

On the quai

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" On the Quai at Smyrna" As a collection of stories that take the reader through the confusing and disorienting journey of America soldiers in World War I, the introduction, " On the Quai at Smyrna," is no exception.

Hemingway begins his introduction without any explanation of who is reminiscing and provides only details to create an image in the reader's mind. Hemmingway creates no context for which to frame the events, and by doing this, Hemmingway throws the reader into the story, not unlike the soldiers who were thrown into a war.

Throughout the introduction Hemmingway creates an image of suffering and despair, however the narrator is never introduced. Using this confusing and disturbing prose as an introduction, Hemmingway sets the reader up for the perplexing and horrible stories that the soldiers are telling throughout In Our Time. " On the Quai at Smyrna" describes a world where gruesome stories are so commonplace that a telling is received with less shock and awe and more indifference. Hemmingway sets up the story by explaining, " he said" (Hemmingway) as a frame.

There is no more background given; no other details are displayed to help the reader understand the situation. The reader has to work through what " he said" to find out the setting, the characters, and the entire situation. This use of framing is atypical and causes the reader pause when relating to the protagonist. By structuring the story this way, Hemmingway draws the readers' attention to the fact that it is not a first person account of the war, but of someone's retelling. The story is told by the officer, it seems, to someone who has had a similar experience with the war and would understand.

The story includes obscure references and specific things of which a reader might not have sense. The anonymous narrator is a British officer at Smyrna and is relaying his stories to possibly an old war friend saying, " You remember the harbor," (Hemmingway) leading the reader to believe these two have shared similar experiences. Hemmingway uses this confusion to show how the soldiers in the war might have felt confused about a number of issues. At this point, the narrator is telling the story so matter-of-factly that he might have destroyed all emotions linked to the horrifying events of the war.

Because this officer has seen such terrible things, such as a mother holding her dead babies, he has become immune to the emotions that the reader feels from these situations. This set up the rest of the stories of *In Our Time* with a tone of horror that becomes more developed throughout the rest of the novel. " On the Quai at Smyrna" starts with the narrator, an officer, talking about " them," screaming at midnight. Although " they" are never identified, the officer makes a point to explain that he does not know why " they" are screaming.

This is just the beginning of the numerous ways that the soldiers in World War I are confused about the happenings in the war. Not only is the reader disoriented, but the so is the narrator. The officer begins a conversation with Turkish officer on the pier. The narrator explains that a Turkish officer wants the narrator to discuss one of the narrator's sailors who had been insulting to the Turkish officer. Hemmingway does not use quotations to explain this conversation between the Turkish officer and the narrator however, a Hemmingway switches to dialogue as the narrator talks to his sailor.

The reader is told exactly what the sailor responds, as if what the Turkish officer's dialogue was less important. By switching the style of storytelling, Hemmingway ensures that the reader will more so identify the narrator of the story. The speaker is unable to find the words he needs to use to describe his environment. While telling the story, the narrator struggles with holding in his feelings about the situation and giving an accurate portrayal to his companion. There were plenty of nice things floating around in it. That was the only time in my life I got so I dreamed about things.

Hemmingway has the reader speak with a limited vocabulary in order to show his inability to find the appropriate words. The speaker doesn't describe what was floating in the harbor or about what he was dreaming. By creating the rhetoric of the speaker to be so barren, Hemmingway shows the emotional detachment the speaker had to the horrifying truths of war. The reader sees that the dreams had by the speaker were most likely nightmares of terrible things he had seen at the pier, and is using his lack of language to control his emotions.

The officer then tells about the women who are unwilling to give up their dead babies bodies. The way the narrator tells this story, in short choppy phrases and sentences, is parallel to his emotions. Hemmingway writes in this way so that although the reader knows and is even disturbed by these stories, the speaker is unattached. The narrator has seen so many traumas in the war that he is unable to display emotions that someone who is not privy to that world would display.

By creating this cognitive dissonance in the reader, Hemmingway emphasizes the harsh realities of a war-laden environment. The narrator

seems to talk as if he has seen too much, and what he has seen was not easy to swallow with the mindset he previously had before coming to war. After seeing all of these terrible situations, he has become overly withdrawn and unable to tell a story full of facts including the gory details. The denial of his emotions proves that he is powerless to discuss his feelings during this time.

As the English officer begins to speak about the strange death of an old woman, the reader sees no change of emotion within him. He interrupts himself while explaining, " We were clearing them off the pier, had to clean off the dead ones, and this old woman was lying on a sort of litter. " (Hemingway) The speaker is remembering himself as he tells the story, and nonchalantly adds that it was the dead bodies that he was cleaning. Explaining something that could already be assumed, the narrator is emphasizing what his job entailed.

Although he links no emotional memory to this responsibility, the fact that he adds that his chore was to remove the dead bodies, shows that he was uncomfortable with it. By reminding himself of the terrible things he was asked to do, the speaker shifts in his emotional restraint for just a quick second. There is no reasoning behind the facts. The speaker talks about the way things were, but never explain why the babies were not given away, or why the animals were crippled before going into the water. As the reader, it is impossible to assume why these things happened.

Hemingway puts the reader in the same mindset as the narrator, as if the narrator also has no knowledge of the motives of these people. The confusing atmosphere during wartime is mimicked in the speaker's retelling of the story. A terrible, horrible scene is created not by the speaker, or by

Hemingway, but by Hemmingway to allow the reader to think of the worst possible " things. " But putting the control of the surroundings into the mind of the reader, Hemmingway is able to propel the reader to reach the outskirts of his or her own fears.

The sarcastic irony the speaker uses, saying things like " nice things," " nice chaps," " a most pleasant business. " (Hemmingway) Shows that he is unable to come up with the words to display his feelings properly in the telling of his experiences. Whoever is listening to the story knows that the speaker was greatly affected by tragedies, but the speaker is not willing to admit it. By using irony, the narrator shields himself from having to relivememories that were already painful enough the first time.

The speaker knows that a large percentage of what he did was inhumane, and wrong, and by saying that it was " nice" or " pleasant" he creates a barrier for himself and his feelings of guilt. Because he had no power to control the happenings in the war, but does feel responsible for treating people without respect, he used ironic language to display those feelings, rather than look weak. Hemmingway creates a man that is devoid of his emotions, rather stereotypically, to tell the horrors of war in a factual way.

Works Cited Hemingway, Ernest. In Our Time. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1996. AZW.