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Who Commissioned The Little Review's "In Our Time?"

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The Hemingway Review

University of Idaho Department of English

Volume 23, Number 1, Fall 2003

pp. 106-110

[10.1353/hem.2004.0004](https://doi.org/10.1353/hem.2004.0004)

ARTICLE

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Abstract

xBiographers have always credited Jane Heap with commissioning Hemingway's contribution to The Little Review's "Exiles" issue (Spring 1923). But much evidence points to Ezra Pound, coeditor of the magazine and Hemingway's mentor in modernism at the time. This commission, eliciting the first glimmers of the "Hemingway style" in six experimental prose pieces, fed into Pound's commission of a short book for his "Inquest" series, which produced Hemingway's *In Our Time*. Together, the two commissions show how decisively Pound influenced Hemingway's style and identity as an avant-garde writer.

· NOTE ·

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WHEN IT APPEARED IN FALL 1923, the spring "Exiles" issue of *The Little Review* featured an impressive array of the Parisian avant-garde, including Gertrude Stein, George Antheil, Fernand Léger, E. E. Cummings, and Jean Cocteau. But leading off the issue was a virtual unknown, Ernest Hemingway, whose six unnumbered prose pieces were entitled "In Our Time." The pieces would gain Hemingway recognition from such influential critics and writers as Edmund Wilson and Scott Fitzgerald. But more important, they marked the first public appearance of prose experiments that he would extend into book form in *in our time*—paragraphs that already contained the seeds of a revolutionary style, of trademark subjects, themes, and stances. How had this barely-recognized writer scored such a coup with a prominent avant-garde magazine? Who commissioned these pieces and why?

In his pioneering biography of Hemingway, Carlos Baker states unequivocally: "Jane Heap, the mannish coeditor of *The Little Review* had invited him to contribute to the Exiles number, which would be out in April..." (*Life* 108) Baker's documentation, however, is ambiguous. For facts pertaining to the composition of *in our time*, he cites a letter Hemingway wrote to him (1 April 1951); but Baker's note does not specifically refer to *The Little Review's* commission (580).¹ He does not explain, moreover, how Heap, living in New York at the time, would have even heard of Hemingway, much less want to publish his prose.

THE HEMINGWAY REVIEW, VOL. 23, NO. 1, FALL 2003. Copyright © 2003 The Ernest Hemingway Foundation. Published by the University of Idaho Press, Moscow, Idaho.



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