

Ready-Made Boys: A Collision of Food and Gender in Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River"

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INTRODUCTION: FOOD CULTURE vs BOY CULTURE ON ICE

The rise of the food industry and the widespread "boy culture" of the early twentieth century collide in Ernest Hemingway's 1925 short story "Big Two-Hearted River," signaling the end of the myth of masculinity, even when manhood was most strongly needed during the world war. The turn of the century witnessed a dramatic change in American food culture due to the new innovative food industry. With the resultant lightening of household duties, women became more socially available and involved, threatening the preeminence of men. As a way to reassert their manhood, men turned to cooking. Through camping and outdoor cooking, boys could prove their manhood, preferably without depending on preserved and/or processed foods, thereby approximating the "ideal man."

"Big Two-Hearted River," a prime example of Hemingway's "iceberg principle" in practice, is also a prime exemplifier of both boy culture and food culture of the period. It has received a multitude of interpretations. These include studies of its role as the final story in his collection of

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interconnected short stories, *In Our Time*; the maturing of protagonist, Nick Adams; and studies from biographical perspectives. As a result, the story has become one of Hemingway's most acclaimed pieces. Despite this attention, the culinary aspects in this story have received surprisingly little notice. "Nick was hungry. He didn't believe he had ever been hungrier" (139). This phrase suggests that Nick's appetite is central to the story, evoking themes of attachment to life and the possibility of rebirth. These themes seemingly feed into Nick's ostensible reason for traveling to the Big Two-Hearted River—to trout fish. Nick does indeed catch and clean trout, but within the story, Nick does not eat the fish. Instead, Hemingway focuses on the other foods in Nick's camping endeavor. Nick begins by opening and cooking cans of spaghetti and pork and beans. He makes coffee according to the technique of his lost friend, Hopkins. Then he makes buckwheat pancakes and, finally, onion sandwiches.

Belonging to the genre of "fact fiction," this short story is a unique text that negotiates the border between the imagined and the actual, and one may notice that it is no creative coincidence that the central axis for the boy and food cultures was in Chicago, a neighboring metropolis of Oak Park, Hemingway's hometown. "Big Two-Hearted River" runs through rising and declining cultural ideals of the early twentieth century and creates Hemingway's fictional world that illustrates food as a metaphor for a boy negotiating a path toward ideal manhood.

I. A CRITICAL HISTORY: NONFOOD-BASED FLAVORS

"Big Two-Hearted River" has provided various flavors of interpretations: genetic, textual, psychoanalytical, new critical, narratological, and genre based. In addition to Hemingway's own comments and letters, various sources have been used to identify actual locations, characters, and incidents. The fact that Ernest Hemingway left for a trip to the town of Seney in September 1919 led to the first biographical approach. Twenty years old at the time, Hemingway was accompanied by two of his friends.¹ In "Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway converts this real-life fishing trip of three into a solo trip by Nick Adams. Paul Smith's study of this short story's genesis and critical history in 1977 is now thought to be the classic gloss of the text:

The story originated in a fishing trip in the late summer of 1919 with Al Walker and Jock Pentecost to the Fox River in the upper Peninsula, enthusiastically described in a letter to Howell Jenkins. Sheridan Baker was the first to identify the river, the town of Seney, and the terrain the three must have walked to have fished, as Hemingway reported, the two branches of the Fox some fifteen miles south of Pictured Rocks on Lake Superior. (87)

In the story, Nick Adams arrives at Seney by train, only to find a “burned-over country” where “even the surface had been burned off the ground” (133). However, the real-world town of Seney was not burned.² In May 1924, Hemingway began writing “Big Two-Hearted River.” It was initially conceived as a single piece. In his letter to Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas dated August 15, 1924, Hemingway states jubilantly that he has written about one hundred pages in which “nothing happens” in the story.³ After this letter he trimmed the story, probably due to Stein’s suggestions, with the version published in *This Quarter* in May 1925 numbering only twenty-nine pages. Moreover, nine of the pages cut from the initial manuscript were later included in another short story, “On Writing.” The single piece published in *This Quarter* was republished in October 1925 as the concluding story of *In Our Time*, divided into two separate chapters (Smith 85–86). This edition of *In Our Time* sold only 1,335 copies, but when it was republished by Scribners after the huge success of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *In Our Time* received enormous acclaim because it was thought to be the genesis of Hemingway’s unique style.

Trimmed down to its essence, “Big Two-Hearted River” exemplified Hemingway’s theory of omission. He later established this idea as the “iceberg principle,” in which in his writing only a small portion appears on the surface, with enormous meaning hidden beneath.⁴ The response to this story at the time of its publication was at two extremes. F. Scott Fitzgerald assessed the piece negatively in 1926 as James Nagel reports:

A year later, after reading the story in the magazine *This Quarter*, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Christian Gauss accused Hemingway—“half in fun, half in seriousness”—of “‘having written a story in which nothing happened,’ with the result that it was ‘lacking in human interest.’ (147)

On the other hand, Allen Tate, who later became the leader of the New Criticism movement at Vanderbilt University, provided a more positive review in the same year:

Most typical of Mr. Hemingway's precise economical method is the story "Big Two-Hearted River," where the time is one evening to the next afternoon and the single character, a trout fisherman who makes his camp-fire, sleeps all night, gets up and catches a few trout, then starts home; that is all . . . the most completely realized naturalistic fiction of the age." (160-62)

In the 1930s, as a sort of combination of the iceberg principle and symbolist criticism, the New Critics begin interpreting elements such as the "hearts," "river," "grasshopper," "trout," and "swamp" in the context of a story where "nothing happens."

The first interpretation to appear emphasized the story's position as the closing piece in *In Our Time*. As is shown in the opening story "On the Quai at Smyrna," the central theme of *In Our Time* is chaos—the question of how to survive in the chaotic world at the turn of the twentieth century. The river becomes a symbol of this era in its entirety, and the swamp Nick discovers represents chaos. As the final story in a book depicting the chaos of the early twentieth century, "Big Two-Hearted River" is a story that implies both the continuance of chaos and the enduring struggle to overcome it, hence the ambiguous ending: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (156). In this ending, which has both positive and negative connotations, the continuance of chaos is embodied.

Previously considered flavorless, "Big Two-Hearted River" was interpreted as a dramatic story by such prominent critics as Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, and Philip Young. The message of the story was seen as revolving around Nick Adams's recuperative trip on his return from war:

Malcolm Cowley, drawing upon Edmund Wilson's insight in a 1940 essay, offered the first major interpretation of Hemingway's fishing story as a post-war parable of trauma. Cowley was followed by Philip Young, who applied his idea that deep-seated memories of a "wound" lay at the heart of Hemingway's truest fiction.⁵

Although readers at that time paid little attention to Wilson, Cowley, and Young, it should be noted that in 1953, Hemingway himself affirmed their direction of interpretation, as he mentions in a letter to the editor, Charles Poore, in 1953:

I can't tell you when Big Two Hearted River was written exactly but it was before The Sun Rises when we still lived at Rue Notre Dame des Champs over the saw mill. I used to write it there and . . . I suppose you know it; but it is a story about a boy who has come back from the war. The war was never mentioned though as far as I can remember. This may be one of the things that helps it. (798)

Although one can never be sure of the underlying intent of a writer's statement, Hemingway does confirm the connection between Nick and the war. In Philip Young's *The Nick Adams Stories*, "Big Two-Hearted River" has obvious connections to the war and appears in the chapter "Soldier Home." Nick is injured in the war and attempts to survive in the chasm between life and death. On one side of his torn heart there is fear, on the other, hope. On one side there is life, and death on the other. In this way, an extremely dramatic interpretation of "Big Two-Hearted River" is born, as a tale of emotional recovery.

In "Big Two-Hearted River: Part I," details such as Nick's recovery of his sharp vision, depicted through his gradual perception of the trout in the water; and his recovery of his vigor, through sweating, hunger, and lack of sleep, implies that Nick is in the process of recovery or rebirth. The final scene of "Part I," where Nick is wrapped in a blanket, resembles the image of a baby in his mother's womb. As if to emphasize this point, "Part II" begins with Nick leaving the tent (womb) and crawling into the hot, damp grass—a clear allusion to childbirth. The recovering Nick heads steadily toward life. But the newly born Nick, like a newborn baby, does not yet possess the strength to survive alone. This is why he decides not to venture into the dangerous swamp. The story ends with Nick heading toward recovery, gaining more and more strength, the process itself depicted as being slow and devoid of turbulence.

Furthermore, the fact that Nick is repeatedly injured during battle in Hemingway's other stories opens the path for biographical interpretations. There are those who argue that this story is a symbolic representation of the author's own injury in Italy in 1918. There are critics who interpret Nick's encounter with the burnt grasshopper as Hemingway's projection of his own injury in the war.

Recently, however, there have been new attempts to assess the piece from the viewpoint of genre criticism. George Monteiro, for example, argues that this story belongs to the genre of "fishing guides." According

to Monteiro, *The Compleat Angler* (1653) by Izaak Walton is the “first manuscript of ‘Big Two-Hearted River’” (154).⁶ Replicating *The Compleat Angler*, Monteiro continues, “‘Big Two-Hearted River’ offers ‘instruction all the way from securing bait and baiting a hook to eviscerating the catch’” (156). Monteiro also introduces John Cooper’s genetic reading, arguing that “‘Big Two-Hearted River’ has its roots in Virgil’s *Georgics*:

A quarter of a century ago Cooper suggested in passing that “‘Big Two-Hearted River’ be considered within the tradition of the piscatorial georgic. Obviously familiar with the Wilson-Cowley-Young theory of the war-wound, Cooper wrote “‘In Hemingway’s ‘Big Two-Hearted River,’ a major georgic theme is presented against a background of war and disillusion.”⁷

If this is true, although Monteiro does not say this, there should be a transcendentalist genealogy to locate Hawthorne and Emerson in between Hemingway and Virgil.⁸

Hemingway has been assessed from numerous points of view, and “‘Big Two-Hearted River’” has been utilized by the critics to prove various critical theories. Therefore, one may think that not much is left to analyze in this story.

II. BOY CULTURE: PRESERVED, THEN PROCESSED

More is left in “‘Big Two-Hearted River.’” It is a story of a boy. The protagonist may be twenty years old, but he has not established himself as an independent, courageous man: “‘There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp’” (156). The unpreparedness of young men had been a national concern since the late Victorian era (Kidd 66–67). A militarized version of boy culture was beginning to take form:

In the late nineteenth century, a wide variety of organizations began to work with boys. The churches started organizations like the Knights of King Arthur, while outdoor groups like the Sons of Daniel Boone and the Woodcraft Indians proliferated, and YMCA plunged energetically into activities for boys. The ultimate organization, of course, was the Boy Scouts of America, which was founded somewhat later in 1910. These organizations meant to introduce coddled boys to the wilderness, to competition, to hardy play and strenuous virtue. In these boys’ groups as at boarding schools, men were intervening to provide “‘boyish’” experiences so that boys would not lose touch with the sources of manhood. (Rotundo 258)

The YMCA was established in London in 1844, ostensibly to support young men suffering from the stresses of urban life, regardless of their religious beliefs. In 1851 the YMCA was founded in America.

In 1885, from the belief that camping was an excellent way to relieve the exhaustion of urban life, the YMCA began introducing camping as an important method of training. Then in 1910, William Boyce, a Chicago publisher, established the Boy Scouts of America:

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was founded as an organized youth movement to revitalize American manhood. Based on a philosophy of "Muscular Christianity," the group created a practical program of activities meant to develop the young man's physical, mental, and moral fitness. At the beginning of the twentieth century, devastating economic cycles, immigration, and urbanization generated anxiety among white middle-class men about the future of American manhood. Just as the military hero Lord Robert S. S. Baden-Powell created the Boy Scouts in England in 1908 to toughen young British men in physical fitness and moral character, so the men who founded the BSA worried that an increasingly urban, industrial civilization was distancing men from positive effects of the more primitive wilderness. (Carroll 68)

At the dawn of the boy culture movement, Chicago, a metropolis nine miles from Oak Park, Illinois, Hemingway's birthplace and hometown for his first eighteen years, became a major "hub" of this movement. Edgar Robinson, who was an office worker at the Chicago YMCA, left the YMCA to become the first director of the Boy Scouts of America.

The Hemingway family did have connections with such movements, especially with the YMCA. Anson Hemingway, Hemingway's paternal grandfather, became heavily involved in the Chicago YMCA. Referring to Anson Hemingway's tenure as secretary of the Chicago YMCA (1878-88), Nagel mentions:

During its formative years the Chicago YMCA was deeply influenced by Anson's friend and spiritual mentor, evangelist Dwight E. Moody. In later years, as more Chicago businessmen became involved in the governance of the program, a crisis of mission beset the "Y." Anson favoured the old mission that had seen the first purpose to be the salvation of young men, not their socialization. As the Chicago "Y" became more and more a social center and less and less a revival tent, Anson left it for a real estate career in Oak Park. His three sons, it should be noted, cut their religious teeth during his Moody/YMCA days . . . ; a third, Clarence, Ernest Hemingway's father,

became an Oak Park doctor who ran his practice like the missionary he sometimes thought he should have become. Like his brother, George, Clarence was a member of the Third Congregational Church, at least from 1903 to 1919. (46)

Furthermore, Ernest's father "formed a local Agassiz Club as a YMCA activity" (Buske n. pag.), and Ernest "joined the local branch of the Agassiz Club, a nature-study group organized by his father" (Baker 13). Linda Wagner-Martin describes a group photograph including the young Hemingway: "The Oak Park Agassiz Club. Under the leadership of his father, Dr. Clarence Hemingway, Oak Park boys could participate in one of the many Agassiz clubs. Named for the pioneering naturalist Louis Agassiz, the club introduced young boys to the scientific study of the natural world. The young Ernest is second from the left" (197). Hemingway was influenced indirectly, if not directly, by the cultural environment of his hometown, which included the YMCA and the Boy Scouts.

For boys, outdoor activity became essential to proving their manhood. The twenty-sixth U.S. president, Theodore Roosevelt, was the vice chairman of the Boy Scouts of America. Baden-Powell introduces Roosevelt in his *Scouting for Boys* (1908) by saying that "Mr. Roosevelt, the President of the USA (1901–09) also is one who believe in outdoor life" (173), and so as the vice chairman, coupled with his nineteenth-century belief that healthy minds reside in healthy bodies, the emphasis on outdoor activity was born. Baden-Powell quotes President Roosevelt's message in this guidebook:

I believe in outdoor games, and I do not mind in the least that they are rough games, or that those who take part in them are occasionally injured, I have no sympathy with the overwrought sentiment which would keep a young man in cotton wool. The out-of-doors man must always prove the better in life's contest. When you play, play hard; and when you work, work hard. But do not let your play and your sport interfere with your study. (174)

Camping became a national sport for boys, supported by the YMCA and the Boy Scouts. Children who were not members of these associations also camped. As David I. Macleod wrote in *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870–1920*:

Early enthusiasts touted camping as a cure for the enervation, nervousness, and fears of effeminacy which distressed the late nineteenth-century urban middle class. Along these lines, William H. H. “Adirondack” Murray, a Boston clergyman, popularized camp life as a cure for exhaustion. . . . Similarly, John Muir prescribed life in the wilds as the perfect balm for nervous strain brought on by city life. Promotional literature for camps applied this argument to city boys whose robust growth seemed problematic—the prosperous because of schoolroom pressures and parental pampering, the poor because of deprivation. (234)

As evidenced by Hemingway and his character, Nick, boys liked camping. The number of boys who participated in camps in 1900 was 3,459. In 1915 this number jumped to 16,690. The rise in participants shows the increasing popularity of camping. A survey conducted in Cleveland, Ohio, at that time found that 25 percent of Cleveland children had camping experience, and 45 percent had hiking experience, while only 3 percent of all children surveyed were members of the Boy Scouts (Macleod 235–36). It is clear that the boyish culture of camping and hiking, which began in the nineteenth century, was taking root. In 1924, at the time “Big Two-Hearted River” was being written, 713 private camps were operating in New England. There were 535 camp companies involved in these camps. Therefore, while a modern reading of “Big Two-Hearted River” may lead one to regard Nick’s camping as an isolated activity, in actuality, camping was an essential part of the boy culture of the time.

The actual activities the YMCA and Boy Scouts promoted were often far from play. In fact, these organizations offered rather serious survival-oriented programs. Examples include procedures to take if you encounter a harmful animal, how to deal with snakebites, how to pitch a tent, hunting skills, and, of course, how to cook outdoors. According to *Scouting for Boys*, “Every scout must, of course, know how to cook his own meat and vegetables and make bread for himself without regular cooking utensils” (164). Cooking had to start from raw materials.⁹ Uncompromising, as well as detailed, cooking instructions were regarded as a way to mold boys into the image portrayed in the romantic masculine myth. With procedures more ceremonial than practical, the recreation of camping became the re-creation of American boyhood.

The realities of the boy culture, however, were not as romantic as those in the conduct books. According to Macleod, those who went on camping trips were children who could not adapt to life in the wilderness. Macleod details the miseries experienced by some campers:

B. F. Skinner, who was a Boy Scout in the mid-1910s and generally liked camps, wrote home from one that went wrong: “We aren’t having a very good time after all. All day today the wind has blown very hard and one of the tents fell in. . . . My stomach is all out of order and yesterday I vomited twice and last night we had a circus. I woke up in the night and heard Raphael Miller vomiting outside the tent. That started Bob Perrine’s. . . . Then I started again. . . . They haven’t given us a full meal since we’ve been here. Today, they had half boiled potatoes, weak coffee and bread. . . . If I had a good excuse I’d come home but I don’t want them to think I’m homesick. . . .” No wonder BSA manuals harped on sanitation. (242)

Early campers were unaccustomed to biting insects, rough food, and being away from home:

In the end, most camps hired a cook. Caution sometimes verged on alarmism; for example, Dr. Fisher warned not to let boys swim twice a day because loss of heat was loss of life. In that context Boy Scouts were viewed as vulnerable adolescents rather than hardy savages. On the other hand, some Scoutmasters did demand too much. “A foot-weary, muscle-tired, and temper-ried, hungry group of boys surely not desirable,” warned the YMCA’s H. W. Gibson in the 1911 *Boy Scout Handbook*. (241)

Although “by 1920, as council camps multiplied, almost 45 percent of all Boy Scouts, 167,677 boys, spent a week in camping” (242), it was questionable whether all this outdoor activity was strengthening boys. Initial camp organizers adhered to the orthodoxy of the instructions, but, in the end, hired cooks were taken along to the camps: children were far from what the YMCA and BSA envisioned as “boys.” They saw camping as an extension of play as they enjoyed the campfire and having their meals cooked for them. In the end, as Macleod states, “Boy Scouts were viewed as vulnerable adolescents rather than hardy savages” (241). The urban boys, who were overly protected and preserved at home, were then processed for an ideal manhood, only to fail.

III. FOOD CULTURE: PRESERVED AND PROCESSED

“Big Two-Hearted River” showcases the rising food industry through the extensive variety of foods appearing in the story. “Part I” mentions seven types of food and three in “Part II.” None of this food, however,

can be called fresh. There is no fresh meat and no fresh vegetable except an onion. Incredibly, all other food items are either preserved or processed. There are the processed and canned pork and beans, spaghetti, apricots, and condensed milk. The buckwheat pancakes and bread, made from milled flour, can also be categorized as processed food. Even the coffee, having been roasted and ground, is in a way a processed food.

From the 1830s on, the U.S. flour-milling industry began to expand. With the prairies of the Midwest opening to grain production and milling, Chicago became the center of this expansion. Food companies such as Washburn-Crosby (the forerunner of General Mills) and Pillsbury were born. By 1900 most of the flour-milling companies and their associates were, in addition to milling, further processing the flour, even to the point of making biscuits. The processing and distribution of these foods became new fields of business. As a result, the food-processing industry grew to constitute 20 percent of the country's economy. By 1920 General Foods and Standard Brands established norms for the industry, becoming the center of the food industry (Gabaccia 56). Later, they expanded into the grocery store, supermarket, wholesale, and distribution businesses.

In Hemingway's story, products such as buckwheat flour and bread in the form of simple onion sandwiches are introduced. Bread is one of the most common processed foods found throughout Western history, being made out of grain that is ground, kneaded, baked, and packaged. In Nick's time, due to the flour-milling industry, bread was a processed food much more easily available through purchase than by baking it oneself. Nick ignores this convenience and follows the traditional instructions as suggested in *Scouting for Boys*, as if his resistance indicates ambivalence about the new technology.

Buckwheat was a common crop in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Northeast. Nick cooks his pancakes from the flour as instructed in *Scouting for Boys* and the *Boy Scout Handbook*. In the first edition of the *Boy Scout Handbook*, published in 1911, this recipe for griddle-cakes is suggested for hiking and camping trips:

Beat one egg, table spoonful of sugar, one cup diluted condensed milk or new milk. Mix enough self-raising flour to make a thick cream batter. Grease the griddle with rind or slices of bacon for each batch of cakes. Be sure to have the griddle hot. (149-50)

As if paying respect to New England, where much of “American” history started, though without an egg, Nick cooks the buckwheat pancakes in a ceremonial fashion:

Rapidly he mixed some buckwheat flour with water and stirred it smooth, one cup of flour, one cup of water. . . . On the smoking skillet he poured smoothly the buckwheat batter. It spread like lava, the grease spitting sharply. Around the edges the buckwheat cake began to firm, then brown, then crisp. The surface was bubbling slowly to porousness. Nick pushed under the browned under surface with a fresh pine chip. He shook the skillet sideways and the cake was loose on the surface. I won't try and flop it, he thought. He slid the chip of clean wood all the way under the cake, and flopped it over onto its surface. It sputtered in the pan. (146)

Then he spreads apple butter on his flapjacks, eating two, folding and storing the third for later. Coffee is also made according to detailed instructions, so detailed it again appears ceremonial. Jeffrey Meyers finds meaning in this: “In this story Hemingway uses characteristically short words and simple sentences as well as effective repetition. He shows how the shell shocked Nick Adams, his appetite intensified by the smell of the food, tries to hold himself together, and prevent another crack-up, through the rituals of cooking and fishing in the healing wilderness” (428). Making pancakes as if he were following the instructions in the *Boy Scout Handbook* and coffee according to his lost friend Hopkins is a nostalgic as well as memorial process that suggests an initiation story.

Unfortunately, the rising food industry appears to overwhelm the individual's effort to be a man. The canning industry also took off at the end of the nineteenth century. Canning itself developed from 1799 to 1818 during the Napoleonic Wars as nonperishable food for the military. This preserving technique spread with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Pork and beans stewed with tomatoes is a nineteenth-century development, and canned pork and beans was the first convenience food, sold by Frank Van de Camp to the U.S. Army during the American Civil War (*Wikipedia*, “Pork and Beans”).¹⁰ According to *foodreference.com*, “Commercially canned pork and beans were first sold in the 1880s, but did not become very popular until H. J. Heinz came out with their version in 1895,” which pushed the canning industry forward.

In the story, there are also a can of apricots and a can of condensed milk. At the same time, the Franco-American Company (since acquired

by the Campbell Soup Company and phased out), through their innovations in canning technology, produced canned spaghetti, meat, beans, and vegetables. This technology appealed to the immature, naive Nick. As the narrator says, “Nick liked to open cans” (141).

Spaghetti was another popular dish made from processed food. At the end of the 1800s it was offered in restaurants as *Spaghetti Italienne*. Ketchup was also a new processed condiment that was advertised as a “Blessed relief for Mother and the other women in the household.” (*Wikipedia*, “Ketchup”)¹¹ The birth of the dish had its genesis in the change in food culture sparked by the increasing number of Italian immigrants. From 1880 to 1921, Italians made up the largest group of immigrants to the United States. As a result, Italian food became hugely popular. At the end of the century, spaghetti became an essential part of the menu in every American restaurant. With the huge impact that Italian food had at the time, this Italian processed food is not just a minor detail of the story; it represents the societal trends of the time.

It is entirely possible that the food in “Big Two-Hearted River” has symbolic meanings related to life and nutrition, but when viewed in the context of the American food industry in the early twentieth century, the influence of new immigrants, new culture, and new industries becomes apparent. As Sherri Inness mentions in her *Kitchen Culture in America*, “How we eat, what we eat, and who prepares and serves our meals are all issues that shape society” (5).

Before the actual camping story begins, on arriving at St. Ignace Station, Nick has already had “a cup of coffee and a ham sandwich in the station restaurant” (140). It was at that moment that Nick starts his tour of the contemporary food culture. In the burned-down old town of Seney, what Nick ate was the traditional American preserved/processed food and drink—ham, bread, and coffee—indicating that real, raw, and fresh food had been extinguished by the twentieth century and Nick was only able to consume the unreal. The new technology of food culture was contributing to the creation of a clumsy yet accessible manhood, much like the boy culture.

CONCLUSION: READY-MADE BOYS

“Big Two-Hearted River” depicts the relationship between the rise of the modern food culture and the weakening of boy culture. As Glenn Sheldon asserts, “The reception of food is continually influenced by

greater social trends, marketing strategies, and overarching economic factors” (564). Nick, in “his khaki shirt” resembling that of a boy scout, goes camping in order to fish, but cooks processed food instead of fish. His cooking is not in the style introduced in scouting guidebooks promoting the traditional good-old American culinary fashion. Rather, it is supported by the novel food culture created by immigrants who arrived in the early twentieth century. Hence, although Nick seems to be enacting the boy myth, in reality he is one of the many boys in America who are weak and lack proper coping strategies; they are the “new boys” in contrast to the “new women” of that age. The failure to negotiate the classic boy in the age of modern food culture represents the twentieth century paradox of the inability of men to justify their masculinity through war.

Though little attention has been given to the food references in “Big Two-Hearted River,” Hemingway himself was known as a man who loved to eat and drink. Boreth Craig published *The Hemingway Cookbook* in 1998, calling the author “a tremendous eater and drinker” (xiii). In *Dining with Hemingway*, William P. Moore introduces nearly fifty dishes described in Hemingway’s stories. In academia, Kelley Dupuis’s “Papa’s ‘Good Eats’ Cafe” and Redd Griffin’s “Hemingway on Food” are only a few of the studies of Hemingway as a food writer. None of them, however, contain references to “Big Two-Hearted River.”

Through his iceberg principle, Hemingway depicts this cultural representation in a vague, laconic fashion, sublimating Nick into the embodiment of the aesthetics of the defeated. Hemingway therefore succeeded in his attempt at literary negotiation, clearly marking him as a modernist who witnessed a collision of the rising food industry and the wide-spreading boy culture in the early twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, the wilderness had gone out of cooking and boy culture, and one can sniff, beyond the beauty of “Big Two-Hearted River,” the preserved and/or processed foods that provided boys like Nick Adams with a fragile, ready-made manhood.

NOTES

¹ Hemingway wrote to Howell Jenkins on September 15, 1919, “Jock and Al Walker and I just got back from Seney. The Fox was priceless” (Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 28).

² Jobst introduces the actual town visited by Hemingway: “Forest fires were also common, especially after the pine ran out in the 1890s. Occasionally one reached Seney

itself. Chronicles differ on how often this occurred, but most agree that it was unusual, perhaps happening only once, around the turn of the century. In the story 'Big Two-Hearted River,' Hemingway's narrator, Nick Adams, tells of a fire that destroyed the town, but this never happened. By 1919 the countless acres of pine were gone and the town had shrunk to only a few buildings. Only one building was burned, although not because of a forest fire" (2).

³ Hemingway writes in the letter, "I have finished two long short stories, one of them not much good and finished the longer one I worked on before I went to Spain ["Big Two-Hearted River"] where I'm trying to do the country like Cezanne 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, I made it all up, so I see it all and part of it comes out the way it ought to, it is swell about the fish, but isn't writing a hard job though?" (Hemingway, *Selected Letters*, 122).

⁴ Mellow mentions, "It was a story in which Hemingway deliberately set out to test his mettle as a writer and one in which he proved a critical theory that the best stories were those in which what the writer omitted was as important as what the writer put in. He was determined to show that in Hemingway country, there would be no need for a message. Hemingway's own explication of "Big Two-Hearted River" in the essay "The Art of the Short Story" remains the best: "So the war, all mention of the war, anything about the war, is omitted. The river was the Fox River, by Seney, Michigan, not the Big Two-Hearted. The change of the name was made purposely, not from ignorance nor carelessness but because Big Two-Hearted River is poetry" (102).

⁵ Nagel introduces the arguments of Malcolm Cowley, R. W. B. Lewis, Kenneth Lynn, Sanford Pinsker, and Edmund Wilson (147).

⁶ Monteiro states, "Izaak Walton, writing in the seventeenth century, fishes in the same 'regular trout river,' whatever name it bears in his narrative. *The Compleat Angler* is seldom featured in Hemingway studies. Yet, Walton's popular book, which by 1983 had achieved nearly four hundred editions, reprints, and translations, is an important source for the two-part story with which Hemingway chose to conclude *In Our Time*" (148).

⁷ Nagel 150. See also Cooper 75-76.

⁸ Smith has pointed out the literary influences on the text, including Kipling, Spender Byron, Henry James, Jack London, Joseph Conrad, Thoreau, Frost, Twain, Descartes, Bunyan, Houseman, Crane, Joyce, and both the Old and New Testaments (88).

⁹ Baden-Powell instructs thusly: "To make a bread, the usual way is for a scout to take off his coat, spread it on the ground, with the inside uppermost (so that any mess he makes in it will not show outwardly when he wears his coat afterwards); then he makes a pile of flour on the coat and scoops out the centre until it forms a cup for water which he then pours in hot; he then mixes the dough with a pinch or two of salt, and of baking-powder or of Eno's Fruit Salt, and kneads and mixes it well together until it forms a lump of well-mixed dough. Then with a little fresh flour sprinkled over the hands to prevent the dough sticking to them, he pats it and makes it into the shape of a large bun or several buns. Then he puts it on a gridiron over hot ashes, or sweeps part of the fire to one side, and on the hot ground left there he puts his dough, and piles hot ashes round it and lets it bake itself" (167).

¹⁰ Also see *Conagra Foods*. 10 April 2009 <<http://www.conagrafoods.com/index2.jsp>>.

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