

Excerpt from **Ernest Hemingway's** short story "**Big Two-Hearted River: Part I**" in the collection titled *In Our Time*, originally published 1925:

It was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout. They were very satisfactory. As the shadow of the kingfisher moved up the stream, a big trout shot upstream in a long angle, only his shadow marking the angle, then lost his shadow as he came through the surface of the water, caught the sun, and then, as he went back into the stream under the surface, his shadow seemed to float down the stream with the current, unresisting, to his post under the bridge where he tightened facing up into the current.

Nick's heart tightened as the trout moved. He felt all the old feeling.

Annotation by Olivia Dubiel

This excerpt from Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River: Part I" illustrates the power of seeing oneself in nature. Historian and ecocritical scholar William Cronon examines this theme in his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In this piece, Cronon advocates for loving and preserving nature, not because it gives us resources or aesthetic beauty, but because it is our responsibility as humans. Cronon says, "As we gaze into the mirror [that nature] holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires." Hemingway's story is about the character Nick Adams, who has just returned from being a soldier in World War I. The reader views Nick's experience dealing with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) while camping and fishing by himself in the woods he used to frequent before the war. Hemingway connects Nick to the trout in several important ways, one of which is Hemingway's use of shadow imagery in the piece. The trout seems attached to his shadow at first, but then leaves the shadow behind under the water as his, "shadow seemed to float down the stream with the current, unresisting, to his post under the bridge where he tightened facing up into the current" (134). The trout ridding himself of his shadow can be compared to Nick living with the shadow of his PTSD and the trout letting go of his shadow gives Nick hope for the future. Hemingway utilizes the symbolic imagery of moving upstream and downstream, suggesting that Nick's journey back into civilization will not be an easy, downstream journey. Nick is going to have to swim against the current, like the trout, in order to achieve any progress in his mental state. This passage ends with a sentence that Hemingway decided to physically separate from the rest of the passage: "He felt all the old feeling" (Hemingway, 134). In this case the "old feeling" may be a sense of connection with the world that Nick lost while fighting in World War I. Hemingway and Cronon both suggest how often our connections with nature are more reflective of our own personal emotional states than we might realize.