10 CRITICS DISCUSS

"Big Two-Hearted River" (1925)

Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

"I'm trying to do the country like Cézanne and having a hell of a time and sometimes getting it a little bit. It is about 100 pages long and nothing happens and the country is swell…isn't writing a hard job though? It used to be easy before I met you…." [Letter to Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, 15 August 1924] "It is much better than anything I've done. What I've been doing is trying to do country so you don't remember the words after you read it but actually have the Country. It is hard because to do it you have to see the country all complete all the time you write and not just have a romantic feeling about it." [Letter to Edward J. O'Brien, 12 September 1924]

Ernest Hemingway
Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961
Carlos Baker, ed.
(Scribner's 1981)

"I went there [Musee du Luxembourg, Paris] nearly every day for the Cézannes and to see the Manets and the Monets and the other Impressionists that I had first come to know about in the Art Institute at Chicago. I was learning something from the painting of Cézanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough to make the stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put in them. I was learning very much from him but I was not articulate enough to explain it to anyone."

Ernest Hemingway
A Moveable Feast
(Bantam 1964) 13

"Here the plot, or foreground of the plot, is simply a fishing trip in the northern peninsula of Michigan. Nick Adams, who is Hemingway's earliest and most personal hero, gets off the train at an abandoned sawmill town; he crosses burned-over land, makes camp, eats his supper and goes to sleep; in the morning he looks for bait, finds grasshoppers under a log, hooks a big trout and loses it, catches two other trout, then sits on the bank in the shadow and eats his lunch very slowly while watching the stream; he decides to do no more fishing that day. There is nothing else in the story, apparently; nothing but a collection of sharp sensory details, so that you smell or hear or touch or see everything that exists near Big Two-Hearted River; and you even taste Nick Adams' supper of beans and spaghetti. 'All good books are alike,' Hemingway later said, 'in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you: the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was'."

Malcolm Cowley
Introduction
The Portable Hemingway (1944)

"Of all the critics who struggled with it for twenty-five years only Malcolm Cowley discussed it perceptively, and no one really understood it. Cowley saw that some of Hemingway's stories are 'nightmares at noonday.' 'Big Two-Hearted River' is apparently a collection of sharp sensory details, he says, but if it is read closely one realizes that actually it is a kind of 'waking dream.' There are shadows in the story that one does not see at first; the thing goes on several levels. The fishing is an escape 'from a nightmare or from realities that have become a nightmare'; it is for Nick a kind of rite, an incantation, 'a spell to banish evil spirits.'

Edmund Wilson, who is usually a perceptive critic too, and who wrote an introduction for an edition of *In Our Time,* refers to the Nick we see in this story as a 'boy.' This slip is only apparently trivial, for to fail

to see that the boy Nick is by now a man is to fail to see the development that has been taking place in his character, and how the stories are related to each other; it is to miss seeing what *kind* of man he is, and therefore, of course, what made him that way, and thus it is to read the whole piece wrong. In order to read it right one must place it firmly in the evolution of the hero Hemingway has been tracing, and see how it is the unhappy result of the quiet and sketchy but meaningful pattern the author has been building up. The story is crucial for all of Hemingway because here and for the first time we get a sustained look at the remarkable effects of what has happened to the boy who innocently accompanied his father into the Indian camp so many years before.

At the outset of the story we are told that Nick has returned to country that had been burned out a year ago, though he hadn't known about it. He is excited over the trip because 'it was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout.' Later he remembers that he and a friend of his, who is very wealthy and owns a yacht, were once going to cruise the northern shore of Lake Superior, but 'that was a long time ago…' Obviously, Nick is a grown man now, who has been away. He has been abroad, as we have seen, and in a war.

The opening page of the fishing trip establishes the atmosphere of shadows and tensions Cowley is conscious of. When Nick first sees the river he is going to work he sees trout 'keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins' and others 'in deep, fast moving water, slightly distorted,' and at the bottom of the pool he finally can make out the big ones. The whole trip is seen as these first fish are seen. Nick goes about his business exactly as if he were a trout keeping himself steady in the current, the whole affair is seen sharply but is slightly distorted, and there are now several deep pools in Nick's personality—where in the shadows lurk the 'big ones.' Nick is clearly in escape from something: as he walked along he 'felt happy. He felt that he had left everything behind…. It was all back of him.'

He walks to where he is going to camp, pausing to catch grasshoppers for bait along the way, and then he finds a level piece of ground an pitches his tent. Each step of the process—smoothing the ground, arranging the blankets, cutting the tent pegs and raising the canvas—is related in a regular and monotonous sequence unrelieved by even a phrase of comment or a break in the rhythm. The action goes along against a backdrop of something only dimly seen…the tense, exasperating effect of this rhythm on the reader is extraordinarily appropriate to the state of Nick's nerves, which is above all what Hemingway is trying to convey. A terrible panic is just barely under control, and the style—this is the 'Hemingway style' at its most extreme—is the perfect expression of the content of the story. Nick's mechanical movements—of cooking, casting, baiting his hook and the rest—are the mindless movements of, say…a badly shell-shocked veteran who, while he can control himself, is performing simple jobs over and over…

When the extreme excitement of a big strike from a trout intervenes the style changes abruptly. The pressure is off the man, he is nowhere but right there playing the fish, and then the sentences lengthen greatly and become appropriately graceful…. Nick fishes all day, and in the course of following him around we see that he is very frightened by the something that is lurking in the back of his mind and that he is escaping…. Nothing much ever really happens. We learn that there is a place where 'the river narrowed and went into a swamp,' and that he doesn't want to go downstream into it today…and the story ends with him returning to his camp encouraged but thinking that he has gone as far with himself as is best for one day—'there were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp.'

Clearly, 'Big Two-Hearted River' presents a picture of a sick man, and of a man who is in escape from whatever it is that made him sick. And Nick obviously knows what is the matter and what he must do about it and must not do. He must keep physically occupied, keep his hands busy; he must not think or he will be unable to sleep, he must not get too excited or he will get sick, and he must not go into the swamp, which unlike the tent, 'the good place,' is the bad place. It is as though he were on a doctor's prescription, and indeed he is on the strictest sort of emotional diet but is his own nutritionist.

By now the cause of this condition should be equally clear. Fragmentary as the outline is so far it can already be seen that the causes of the difficulties which 'Big Two-Hearted River' gives symptoms of are the experience, already partly related, of the man's past: the blows which he has suffered—physical, psychical, moral, spiritual and emotional—have damaged him. He has been complicated and wounded by

what he has seen, done and been through. This is the whole 'point' of an otherwise pointless story and with it Hemingway brought his book to a close. When one extracts from it as we have done the stories in which Nick appears one sees that actually Hemingway has plotted a story which covers perhaps as much as twenty years in the life of Nick Adams, first leading actor in a coherent drama to which he dedicated nearly four decades of his life."

Philip Young
Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration
(Penn State 1952, 1966) 43-48

"Both of Hemingway's friends [Dean Gauss and Scott Fitzgerald] had read it in the spring number of…*This Quarter*. Half in fun, half in seriousness, they now accused Hemingway of 'having written a story in which nothing happened,' with the result that it was 'lacking in human interest.' Hemingway… countered by insisting that we were just ordinary book reviewers and hadn't even taken the trouble to find out what he had been trying to do.' This anecdote is a typical instance of the unfortunately widespread assumption that Hemingway's hand can be read at a glance. Dean Gauss found that his own return to the story was profitable. There was much more there than had first met his eye. For here, as elsewhere in Hemingway, something is going on down under….Malcolm Cowley, one of the few genuinely sympathetic critics of Hemingway, has suggested that 'the whole fishing expedition…might be regarded as an incantation, a spell to banish evil spirits.' The story is full of rituals. There is, for example, the long hike across the country—a ritual of endurance… There is the ritual of homemaking… Next morning comes the ritual of bait-catching…

The whole of the fishing is conducted according to the ritualistic codes of fair play. When Nick catches a trout too small to keep, he carefully wets his hands before touching the fish so as not to disturb the mucous coating on the scales and thus destroy a fish he is trying to save. Down under, in short, the close reader finds a carefully determined order of virtue and simplicity which goes far towards explaining from below the oddly satisfying effect of the surface story.

Still, there is more to the symbolism of the story than a ritual of self-disciplined moral conduct. Two very carefully prepared atmospheric symbols begin and end the account. One is the burned ground near the town of Seney. The other is the swamp which lies farther down the Big Two-Hearted River than Nick yet wishes to go. Both are somehow sinister. One probably legitimate guess on the background of the first is that Nick, who is said to have been away for a long time, is in fact a returned war-veteran, going fishing both for fun and for therapeutic purposes. In some special way, the destroyed town of Seney and the scorched earth around it carry the hint of war—the area of destruction Nick must pass through in order to reach the high rolling pine plain where the exorcism is to take place. In much the same way, the swamp symbolizes an area of the sinister which Nick wishes to avoid, at least for the time being. The pine plain, the quiet grove where he naps, the security of the camp, the pleasures of the open river are, all together, Nick's 'clean, well-lighted place'."

Carlos Baker
Hemingway: The Writer as Artist
(Princeton 1952-73) 125-27

"Without faith in himself, in man, in woman, in civilization, or in God, he is, in one of Melville's phrases, 'an *Isolato* living on a separate continent of his own,' rootless and lost…. He desperately turns to Nature in order to find some purpose in life… He must bring order out of chaos and recreate a world in the image of human reason and love. It is in the framework of this conflict that Hemingway executes the form of the story (in the process, like T. S. Eliot, adapting the ancient myth of the Fisher King to his artistic designs). The action unfolds in the pattern of ritual: what is said and done has meaning only in terms of the way it is said and done. Nick, in effect, is the communicant in a primitive magico-religious ceremony of immemorial antecedents. Having throughout his life been terrified by the mystery of death, he now undertakes to penetrate into the heart of darkness, the primordial womb out of which life (and by extension, light and consciousness) first came….

The twofold division of the work integrates with this aspect of Hemingway's narrative strategy. The first part is a ritual of preparation, the second a ritual of initiation. Symbolically, Nick enacts the role of the

redeemer in the tradition of the Waste Land myths. The setting in which he finds himself after he gets off the train is sick, barren, and forsaken…. Hemingway does not offer any explanation for this cataclysm. But in the light of Nick's life this region is the blighted world whose spiritual heart has been emptied by unfaith and despair. Its renewal depends upon the hero, for he and the land are under the same curse. And since it is water, in the physical and symbolic sense, that will restore the lost fertility, the river is the controlling image of the thematic conflict. As it can revitalize the earth, so it can rehabilitate Nick. In the course of his ritual ordeal in the stream, he must discover the cause of his own impotence so as to release the healing waters.

In the next phase of the action Hemingway centers on the disposition of the protagonist to engage in the mission of salvation…. Like Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea,* he associates the act of fishing with some deep, inward fulfillment…. And on Nick's journey toward the upper reaches of the river, he carries a heavy pack—the burden of the guilt and shame of his culture. At least so Hemingway's repeated allusions to its weight and discomfort seem to imply…. The pack that he has shouldered on this journey is the cross of his remorse and penance…. Conventional symbols of plague and famine, these stigmatized insects [blackened grasshoppers] herald his conversion of their evil into good when he uses them for bait in his quest for 'the big fish'….

Even the prose style is in keeping with the aura of ritual. Precise, controlled, and prayerfully iterative, it signals Nick's release from self-doubt, his attainment of a new spiritual balance. Appropriately, Hemingway symbolizes this transformation in the image of Nick's ravenous appetite, for on the level of mythic truth it is divine sustenance that he craves…. This meal is sacramental in character…. He bases his conduct on a precedent in the holistic past, a previous interlude in this wilderness when he identified himself with a responsible role in life. In making the coffee in conformity with an exemplary model, he recovers the past. He transforms the remembered into the real, breaking through the barriers of time into the order of mythic timelessness from which all sacred ritual issues. So Part I ends. The hero is on the brink of communion with the daemonic-divine forces that can regenerate the Waste Land….

Nick's line is suddenly jerked taut by a huge trout which, unaccountably, escapes…. And now Hemingway plainly denotes the transcendent quality of this fleeting contact in Nick's intuition that he has achieved communion with the spirit of the river…. Even while he is disconcerted by the loss of the colossal fish, he impulsively deifies what he has lost… 'He felt like a rock, too, before he stated off. By God, he was a big one. By God, he was the biggest one I ever heard of'… Here the repetition of 'rock' and 'By God' suggests an immediate association with Christ's pronouncement to Peter: 'Upon this rock I will build my church.' And since Christ was the God revealed in the water (baptism) and in the heavenly fish of the Eucharist…it seems to follow that Nick is under obligation to build his faith on a similar foundation of spiritual security, a belief in the immanence of divine power….

Now Hemingway works out the pattern of initiation in harmony with the protagonist's recovery of his confidence. Nick nets a small fish under very difficult circumstances in the midst of entangling weeds and rushes; but he nevertheless exhibits a perfect mastery over his will. In sum, he is ready for the decisive test. Hence, a moment later he hooks a much larger trout and skillfully nets it. In contrast with his previous failure, he is pictured in the symbolic position of rapt communion with the river…. 'He sat smoking and watching the river.' Now there is no tension, no doubt, no depression—only the serene knowledge that he has come to terms with the spirit of the river. In effect, Hemingway has brought the ritual of healing full turn. The hero is ready to undertake the daring plunge into the swamp, into the heart of darkness in which the light of faith can never be extinguished….

In the resolution of the action Nick consciously admits the inevitability of defeat, frustration, and death. But at the same time he senses that this knowledge of mortal destiny is in itself the basis of human dignity…. He has learned the truth which the lost generation scorned: only deprivation and suffering can teach man to love man. In the cycle of exile and return which controls the adventures of Nick Adams, Hemingway lays the foundation for the parable of *The Old Man and the Sea.* In the novel he simply treats explicitly the implicit theme of 'Big Two-Hearted River,' in the process, however indirectly, affirming the continuity of his moral outlook on the world.

Ultimately, then, he writes in a framework of values as traditional as Eliot's in *Four Quartets* or Faulkner's in *The Fable,* yet without their tiring religious nostalgia…. He recognizes that the chaos and violence of external human behavior are expressions of primitive desires which man, throughout time, has used ritual to order and to understand. In his enunciation of the need for a ceremonial adjustment to the dislocations of experience, he attests the sacredness of the cosmic religious consciousness that produced both the Fisher King and Christ."

William Bysshe Stein
"Ritual in Hemingway's 'Big Two-Hearted River'"
The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (1953) 95
reprinted in *American Literature: A Critical Survey* 2
eds. Thomas Daniel Young and Ronald Edward Fine
(American Book Company 1968) 341-47

"In 'Big Two-Hearted River,' Nick's experience while fishing near the swamp evokes terror. What Hemingway describes, however, is not an emotion—*terror* is never mentioned—but its objective correlatives as Nick and the reader see them: 'In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure.' Objective, external, the description relies for its impact upon the controlled release of Nick's response to pure visual stimuli. Not until the rather mysterious word *tragic* does emotion implode upon Nick's and the reader's consciousness. Why fishing in the swamp might be tragic, Nick does not explain. Hemingway says only, 'Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further today.' As Daniel Fuchs observes in another context, the 'docility of the language intensifies the panic.' Terror and panic are the life stuff Hemingway writes about here and nearly everywhere in his fiction. Since his apprentice and exemplary heroes alike must learn not to confess inward strife, Hemingway needed a style compatible with the 'code.' Reticence is the hallmark of that style, but a reticence so artful it nearly shouts through silence a testimony of inward torment."

Arthur Waldhorn
A Reader's Guide to Ernest Hemingway
(Farrar, Straus/Noonday 1972) 33-34

"If the first story of *In Our Time,* 'Indian Camp,' begins Nick Adams's alienation from the myth of redemptive nature, the last story, 'Big Two-Hearted River,' brings him back to the scenes of his childhood in Michigan fruitlessly to repeat rituals which are intended to bring him into harmony with nature. And so adult Nick Adams, repatriated, sets off on a solitary fishing trip in the scenes of his childhood. When he descends from the train, however, he notices that the town was gone, the landscape black and barren. 'The country was burned all over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned.'

Desperately, Nick Adams wants to believe that 'It could not all be burned,' that he can still re-create the innocence of his childhood. Momentarily, he would escape the terror of history by pretending that he was a child…capable of 'total possibility.' He searches through the ashes of the countryside until he reaches the river, and there he makes his camp…. Concentrating on the techniques of fishing he can escape from the world…. For Hemingway, as for Mark Twain, the river was the last refuge for the dream of innocence in the valley of democracy…. For Hemingway, the only way to preserve human dignity in the swamp of existence was to refuse to participate in the futile attempts of man to impose values and order on the indifferent universe."

David W. Noble
The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden:
The Central Myth in the American Novel since 1830
(Grosset & Dunlap 1971) 149-51

"Most of the critical disagreements over 'Big Two-Hearted River' may be traced back to Malcolm Cowley. He and Kenneth Lynn have argued for years over whether Nick is a veteran with a traumatic wound, as Hemingway proclaimed from the grave in *A Moveable Feast,* of a boy as badly wounded by family skirmishes. Lynn maintains that there is no overt reference to the war in the story, overlooking the

story's military imagery to discover other, as covert, allusions to Hemingway's restive homelife. [Lynn is an unreliable critic, obtuse and dishonest.]

But Cowley's more telling remark was that many of Hemingway's stories seemed like 'nightmares at noonday,' and since then critics have divided on two major issues: first whether the terrain of the story is primarily inward or outward, passive and imagined or active and perceived; and second, whether the narrative is more a trying nightmare than a fulfilling dream…. As a rule, those critics more concerned with Nick's character, his 'inward terrain,' stress the concluding vision of the swamp and find Nick's mental journey a fearful denial and a failure, while those more interested in the story's narrative and the scenes of the day's fishing find Nick's decision not to fish the swamp a reasonable one and the trip to the river ending with some version of an achievement. This latter reading in part distinguishes the commentary on the story after 1975 from that before."

Paul Smith
"A Partial Review: Critical Essays on the Short Stories, 1976-1989"
New Critical Approaches to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway
ed. Jackson J. Benson
(Duke 1990) 383

"Again, the confrontation with nada is critical here, but the appearance of *nada* is more artfully veiled than in other tales….*nada* is most overtly suggested by the forbidding swamp…. Aside from the old waiter's prayer [in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"], this is Hemingway's most detailed characterization of *nada* [See also the end of Chapter III, *A Farewell to Arms*]: it too is dark; its depth is ungauged but considerable; and, with its swiftly moving current and bare banks, it is most assuredly inhospitable to man…. Like the trout's in the potentially destructive current, this discipline could hold Nick steady in the dangerous eddies of life and so enable him eventually to enter the swamp."

Steven K. Hoffman
"*Nada* and the Clean, Well-Lighted Place: The Unity of Hemingway's Short Fiction"
New Critical Approaches (1990) 185-86

"*In Our Time* culminates in "Big Two-Hearted River,' a stunning tour de force that concludes the longer narratives and weaves together the collection's major themes, as well as posing new questions about its coherence and overall vision. The story, as critics have long argued, suggests the slow, silent recuperation of the human mind from the psychic trauma of (probably) World War I. Nick's refusal to think, his steadfast determination not to hurry, his attention to the minutiae of his camp and its natural setting—all of this bespeaks a mind fragile with shock as it attempts to construct new grounds for a sane existence.

Battered survivor of what Eliot called the 'immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history,' Nick Adams in 'Big Two-Hearted River' seems poised to restore human existence to a natural order. Unlike the disoriented fishers and guide of 'Out of Season,' Nick is both professionally seasoned and 'in season.' He holds out for the perfect moment to eat his hot food and captures grasshoppers for bait before the sun would make them impossibly lively; he will fish the swamp in time and in timely fashion. And unlike the displaced expatriates of *In Our Time* Nick knows exactly where he is: He 'did not need to get his map out' for he 'kept his direction by the sun' and 'knew where he was from the position of the river.'

Oriented in and by the natural world, Nick's journey toward the 'good place' of the camp possesses a spiritual dimension absent from the wanderings of characters like the revolutionist or Mr. and Mrs. Elliot. Carrying a heavy pack like Christian in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and moving toward a river-baptism, Nick Adams becomes an 'Everyman' figure whose function is to redeem whatever is still authentic about that ancient prayer, 'give us peace in our time, O Lord.' The story thus promises a new beginning and a return to origins: back to the eternal verities of nature; back to Michigan; back to a camp; and even, in a sense, back to a new Indian camp, for the Native-American overtones of the title 'Big Two-Hearted River' suggests a close relationship to the land now unsullied by cultural transgressions and exploitations.

Rarely in American literature has landscape been evoked with such scrupulous detail as in 'Big wo-Hearted River,' and rarely has landscape evoked human emotions so precisely or forcefully. The story opens in a 'burned-over country' where the ruined town of Seney mutely indicates earlier and greater devastations, like Hortons Bay or the 'rubble' of the town where Nick receives his war wound. The scorched land represents a psychic scarring that causes Nick now to 'choke' his mind whenever it starts to work and to displace his mental energy into pure, almost mechanical observation and action.

Yet Seney's destruction also testifies to all-powerful forces of nature that elsewhere promise renewal. Though 'the country was burned over and changed,' Nick knows that 'it did not matter,' for the country 'could not all be burned.' The river is untouched, and the trout who 'changed their positions by quick angles, only to hold steady in the fast water again' still exemplify a grace under pressure that Nick desires to emulate. Even in the scorched land, Nick discovers blackened grasshoppers now adapted to a hostile environment, living proof that natural processes of transformation lead to a country—and mind—that is 'alive again.' Nick's spiritual ancestors are not only Native Americans but American Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, for whom nature is a living sacrament of an all-pervading Spirit. On the Big Two-Hearted River, the heart of nature responds to the heart of human beings.

If the river is one locus of harmony and regeneration, Nick's camp is the other. After stories of aimless wandering and psychic displacement, the camp possesses the emotional aura of a true homecoming. Inside the tent, for instance, 'there was something mysterious and homelike… He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it.' In its repetitive, staccato rhythm, the passage captures Nick's exhaustion yet also a near-triumphant sense of finality…. For Nick, who sleeps 'curled up' in the womblike tent, then emerges through the tent-flaps to 'look at the morning,' the camp signifies a psychic and spiritual rebirth—a self-delivery that recalls and transforms the bloody cesarean of 'Indian Camp.'

Even in this Arcadian 'good place,' however, there are ominous signs that Nick's rebirth is more potential than accomplished. Hooking the first big trout makes a mockery of Nick's fantasies of control…. The battle with the big fish graphically portrays a world of unendurable pressures and sudden breaks that change faster than Nick can adjust. It suggests the limitation of Nick's measured processes of psychic reintegration while demonstrating why they are emotionally appropriate…. 'Big Two-Hearted River' uncovers a profound and beautiful emotional resonance in the natural environment even as it discloses the depths of the psychic and existential terrors Nick can barely face."

Thomas Strychacz
"In Our Time, Out of Season"
The Cambridge Companion to Ernest Hemingway
(Cambridge U 1996) 81-83

"On the story's surface nothing much happens, but, as with nearly all of Hemingway's best fiction, what is not stated is more important than what is (see theory of omission). In 'Big Two-Hearted River' the reader 'feels' gradually the tension Nick is under from the detailed descriptions presented by the narrator in the story, the reader becoming aware that Nick is on the camping trip in order not to think about whatever it is that has traumatized him. The concentration on the details of camping and fishing is presented through Nick's thinking but in the third person. Whatever caused the trauma is not stated, but it is the psychic wound that matters, not the reason for it, and the fact that Nick is working hard to forget it so he can get his life back together. The 'swamp,' across and down river, is a constant symbol of Nick's dread, but he is beginning to conquer it….The reader feels at the end of the story that Nick will overcome his psychological wounding, because, although he has avoided the 'tragic adventure,' the narrator states in the last sentence: 'There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp'."

Charles M. Oliver
Ernest Hemingway A to Z
(Facts on File/Checkmark 1999) 25-26

Michael Hollister (2015)