with multiple groundbreaking theories and newly discovered phenomena, goes through a period of dynamic development:

Just as the 1920s are sometimes described as the 'roaring twenties,' so these are truly 'golden years' for science, their glory reaching a peak in the second towering achievement of twentieth-century physics (the first one being rela-

3 It is perhaps worth to note that Burns mentions Ezra Pound only once in his book. Even in the chapter entitled "Uproar in the arts", which constitutes a concise overview of the new trends in (American) post World War I literature, Burns seems to be completely neglecting the role of Pound in the shaping of the new literary trends of the 1920s. The poet's name appears in a fragment of a quotation cited to illustrate T.S. Eliot's "unlikely relationship to the artistic arousal of African Americans" (Burns 287). Contrary to Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, David Herbert Lawrence, Agatha Christie, or the already mentioned T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound has not been included by Burns in the discussion on the broadly understood artistic landscape of the Jazz Age.

tivity)—namely, the theory of quantum mechanics, which emerges in the same period. (Dardo 125)

In 1922 Einstein's photoelectric effect paper had been known for seventeen years. Likewise, the revolutionary theory of general relativity deconstructing the commonly accepted cognitive perspective on the world, previously viewed as an internally coherent, three-dimensional space with the separate dimension of (absolute) time, had already been discussed by scientists representing the most esteemed research communities around the world for seven years. Nevertheless, it is in 1922 when the physicist's revolutionary ideas can unfold their significance in the proper environment of a perpetually growing public interest in the newest scientific achievements. Already widely recognizable and celebrated not only as a scientific genius but also as a brilliant commentator of the current socio-political issues, Einstein becomes a celebrity figure. The general public, mesmerized by the unintelligibility of his scientific thought, boldly claims its rights to the insight into the formerly hermetic, largely inaccessible to laypeople realm of scientific knowledge. Twenty-two years later, during an interview for *The New York Times*, the scientist will ask the journalist: "Why is it that nobody understands me, yet everybody likes me?" (Robinson 139). The great, international fame which Einstein cherished throughout the rest of his life, and which frequently confused him, was in large part a result of the increased interest in science observable in the 1920s.

The Mesmerizing Discourse of Science : 1920s and the Popular Science Craze

An immediate result of the public's urgent need to participate in the groundbreaking discoveries at least in the role of a passive observer who, despite their lack of professional knowledge, would be able to nibble a part of the scientific marvels for themselves, is a rapid development of popular science. According to Leane (24), the period of popular science craze in America coincides with, or is even driven by what the author calls "the Einstein boom" that reaches its peak in the 1920s and continues a positive trend in the following decade. There is a peculiar "media circus" which "surrounded Einstein and his theory in the years immediately following Eddington's 1919 eclipse observation" resulting in a number of publications popularizing the newly discovered phenomena or explaining the complicated scientific theories to people who do not belong to academic circles. Whereas some of the publications mentioned by Leane (24) such as Einstein's *Relativity: The Special and General Theory* (1920) followed by *The Meaning of Relativity* (1922), a book recurrently reprinted until now, or Eddington's *Space, Time, and Gravitation* (1920), are the ones written by academics themselves, with a great concern for scientific accuracy, formalism, and logic, the new discoveries are widely discussed in print by non-academic subjects as well.

In the frantic atmosphere of the roaring twenties the meticulously controlled discourse of science leaks through the safe environment of academia to reach the areas of social life formerly unconnected with any academic-related activity. As a result, relativity theory discourse series that, apart from Einstein's groundbreaking theories embrace also the accompanying discoveries in the field of science (Bohr's,

Heisenberg's and Pauli's work on quantum mechanics, Planck's discovery of energy quanta, Friedman's idea of an expanding universe, Hubble's discovery of the nebulae beyond the Milky Way Galaxy, or Eddington's theory on the source of stellar energy, to mention just a few) are subject to various transformations and takeovers by speaking subjects from beyond the research community. Open lectures, press and radio coverage of the new findings, and popular science magazines such as *Scientific American*, *Science and Invention*, *Popular Science* or *Popular Mechanics* contribute to the rapid dissemination of the scientific discourse. Its dynamic spreading leads to a gradual de-formation of various fields of cultural activity formerly unrelated to science, mutual contamination of the interacting discourses, and a lasting cross-field influence. As a result, the discourse series oscillating around Einsteinian new physics acquire higher visibility in the public space, but even more importantly enter in a dynamic dialogue with the outsides of academia, transforming the perception of space and leading to the creation of new meanings.

For a young 23-year old aspiring writer losing all his modest but promising writing output at the end of 1922, the year that in many respects marks the beginning of the new era, must have been more than overwhelming. Nevertheless, encouraged by Pound Hemingway lets himself to be carried by the spirit of the time. Not yet an experienced author, but definitely an excellent observer Hemingway takes a crucial lesson at the turn of 1922 and 1923 learning how to soak in the atmosphere of the here and now, how to turn his own life experience into a valuable literary material and, perhaps most importantly, how "never to empty the well of [his] writing."⁴

Symmetry, Minimalism, and Logic: The Mathematical Architecture of Literary Form

While the most prominent scientists of the period deconstruct the long-accepted and universally regarded as obvious image of reality, push the outer limits of the universe, and unveil the world in the micro-scale exploring the phenomenon of quanta, Hemingway makes a bold attempt to deconstruct the perspective on narration, delineates the new boundaries of prose, and revolutionizes the literary

4 In the third chapter of *A Moveable Feast* entitled "Une Génération Perdue" (25-26), dwelling on his Paris experience Hemingway writes: "When I had not come back from any trips and would stop in at the rue de Fleurus after working I would try sometimes to get Miss Stein to talk about books. When I was writing it was necessary for me to read after I had written. If you kept thinking about it, you would lose the thing that you were writing before you could go on with it the next day. It was necessary to get exercise, to be tired in the body, and it was very good to make love with whom you loved. That was better than anything. But afterwards, when you were empty, it was necessary to read in order not to think or worry about your work until you could do it again. I had learned already never to empty the well of my writing, but always to stop when there was still something there in the deep part of the well, and let it refill at night from the springs that fed it." The springs that filled Hemingway's well of writing are always highly diversified and span from his past journalist wartime experience through the inspiration gathered in Stein's salon to, in later years, African safari trips and, above all, genuine, frequently rough conversations in which Hemingway always tried to touch the nature of things. The last source of artistic stimuli was perhaps best described by Martha Gellhorn in her *Travels with Myself and Another*.

form. The modernist search for the new and extraordinary taking place at the expense of the deconstruction of the formerly celebrated artistic schemes can be viewed as a creative process parallel to the scientists' endeavors to revise and reshape the academic and the popular vision of the world. According to Wilson (340), whose favorable reception of in our time made Hemingway "awfully glad" (Baker 105), "Mr Hemingway's poems are not particularly important, but his prose is of the first distinction.... [H]e is rather strikingly original, and in the dry, compressed little vignettes of *In our Time* (sic!) has almost invented a form of his own." Although Wilson is rather cautious about claiming Hemingway's collection of prose miniatures an absolute novelty, his inclination towards analyzing the publication in the categories of a literary, or in a broader sense, artistic experiment is more than visible. Of course the direct effect of Einsteinian new physics on Hemingway's literary vignettes cannot be explicitly proven, but the new scientific findings and their experimental nature were striking enough to modify the general perception of reality, upset the existing image of the world, and provoke the search for new, more encompassing outlook on reality that would allow for the newly discovered truths or hypotheses.

Divided into eighteen chapters with an average length oscillating around three hundred words, Hemingway's *In our Time* acquires a peculiar compositional airiness and transparency. Such a simple pattern of text distribution governing the compositional design resembles a clear mathematical formula, where the lack of superfluous elements ensures its productivity in the process of meaning creation. The greatest possible condensation of content in an austere, minimalist form results in obtaining a vibrant assemblage of literary miniatures so vivid and rough that their coarse texture with sharp edges is almost palpable.

Nonetheless, it is not only the internal structure of the entire composition that obtains pronounced contours. "Madame, our words from loose using have lost their edge" states Hemingway (*Death in the Afternoon* 71) in one of the highly abstract, imaginary dialogues with the Old Lady, that interweave the meticulously detailed descriptions of corrido in *Death in the Afternoon*. That words will retrieve their edges, become once again clear and strong with their solid and dependable semantic framework is of primary importance for young Hemingway. The collection of vignettes can be thus regarded as an experiment in the writer's laboratory aimed at re-discovering the genuine anatomy of words, mending the rickety structure of meanings, and removing unwanted "growths" to finally unveil the underlying skeleton, the most clear and uncontaminated connection between the signifier and the signified.

Risking a statement, that the aforementioned connection between signifié and signifiant, to noncommittally borrow from de Saussure's discourse, is a parallel reflection of the relationship between the text and its form would not be perhaps exaggerated. If viewed in this way Hemingway's *In our Time* appears as a cycle of internal reflections that take place along the axis of minimalism. With every element of the structure so obtained finding its mirror image at the other side of the division line, the composition bears close similarity to a well-planned graphic design in which the artist organizes the entire work according to a subtle and secret underlying geometrical pattern. Such a hidden framework does not interfere with the

content, but provides a proper support for the work's substance. It can be argued that Hemingway is looking for a perfect symmetry between words and the things they refer to, between the form and content, between the picture stored in memory, and its translation into the language of his prose.

The choice of a strict compositional discipline in the era of rather abstract, frequently amorphous forms or artistic expression governed by nothing else but the internal law of absolute emancipation makes the structure of Hemingway's in our time resemble the ones behind the scientific formulas of the period. In the chapter devoted to the analysis of symmetry as the basis for the development of science Grygiel (16) refers to a brief part of Heisenberg's considerations on the ontological basis of the universe, using it as a motto opening the section. The fragment is worth quoting in its full length, as Heisenberg (133) explicitly states that it is symmetry that lies at the foundation of the world:

'In the beginning was symmetry' is certainly a better expression than Democritus' 'In the beginning there was the particle.' Elementary particles embody symmetries; they are their simplest representations, and yet they are merely their consequence. Accident came later on in the development of the universe, but it, too fits neatly into the original forms; it satisfies the statistical laws of quantum theory.

Although the meaning of symmetry is very broad in exact sciences, especially in physics, the semantic core of the notion is still preserved and constitutes a common denominator with its popular understanding. For Einstein symmetry is closely linked to invariance—the state of physical phenomena and quantities which “remain constant irrespective of the individualizing conditions of reference frames” (Bartlett 557), and covariance—“the form of invariance of the laws of nature under arbitrary smooth coordinate transformations” (Martin 33). Symmetry is used by Einstein as the primary rule underlying his field equations that represent the curvature of space in relation to the way both energy and matter are distributed in the four dimensional manifold (Martin 33). Nevertheless, as Zee (99) notices, even in physics symmetry is not only about a well-ordered, reliable geometrical or mathematical structure; it is also, or primarily about aesthetics and beauty. Hemingway's sense of beauty is in a similar way explicitly subjected to clarity and order. These are deeply rooted in the previously discussed minimalist quality of narration and the transparency of form, that altogether make the entire composition acquire both firmness and lightness. Within a solid and harmonious framework of a clear compositional pattern Hemingway encapsulates narrations simple, yet heavy in meanings. Their depth is to be discovered only by careful close reading as the sense unveils gradually beyond the surface of things.

Thoroughly planned, yet noncommittal structure of in our time with every vignette constituting a separate literary miniature as if extracted from a broader narrative landscape lacks any explicit plot linkage between individual chapters. Although the sketches are interrelated as regards the themes explored and the character types chosen for particular miniatures, every vignette acts as an

autonomous literary image. With the paratexts surrounding the main body of the text reduced to the bare minimum, the miniatures remain unbound by the constraints otherwise put on them by chapter titles. This, in turn, makes the vignettes function as standalone prose units, independent both from the collection's composing parts and from the literary work as a whole. The seemingly empty spaces, voids in either the compositional or narrative structure are places where the autonomy of text and the autonomy of the reader are born. Hemingway's experiment with pushing prose to its narrative limits, reducing it to a bare minimum, and forcing a minimalist text resort to the hidden visual dimension also presupposes a symmetry in the author-text-reader relationship.

The Echoes of Imagism: Towards the Poetics of (Timeless) Images

Ascribing the influence on Hemingway's in our time only to the external context of the rapidly developing science and the changed sensitivities regarding space and/ or time perception would result in obtaining a disproportioned image. To balance the analysis it is necessary to discuss a parallel source of impact on the author's early publication, rooted in the field of literature itself. A carefully arranged architectural design of form characterized by austere elegance and radical transparency leads to a substantial shift of the collection's structural axis from the ground of prose to that of poetry. The minimalist, athletic style of vignettes, the unadorned brevity of individual chapters, the neutral character of paratexts followed by free arrangement of the texts' order make in our time resemble a book of poetry. Of course, risking a statement that Hemingway's literary miniatures of in our time are closer to poetry than prose would be perhaps an exaggeration. The collection's remarkable arrangement should be rather viewed as an extravagant compositional approach resulting in the transplantation of the architectural framework characteristic for books of poetry to the collection of prose miniatures.

The vignettes composing in our time are not renouncing their prose character, although, in a broader context of Hemingway's engagement in poetry writing and the author's early inspirations with the inventiveness of Pound's style, the miniatures in focus may appear as an experimental form of prose poetry brought to its structural and stylistic limits. This would mean that Hemingway's writing style and technique, later on identified by the author as the theory of omission or the iceberg principle, have their roots not only in the factuality, conciseness and objectivity of journalism, but also draws inspiration from the new aesthetics explored by modernist poetry.

Within the stark linguistic and compositional structure of in our time an attentive reader will easily discern echoes of imagism. The condensation of message carried by words heavy in meaning, later compared by Ford Madox Ford (xvi) to "pebbles fetched fresh from a brook" which "live and shine, each in its place," allows Hemingway to compose extraordinarily vivid literary images, as if every vignette was a photograph exposing under harsh, high-contrast light sharp details of a scene captured in time.

In "Small Magazines" published in 1930 in *The English Journal* Pound describes Hemingway as a writer

to all extents and purposes accepting the principles of good writing that had been contained in the earliest imagist document, and applying the stricture against superfluous words to his prose, polishing, repolishing, and eliminating, as can be seen in the clean, hard paragraphs of the first brief *In Our Time*, in *They All Made Peace*, in *The Torrents of Spring*[.] (Pound 700)

The rough, unadorned style of Hemingway's prose was particularly close to Pound's perspective on the principles of poetry, which perhaps explains Ezra's lasting interest in Hemingway's work. "A most unlikely friendship" as defined by Cohassey (2014), results in a pronounced influence of Pound on young Hemingway who, inspired by the poet's avant-garde aesthetics transposes the essence of imagism on the ground of prose. Reducing the tissue of the text to the absolute minimum, carefully choosing words which would most accurately express complex meanings, Hemingway obtains literary images so clear and striking as the ones emerging from the precise phrasing and terseness of imagist poems.

By borrowing from avant-garde poetry its methodical approach towards both language use and the architecture of form, Hemingway quickly discovers the artistic potential stemming from the tension between the minimalist compositional structure and maximally condensed meaning, shifting the vignettes' center of gravity from the linguistic to the pictorial. In this view, the vignettes realize in the realm of prose what Pound considers to be fundamental premises for image creation in poetry. "An 'image,'" writes Pound (1913, 200) in his famous "A few don'ts by an imagiste," "is that which presents intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". According to Pound (1913, 200), only by an immediate encapsulation of the moment's substance is it possible to achieve in poetry "that sense of sudden liberation" which, apart from an obvious emancipation of the artist's imagination, brings a genuine "sense of freedom from time limits and space limits".

Pound's pursuit of achieving a timeless (poetic) image unbound to any spatial dimensions coincides with the exploration of the question of time and space in the field of science. Similar attempts to find a new form of artistic expression that would allow for liberating the image from the constraints imposed on it by space and time can be observed in the works of cubist painters. This analogy was discussed by Laporte, in his 1945 essay entitled "Cubism and the Theory of Relativity." Laporte (313) argues that "the old mode of paying attention to body or mass while taking the manner of observation for granted, was abandoned" both in science and in art. This, in turn, led to a significantly different perceptual approach towards the things observed. Multiperspectivity, or the distortion of the previously accepted view on reality is also irretrievably connected with an altered perception of time, especially the notion of simultaneity. "The consequence of this new approach" writes Laporte (313) "was, respectively, a seeming 'distortion' or dissolution of bodies in painting, and the famous convertibility of mass and energy in the Theory of Relativity." A significantly more comprehensive study on the similarities between the new physics and new art represented respectively by Einstein and Picasso has been conducted by Miller (2001). These observations allow concluding that art and literature could not remain indifferent to the changes in the perception of the world in the first two decades of the twentieth

century induced by science. And although the search for the new approach towards reality is realized differently in broadly understood art on the one hand and exact sciences on the other, the efforts in finding the most genuine perspective revolves essentially around the core developed between the notion of time and the possible dimensions of space.

Unhampered by Time, Unrestrained by the Dimensions of Space: Cubist Poliperspective on the Here and Now

In what sense, are therefore Hemingway's vignettes from in our time actually beyond time? What makes them overcome the limitations set by space? The very title of the collection suggests that Hemingway's literary miniatures function within a specified time frame; several vignettes feature real, historical figures, mentioned by name, such as Samuele Cardinelli, Alexander Kerensky, Manuel García López "Maera" or Nicanor Villalta. The minarets of Adrianople from chapter three allow to recognize the column of refugees as the Greeks fleeing Smyrna during the Greco-Turkish War. The unknown soldier's dramatic, solitary prayer in the trenches of Fossalta in chapter eight spans a bridge between the content of the vignette and Hemingway's own wartime experience from Italy. Chapter six in turn features the execution scene of six Greek ministers shot in Athens after the Great Fire of Smyrna on November 28, 1922.

Whose time is it then? Captured in motion, presented within a narrow context of the closest reality, the characters from in our time are paradoxically given too little time and too little space to develop fully. As if encapsulated within vignettted photographs, the anonymous figures find themselves in a sudden, sharp light of the here and now, unanchored in the past and not looking ahead to the future. The imperative currency of the moment nullifies any instances of time other than now; even if narration covers past events, the sharpness of memories and their unexpected, in most respects intrusive appearance in the immediate and the current completely deconstruct the present.

With the represented worlds, or rather, clippings of reality changing rapidly as if frame-by-frame, a line of flashing images composing a film chronicle, the protagonist disappears as quickly as they rise "on screen." The frantic procession of often nameless figures does not even speak in one, coherent voice. The diversity of narrative techniques adopted by Hemingway introduces a polyphony of perspectives which seems to ultimately render void any attempt to identify the speaking persona(s) behind the vague "we" and "our." In the previously referred to review of in our time Wilson (341) writes: "His bull-fight sketches have the dry sharpness and elegance of the bull-fight lithographs of Goya. And, like Goya, he is concerned first of all with making a fine picture." Of course, it would be difficult to argue with Wilson's observations, since, indeed, Chapters: 2, 12, 13, 14, 16 of in our time, with the intensity of emotion and the athletic compression of image appears as a perfect translation of Goya's romantic drawing into the language of (modern) literature. But it is perhaps Rosenfeld whose remarks on Hemingway's prose miniatures are even more pertinent; "Hemingway's short stories belong with

cubist painting” declares Rosenfeld (22). And indeed, without any overarching narration other than the faint anonymous voice collecting the miniatures under a little explaining, three word title borrowed from the outside, a shattered remnant of a complete, unbroken phrase, the entire collection resembles a cubist painting—a fractured, timeless landscape of incontrollable violence, inexplicable suffering, and all deconstructing loss.

The title of the collection borrowed from the Book of Common Prayer, is merely a phrase carved out of the Morning Prayer, “Give peace in our time, O Lord” (59). Devoid of its opening request and closing apostrophe, the original versicle becomes only a distorted after-image, a shred of a wishful plea that loses sight of the desired and the hypothetical, suddenly unveiling the bitter truth about the here and now. Of course, it can be argued that the common denominator of the characters’ experience allows to assume that the vignettes become a universalized voice of “La Génération au Feu”—the Lost Generation, whose rebellion against the pre-war values, artificial and no longer relevant in the post-war world, and their lack of consent for “a harsh, impersonal force in the universe” (Rosenfeld 23) become universal, unbound by (their) time. Nevertheless, due to its considerable autonomy from space and time, the collection can be perceived as functioning simultaneously in the highly particularized realities of the 1920s and a more universal temporality which constantly actualizes itself. The images of war from Chapter 4, 5, 7, and 8 resemble quickly reaching forward, and then almost looping images, where the actual meaning lies beyond the content comprised of the very present moment and the characters’ closest surroundings. With the rough, unadorned emotion inscribed deeply into the composition’s structure Hemingway goes beyond the spatio-temporal framework suggested by each of the miniature’s details. Such a cleft of the narrative time into two diverging lines distorts the notion of chronology and succession of events. Hemingway’s vignettes can be either bound to particular moments in history, while at the same time, due to the minimalism of literary images, the namelessness of the protagonists, and non-specificity of the locale, remaining essentially beyond any temporal frame of reference.

The peculiar suspension of a literary image in time, along with a direct approach towards the object of representation evokes Pound’s imagist principles exposed in “A retrospect” (1918). More than a decade later Hemingway develops his own formula for that “sudden liberation” from time and space, which for Pound could be obtained in poetry only through a skillful composition of timeless images:

In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another, you communicated the emotion aided by the element of timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to get it. (Hemingway 12)

The “sequence of motion and fact” on the ground of which rises “the emotion” becomes an equivalent to Pound’s understanding of an image as an

“intellectual and emotional complex” encapsulated within a specific unit of time. Combining the journalistic quality of fact representation with the atemporal element of emotion hidden beneath the surface of things Hemingway renders his first collection of vignettes universal and, accordingly, timeless despite their dependence on an explicitly defined time-frame.

With the seven eighths of the iceberg being below water, the vignettes from in our time, although heavy in meaning, gain transparency and lightness. This becomes possible not only due to the universal dimension added to the miniatures by the element of both timely and timeless emotion but also because of the understatements stemming from the economy of language and form. The unspoken gives rise to crevices, seemingly empty spaces in the texts' raw texture. These, in turn, along with rapidly developing themes rushing to achieve culmination point in reduced to minimum narrative lines which suddenly cease, reinforce the impression of the cubist fragmentation of the collection's both linguistic and compositional structure.

Paradoxically, it is the fissures and empty spaces emerging from the experimental reduction of content and the maximal possible condensation of meaning that constitute the points of support for the entire composition of in our time. Interestingly enough, the experimental character of the collection results in obtaining a firm, non-aging classical structure. Strong with the power of emotion that shines through understatements, the collection acquires features of a universal framework which will later serve as a peculiar “desiring machine” that interacts with imagination and experience producing new meanings for nearly four decades since its publication, while serving as a skeleton for Hemingway's subsequent collections of short stories.

Rooted deeply in Hemingway's experience, but highly responsive to the realities of the first half of the 1920s, the miniatures osmotically absorb the new sensitivities in time and space perception. The immersion in the vibrant cultural landscape of the era provides a breeding ground for the enrichment of the otherwise austere form of in our time with diversified sources of influence which range from imagist poetry, through the methods of picture processing applied in photography, to Einstein's groundbreaking findings in the field of physics that revolutionized the perception of space and time.

The minimalist form of particular literary images with sharp focus on the essence of the scene, and an uncompromising reduction of any unnecessary details leads to the deconstruction of the narrative time. Time can no longer act as a constraint put on narration. Since the boundary between the literary and the pictorial is blurred, the minimalist, sharply-focused images presented in Hemingway's vignettes remain essentially beyond time. Additionally, with the maximal reduction of the superfluous elements, it becomes almost impossible to ascribe the scenes depicted in Hemingway's literary miniatures to any real or imaginary space(-time). Liberated from the limitations of both the temporal and spatial dimensions of (the narrative) reality, the vignettes from in our time speak the silent murmur of Einstein's Relativity Theory at the level of literary form of particular vignettes and the structure of the entire collection. As a result, in our

time remains essentially timeless, serving the author as an inexhaustible source of inspiration, and an infinitely capacious literary structure able to embrace a number of narratives within its minimalist framework. With Hemingway's masterpiece short stories unfolding in the crevices between the eighteen vignettes later on in Hemingway's literary career, in our time preserves both its originality and universality, always actualizing itself within new configurations of literary images.

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