The study of oikos, is an ecocritical strand that examines literature from the oikic angle. This approach outlines the oikos which houses the harmonious relationship of the human and the nonhuman. This chapter reviews the definition of Oikopoetics and attempts an Oikopoetic reading of Hemingway’s stories *The Big Two-Hearted River Part-I* and *The Big Two-Hearted River Part-II*. Along with the analysis an attempt is made to identify the iceberg theory in the above mentioned stories.

While deep ecology studies the humans and the nature Oikopoetics differs from deep ecology by adding a third dimension, the spirit. One of the definitions of ecology is the study of oikos, oikology. The Greek term “oikos,” which means “household” is a blend of the human, nature and the spirit. According to Nirmal Selvamony, “it is something that integrates specific space and time, nature-cultural elements and human action” (314).

The “oikos” in a work of literature that revolves around the chief character or the protagonist. And there is no one single oikos in a work. Various oikoses can be drawn around the protagonist like concentric circles. If for instance, the chief character is a man, then the first oikos that would merit consideration could be that of the hero himself, his dwelling in nature. The next oikos could be the particular community where he lives. If the protagonist is considered a representative of his family, then he is a unit of that oikos which includes the land, and their ancestors. It is to be noted that the second oikos includes the first so they are connected to one another.

According to Selvamony, an oikopoetic analyses involves three chief tasks. “The first task is to identify the oikos; the second, to establish relationships between the oikoses; and the third, to compare the oikos(es) of the text under study with the oikos(es) of other comparable texts” (12). Ecological place is not just a material
object, but is a house or oikos. The oikos is a place which integrates all its members in a definite relationship. In this story Nick’s emotional bond to the place reveals his oikos. His association with trout and grasshoppers indicate his relationship with the other oikoses. Finally, a comparison of this oikoses with the oikoses of Thoreau’s *Walden* helps to analyze the story in a broader aspect.

The two stories written by Hemingway, the two parts of *Big Two-Hearted River* merit a close analysis from an oikopoetic perspective – such a reading of these stories reveals the interrelatedness among the human, the natural and the spiritual. They testify to the vital and regenerative powers of nature. Nick, the protagonist, a war-returnee enters into the wilderness of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The story is divided into two parts narrating Nick’s joy and comfort in a burnt country. Nature plays a predominant role through the two parts of the stories.

Hemingway employs the iceberg theory to narrate the story. On the surface layer the writer presents the environment ruined by the war. Nothing about Nick is revealed, it is left for the reader to interpret and understand with the help of images that are visible on the tip of the iceberg. The emotions and feelings of Nick are buried beneath the surface layer, of the narrative.

**Big Two-Hearted River Part-I**

Nick Adams, back from the war, explores the wilderness of big Two Hearted River situated in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, to restore the health of his nerves. Nick, a shell-shock war-returnee from the World War I, travels into the forests of northern Michigan to find a release from civilization’s agonizing bondage. A close reading of the story reveals that something bothers Nick. But Hemingway hardly mentions the mental conflict of Nick. The narrative goes like this:
Nick looked at the burned-over stretch of hillside, where he had expected to find the scattered houses of the town and then walked down the railroad track to the bridge over the river. The river was there. It swirled against the log piles of the bridge. Nick looked down into the clear, brown water, coloured from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins (165).

The story exhibits the iceberg theory employed by Hemingway. To begin with the writer has not given any reason for Nick’s trauma and his thoughts are not revealed throughout the story. Thus the visible part of the iceberg shows the burnt landscape and the invisible part complements the emotions and feelings of the protagonist. The submerged tensions, a feeling of ill-being and oppressive shadows, are experienced by him.

The story begins with a train dropping off Nick Adams near the wilderness of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The train is a recurrent motif in the stories as a sign of industrialization, domestication and territorial conquest. It stands for the triumph of history over nature and represents a cultural wound. Nick surveys the burnt-over hillside and the river where the trout keep themselves steady in the current with wavering fins. The first oikos is established between Nick and the land. His desire to make a home is symbolically represented by the camp. He connects to the other oikos through the wasteland inhabited by the charred, blackened grasshoppers. Nick is the sole character and is all alone in nature and seems poised to relocate his broken self in nature. He copes with the transition from the war to the real world outside through an excursion in the woods.
The story follows a simple pastoral line, the hero withdrawing from some threatening scene on the horizon into the green world. Here the beauty and order of the setting permeate the young man’s spirit and help to restore his inner equilibrium. The river must be “two-hearted”, both healing and tragic. Towards the end Nick cleans the two big trout he has caught and walks back to his camp.

The entire story portrays the ruined landscape and its devastated condition. Although the writer has not mentioned the cause of the ruin, it is obvious that the destruction is manmade and is a result of the war. It shows how nature takes shape, in the landscape and the surroundings. It enhances a poetic of the homely in a precise and deliberate working out of meaning. Even under such an ecological disaster Nick is able to overcome the trauma because nature has a regenerative force. Nature is silent when the destruction takes place. Soon after the destruction nature recreates the environment in a natural process. So nature has the power of generating life. This, from an oikopoetic point of view, gives an additional value to the story. Oikos in Greek had been the basis of a holistic society in which the humans, nature and the sacred were close knit. Although the town is burnt, it is interesting to study Nick’s association with the landscape. He tries to recollect the glory of the town and in fact he associates with the other oikos in nature.

Hemingway has vividly illustrated in detail the amount of ruin man has inflicted on nature. The town has disappeared leaving the countryside burnt out completely. The story suggests the slow, silent recuperation of the human mind from the psychic trauma of the World War I. The story uses poetic images designed to convey various states of feelings. It pictures the whole society being routed by the flames.
Part I moves through a series of sensory impressions that suggest a mind searching for peace. The story is an exploration or a “journey into self.” It is also an objective description of Nick’s activities in the Michigan woods for two days. Access to the river is gained by trekking across the burnt-over district past the ruins of a town that in its heyday boasted thirteen saloons. Black, sooty grasshoppers populate the burnt-over area. The story presents Nick’s removal from humanity and his effort at spiritual healing through harmony suggesting nature on a positive note. To suggest the need for spiritual reawakening, Hemingway opens the two-part story with images and tones that recall the damaged landscape and horrors of the war in the chapters. The opening lines of the story run thus:

The train went on up the track out of sight, around one of the hills of burnt timber. Nick sat down on the bundle of canvas and bedding the baggage man had pitched out of the door of the baggage car. There was no town, nothing but the rails and the burned-over country. The thirteen saloons that had lined the one street of Seney had not left a trace. … Nick looked down into the clear, brown water, colored from the pebbly bottom, and watched the trout keeping themselves steady in the current with wavering fins (165).

The images of destruction by fire suggest a kind of hell. The fire with its residual cinders, perhaps a persistence of matter, might be viewed positively rather than negatively, hinting at purification and renewal or at least bringing along the hope of and belief in a possible rebirth rather than destruction to nothingness.
Just as the old deserted mill town in *The End of Something* acts as a correlative for feelings of loss, so the wasted town and burnt out countryside in this story evoke feelings of devastation. A sense of terror is observed in the beginning which is both real and ambiguous. Although Nick is burdened by the pack, yet he is happy owing to his affinity to the place. As Nick hikes through the countryside, the emotional burden he bears is heavy, as suggested by the pack he carries which is “much too heavy,” yet, “he felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write other needs. It was all back of him” (134). This sense of emotional relief is conveyed by the image of the river. Nick’s looking down into the water and studying the trout suggests a moment of self-reflection:

Nick looked down into the pool from the bridge. It was a hot day. A kingfisher flew up the stream. It was a long time since Nick had looked into a stream and seen trout………..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 (134).

The river is much more than a symbol. It manifests the perenniality of nature. “The river was there” expresses that the river is an image of permanence. It symbolizes spiritual renewal of the protagonist. The extent of the damage done to the landscape is suggested by the repetition of the words “burnt,” “burned,” “burnt-over” occurring eleven times in the first three pages of the story. The image of the kingfisher flying up the stream, its shadow startling the trout, parallels the feelings of fear, in particular the shock of sudden death. He walks along the road that goes back into the country. “He walked along the road feeling the ache from the pull of the heavy pack.”
All the way his muscles ache and the day is hot, but Nick feels happy. When Nick reaches the spot near the river where he wants to camp, trout jump high out of the water to catch insects, and they feed “steadily all down the stream.” These are images of a fertile and rich country, images that serve as a correlative for a mind in the process of healing. The sensory impressions used to describe Nick setting up camp enforce a feeling of a mind searching for peace. Similarly, Nick smooths the sandy soil because he does not want any lumps, he feels the earth and smells his hand after he rips up the sweet fern by the roots.

The oikos is a place which integrates all its members in a definite relationship. The word “member” implies organic relationship, like a limb of the body. According to Selvamony, “The humans, the nature-cultural phenomena and the spirit beings of a particular house are all integrated into a familiar relationship, even as a limb of the body” (153). This kind of union is established by Nick in the story. Nick’s association with the land is the first oikos. His association with many oikos: the grasshopper, the river is visible in the later part of the story. He intrudes into Michigan and establishes a trinity of human, nature and spirit. During summers Hemingway had spent much time in Michigan which is the reason why most of his stories are located in Michigan. So it is obvious that Nick establishes oikoses with the place Michigan too.

We are told that the town is gone. This description is a parallel for Nick himself: he has already been burned away, already passed through many corrosive and destructive events as related in many other stories. The town of Seney is a symbol for these past experiences and their deteriorating effect on Nick. Although the town and the hills around Seney are burnt away what is left for Nick is the river. His association with the river is another oikoses. The river stands as a symbol of life. He is happy to see the river and establishes a link with it.
Standing on the bridge, Nick spends a long time observing the spurs of the trout in the current through the mist of gravel and sand. It is to be noted that while the land is burnt, the river is unaffected symbolizing life, so we could see trout and fish. Nick tries to derive pleasure in the non-human world. The non-human world comprises the fish, grasshoppers, river, and hilly landscape. The entire story revolves round Nick’s presence in nature. The story emphasizes the fact that Nick rejuvenates his spirit in nature.

After surveying the burnt landscape Nick goes back to the railway track to pick up his heavy pack and walks uphill. Nick experiences joy as he walks although his body aches due to the heaviness of the pack: “Seney was burned, the country was burned over and changed, but it did not matter. It could not all be burned. He knew that. He hiked along the road, sweating in the sun, climbing to cross the range of hills that separated the railway from the pine plains” (167). Moreover, he observes the grasshoppers that turn black. Nick realizes that the fire would have turned them black. He wonders how long they would remain like that. Normally grasshoppers appear in yellow, black, red colors, but these grasshoppers have turned black because of the burnt-over land. These grasshoppers are not similes for Nick’s inner state, like the land, but for Nick himself. They have endured the destruction of the fire and must now live with its consequences. He holds the grasshopper by the wings and speaks loud for the first time “Go on, hopper,” Nick walks all the way to reach the river. He observes the tall branches that provide shade leaving minimum space for the sun light to peep in. Under such a shade Nick halts and feels good. The narration goes on as:
Nick slipped off his pack and lay down in the shade. He lay on his back and looked up into the pine trees. His neck and back and the small of his back rested as he stretched. The earth felt good against his back. He looked up at the sky, through the branches and then shut his eyes……..He shut his eyes again and went to sleep‖ (169).

Thus Nick exhibits ecological concern in the sense that each organism is interconnected with one another.

Like Nick, the insects too have survived the entropic change of their environment, but are now transformed completely, having become blackened by the ash and soot. Nick realizes that the town and the surrounding hills, like parts of him, have been lost forever. But there are still untouched parts of the land, and of him. The fire has not taken all the trees, while the river flows through the land both green and barren and black town, and is still full of trout. Here, it is important to understand the “connections” and “interconnections” that can be recognized among humans, organism and place.

Later he walks down the hill side and sees the river that flows fast and smooth. The water in the river is still active and alive. Watching the movement of the fish in the water Nick feels “happy.” We learn later in the story, away from Seney and deeper into the woods that surround the town, that Nick has fished at this place before, and that the river seems to hold a constancy and peacefulness for him. Thus the river acts as a symbol of life and joy for the protagonist.
Irrespective of the appearance of the town in black color, the flow of the river motivates Nick. However, Nick realizes at this point why the hills and the river can still make him feel happy despite the fact that they have been changed through their outward destruction. Like the river that cannot burn, Nick decides that since not all of the hills have been washed over by the fire, the entropic change is actually minor, affecting only the outer layer leaving the core of the land and himself unchanged. Seney is gone and the hills about the town are lifeless and destroyed, but he is leaving these places behind him, granted with great effort under the weight of his baggage.

He walks in the hot sun and becomes tired. He slips off his pack and lies down in the shade. “The earth felt good against his back.” He looks at the sky and relaxes under the shade. From his vantage point at the top of a hill, he surveys the country around him and sees the point in the land where the fire stops its carnage off in the distance, giving way to a plain filled with pine trees. These pine trees, like the river, represent the “unchanged”. Even before Nick reaches the thick overhead branches of the wood that he had spied from the hilltop, Hemingway presents the land to reflect the beginnings of Nick’s acceptance of both the physical and emotional entropy. “Then it was sweet fern, growing ankle high.” Not only are things growing here, but they are sweet things.

Nick walks alongside the river looking for a proper place to make camp first and later to cook his food. He made his camp in between the pine trees. Nick’s journey all the way in the burnt town had left his muscles tired. The narrator describes the ritual of cooking, hunting, and camping. Nick experiences comfort after the long hard trip, indicating his longing for peace and harmony. He sits down against the charred stump and glances over the country. From the position of the river he knows where he
is, indicating his complete knowledge of the place. As *oikos* studies a real community located in a definite place, here we observe how Nick experiences the comfort of the earth. He is pleasantly situated within the boundaries of a good place where he feels free to let his mind loose. Nick is potent here in the land of his father; he has complete control of his life in the good place. Thus he overcomes his traumatic war experiences and tries to lead a normal life.

Nick’s emotions and feelings are not explicitly expressed by the writer. However, certain rituals like cooking, camping and fishing exhibit Nick’s efforts to overcome the trauma. Beneath the surface of the iceberg the feelings of Nick are hidden. The hidden part comprises his fear, pain and suffering. The physical activities of Nick preparing fire and cooking indirectly indicate his efforts for new life. He also prepares coffee. The writer elaborates on these rituals. At last Nick crawls into the tent to sleep. Irrespective of the devastated land Nick searches for a place to camp and relax. The story shows Nick’s binding factor towards nature and place. The influence of the place is so strong that Nick’s state of mind is steady and unhampered.

Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. He had not been unhappy all day. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it. Now he was hungry (139).

Nick is happy in the camp and is more secure. He has put aside the past and is now focusing on the present moment. The language used in the description of Nick preparing his meal reveals that Nick is satisfied with the simple aspects of here and now. The sensations of cooking and eating, the sight, sound, feel, and smell of beans and spaghetti, express Nick’s familiarity with this experience and his attempt to
heighten each sensation. As such he is able to associate with many oikos around him. Thus various oikoses are drawn around Nick like concentric circles. The first oikos is Nick’s dwelling in nature. The first oikos becomes a unit of the second and are interconnected to a member of oikos as there can be no definite limit to the number of oikoses that can be drawn. The land itself can be considered an oikos and human a unit.

Nick’s journey to renew his self is positive. Nick’s act of preparing coffee symbolizes new life. The last two pages are about cooking and making coffee which, according to Hopkins, is filled with a sense of loss and the idea that a state of innocence is irretrievable. Nick learns that the coffee, according to Hopkins, is bitter or rather that the conditions of life and the possibilities for the soul’s peace are difficult and often unrewarding. However the story ends on a quiet note, with a return to an emphasis on the senses, fear quiten: “The swamp was perfectly quiet,” and when a mosquito hums close to Nick’s ear, he puts a match to it and listens to it, “a satisfactory hiss in the flame.”

Most of the extensive criticism on this story agrees that Nick is in a state of shell shock. His solitary fishing trip among the hills and pine plains of rural Michigan seems a form of escapism—a pastoral retreat from reality. In this story, the anti-pastoralism of the long-abandoned town of Seney and its surrounding burnt-out landscape in the first part of the story, serves as an example of “civilization” and its attendant horrors, in stark contrast with the bucolic riverside meadow where Nick finally makes camp. Curiously, however, it is the swamp, an element of truly wild nature adjoining the river, that precipitates the eventual emergence of the “machine in the garden” or the reminder of the world and its realities that Nick tries, and fails, to escape.
Human activity is not the only force disruptive of the peaceful green world and non-human wilderness may be just as threatening to pastoral security as the military-industrial-political “machine.” As Ecocritic Gary Snyder argues, wilderness is not just “other” but also inheres in the human sphere of existence, in the body, perhaps most of all in the uncharted depths of the mind. It may be that Nick, presumably suffering from real psychological distress, identifies himself with the swamp even as he fears it and consequently, distorts it symbolically. The depths of the human (sub) conscious are wild, and at the same time the human is the “machine.”

Nick stays all alone in his camp and experiences a union with nature. Thus he finds a way to control his world and his life. He seems to find strength in connecting with the natural world and accepting his human limitations. The whole story is crowded with physical activity. First, Nick walks from the station across the burnt country and then along the river: he pitches the tent, cooks food and eats. Nature serves as an emotional symbol throughout the story. Therefore, the journey undertaken by Nick can be termed as a spiritual journey. The nexus between the human, nature and spirit is explicitly observed in the story.

*Big Two-Hearted River Part-II* is an extension of the Part I. The story begins literally when Nick wakes up from sleep. Part II also progresses through a series of sensory images that culminate in a single perception. Nick wakes up with new energy and prepares to fish. The day begins with mixed feelings when he fishes in the stream. The fishing tackle and tactics are described: fixing the reel, threading the line, tying the leader, baiting the hook, casting and tightening the line, lifting the trout over the bank and cleaning “him” thoroughly in the end by the riverside, not to mention the thrill, excitement and disappointment when feeling the tug on the line or fighting the trout against the current.
The landscape of the town exhibits the devastated condition but for Nick the bright Sun, and the clear river are sources of excitement. As Nick woke up he enjoys the natural freshness.

The river was clear and smoothly fast in the early morning.

Down about two hundred yards were three logs all the way across the stream. They made the water smooth and deep above them. As Nick watched, a mink crossed the river on the logs and went into the swamp. Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river.

He was thrilled to see plenty of grasshoppers on the grass. The story begins when Nick crawls “out under the mosquito netting stretched across the mouth of the tent.” The grass feels “wet on his hands.” The river looks “clear” and runs “smoothly fast.” The meadow is “wet with dew” and the grasshoppers that Nick selects are also “cold and wet with the dew.” This celebration of the senses is so strong that Nick’s crawling out of the tent is like a rebirth into the sensate world. Nick is delighted to be in nature and live peacefully.

Nick experiences unease, despair, shock and solace in nature. In fact he draws inspiration by the morning Sun and wants to catch the grasshoppers. He collects nearly fifty hoppers into a bottle and finds more hoppers lying around. Nick is psychologically disturbed and every act in this story signifies his state of mind. The excitement of the activity causes Nick’s mouth to become dry with fear, he feels “a little sick, as though it would be better to sit down.” He enjoys the act and is thrilled but prefers to sit down instead of continuing.
Nick undergoes a kind of spiritual rebirth. Various physical activities from camping to fishing elevate the story into an elaborate ritual. The story is to be read neither as an escape nor as a mere spell to banish evil spirits but as a return to nature and its therapeutic benefits and as a desire as well as an attempt to live in harmony with it. His wound is incurable and he learns to live with it, in harmony with the abiding earth and the flux of life around him. Here the grasshoppers symbolize spirit for life and the camp symbolizes home. Amidst the ruined landscape Nick is trying to regain his self.

Nick was excited. He was excited by the early morning and the river..........He found plenty of grasshoppers. Nick picked them up, taking only the medium-sized brown ones, and put them into the bottle. He turned over a log and just under the shelter of the edge were several hundred grasshoppers… It was a grasshopper lodging house (175).

Nick rolls the log back so that he can get grasshoppers every morning. Nick is excited by these activities. Without dew on the grass it would take him all day to catch a bottle full of good grasshoppers and he would have to crush them. He prepares coffee, cake and two sandwiches. His preparation of food is itself a ritual, and he enjoys being in the camp. Nick’s preparation of the fishing net conveys the sense of renewal and wonder at the physical world.

Nature in the story is not just a setting or a background ornament. It plays an important role. The “camp” set by Nick symbolizes life and regeneration. It is not a given landscape but one that is being built from the character’s experience. The landscape is drawn as the character moves along, in a dynamic description in which nature is endowed with a structural function. The dynamism of the character’s walking through nature sets forth and discloses a landscape that comes alive in its paradoxical balance.
Clement Rosset, a French Philosopher defines nature as a “frame,” a “perennial stance,” a “presence,” aims at comforting man from being “fragile and insignificant” (158). He further adds “the idea of nature is one of the major screens that isolate man from the real, by substituting the complication of an ordered world to the chaotic simplicity of existence” (158). His definition finds an echo in the American concept of nature, as American thinkers have always tended to see nature not as a man-centered concept but as a gauge of man’s predicament and capacities. Because it was not shaped by history and could only rest on a geographical and tangible reality to derive its own characteristics from, American culture has developed a strong nature bias. Art and literature have grown from such dynamics as is to be found in nature. It started with the early English-modeled Gothic atmosphere where nature was invested with venting anxiety. It evolved into a political and sacred view of nature in the nineteenth century that founded the national consciousness, nurtured a sense of belonging and ensured the birth of an autonomous literature. The idea of nature in American literature has thus evolved from a dangerous wilderness to be repressed to an optimistic version of a rich and promising nature.

In this section Nick describes nature through his body. It should not be read as a glorification of a supposed male strength, but a sign of a possible integration into nature. All the senses are involved in the process: sight, touch, taste, smell, and, to a lesser extent, hearing. The only noises to be heard are the humming of the mosquito in the silent night and Nick’s words. The silence in which the scene is enclosed brings forth the remembering process and retrospective vision. If there is a beauty in nature represented in the story it is the beauty of the literary representation. It is highly relevant that Nick’s adventure at the river should begin with erasing thought, and even erasing memory. Hemingway narrates river and its scene thus:
Ahead the river narrowed and went into a swamp. The river became smooth and deep and the swamp looked solid with cedar trees, their trunks close together, their branches solid. It would not be possible to walk through a swamp like that. The branches grew so low. You would have to keep almost level with the ground to move at all. You could not crash through the branches. That must be why the animals that lived in swamps were built the way they were, Nick thought (183).

Nick experiences a pleasant and harmonious environment. There is no trace of loneliness seen in him. This is because he is able to associate with other oikos like trout, grasshoppers, trees etc. He experiences joy in the middle of nature.

Non-verbal communication is thrown into relief by Nick’s bodily reactions. They fill in his silence: his muscles are aching from the heavy pack, his shoulders are painful, his arms and legs are stiff and cramped when he wakes up. Touch, taste and smell are the senses that relate him with his milieu: he feels the earth on his neck and back, he feels the ankle-high sweet fern and, in a synaesthesia combination pointing at the unity of perception. He feels his hands wet with dew, the cold shock of the water and the current sucking against his leg, the gravel sliding under his shoes. The two examples that follow show how language expresses the continuity between Nick and the outside world: “It was getting hot, the sun hot on the back of his neck” (176). Knowledge is also brought to him through taste and smell, like the smell of the sprigs of crushed heathery sweet fern, the smell of the canvas, or the smell of the hot beans and spaghetti. He exhibits multiple reactions to taste: he reacts to the bitterness of the coffee or to the sweetness of the juice syrup of the apricots. Such details about his camp site or his food are not superfluous or incongruous with the subject.
Hemingway’s character is involved in “a vital intercourse” with the elements of nature. His practice of fishing sport is certainly physical; all the more so as the use of grasshopper for bait instead of artificial fly implies a physical contact. The story integrates with an idea of conflict inherent to the law of nature. Yet the story is not a stage of rugged competition or a display of violence, but conveys the acceptance of the law of nature as exhibited in the food chain suggested by the kingfisher watching his prey. Nick is happy to fish in the stream. Hemingway says,

Nick felt awkward and professionally happy with all his equipment hanging from him. The grasshopper bottle swung against his chest. In his shirt the breast pockets bulged against him with the lunch and his fly book. He steeped into the stream. It was a shock. His trousers clung tight to his legs. His shoes felt the gravel. The water was a rising cold shock (177).

Nick settles to the bottom beside a stone and reaches down his hand to touch the trout. As Nick reaches the smooth underwater, feeling, the trout disappears across the bottom of the stream. Nick drops grasshoppers and enjoys fishing.

The ecological sensibility in Nick is shown during fishing. For instance, he first catches the trout and then drops it back into the stream.

He hung unsteadily in the current, then settled to the bottom beside a stone. Nick reached down his hand to touch him, his arm to the elbow under water. The trout was steady in the morning stream, resting on the gravel, beside a stone. As Nick’s fingers touched him, touched his smooth, cool, underwater feeling he was gone, gone in a shadow across the bottom of the stream (178).
Death is integrated into the representation of nature, partaking in the process of transformation and growth, and in the phenomenon of decomposition and dissolution. Hemingway’s nature, embodied in the landscape, the biological milieu and the reality of the surrounding world, is inevitably incomplete, personal and fragmentary. His nature is concrete, tangible and alive, and demonstrates that the idea of nature is but an ideological fantasy. Nick’s trout fishing experience is not the story of a solitary escape into nature or a romantic withdrawal into self, but an experience of confrontation and elucidation, i.e. calm, clear and wise. Nick carefully cleans the trout. Hemingway narrates the ritual of cleaning:

He washed the trout in the stream. When he held them back up in the water they looked like live fish. Their colour was not gone yet. He washed his hands and dried them on the log. Then he laid the trout on the sack spread out on the log, rolled them up in it; tied the bundle and put it in the landing net (183).

After cleaning Nick puts the trout in his pocket and moves towards the camp. He senses that there were plenty of days ahead when he could fish the swamp. Thus towards the end Nick is calm and the day ends in a sense of peace and potential for further tranquility. Nick develops confidence towards the end. The emotional struggle that Nick experiences in the beginning is not sensed towards the end. Nick sits and smokes a cigarette and thinks about the swamp with its low branches. Nick acknowledges and accepts the inevitability of loss, suffering, and death. The story stays rooted in the historical and legendary Seney even as Nick hikes away from the place, moving into a timeless Michigan.
Multiple feelings and emotions encountered by Nick are not directly narrated. They remain hidden beneath the surface. The visible part of the iceberg comprises the charred grasshopper symbolizing Nick, the swamp represents the darkness of death, of mental chaos, of the unknowing and the unknown, the biggest mystery of life, and that to be a man Nick must face it, fishing again in the blackened tangle of his wartime experience. Seney has a more famous devastation by forest fire in its history, already in the glamorous past when Hemingway was born. The Black River is a real Michigan river, and so is the two hearted with branches referred to as “Big” and “Little”. But the two hearted river does not run through Seney.

Hemingway’s technique is very close to Eliot’s Objective Correlative for the emotion involved. Only he seems to be more symbolist than Eliot, since he not only does not provide the reader with any clue to the meaning but also makes it very difficult for him to detect the symbols, which are generally hidden away under a surface story—a truthful rendition of what actually happens and what really produces the surface emotion which is felt.

An analysis of the story brings out the fact that Nick is overcoming his psychological damage through the ritual of camping and fishing. Nick is alone in the charred landscape and is inspired by the charred grasshopper. Thus he is able to associate with many oikos and he does not brush aside anything as immaterial to him. According to Frederic J. Svoboda, “Nick finds a way to control his world. He can do so of course only within the limits of human control, but he seems to find strength in connecting with the natural world and accepting his human limits” (1996: 33).
As nature and man are interdependent Nick’s attempt to bond with nature evokes a sense of holiness. The story stresses on the importance of the senses in the human relationship to the non-human world. Nick realizes diversity of the swamp and the importance of protecting fish from harm. His final act in the story reveals that he has the ecological sensitivity to keep the swamp’s integrity and stability even if it forces him to give up fishing in the swamp. His abandonment of fishing there is symbolic on at least two levels: firstly he is unwilling to violate its existence; secondly he believes that the swamp has a right to continue its intrinsic values. Here Nick is seen succumbing to nature rather than forcing nature to succumb to him. Certainly, patterns of interdependence within nature and between human and their natural environment are more complicated than can be demonstrated. Yet Hemingway’s biological thinking of interdependence between human and nature is self-evident.

The story is viewed as an account of healing process for Nick Adams. He hopes that a return to his boyhood activities of camping and fishing would rid him of his trauma and despair. In the stories Nick finds himself continually haunted by frightening flashbacks of his past suffering and grief. He lifts his spirits by setting up camp, fishing, cooking, and by creating his own personal utopia.

The visible part of the iceberg comprises of the landscape, fish, butterflies, and all the rituals of cooking and camping. Beneath the layer lies the larger part of the iceberg reflecting the mind of Nick. Nick’s return home is infused with the issues faced by a man coming back from war. Everything at home is burnt out and abandoned. This state of Nick’s homeland represents the feeling of many veterans returning home. From the smoldering battlefield of burning swamp to the foot soldier grasshoppers, and onward, past the flooded trench rivers, Nick is operating as if he
were still in a war. So Nick’s mind is affected by the war just like the charred landscape. Probably, Nick fears to live in human society, and therefore moves into nature. Undoubtedly, the invisible part of the iceberg is larger compared to the visible part.

Affected by war, he chooses to trip on a burnt landscape to overcome his trauma. His act of leaving the city and dwelling in nature for peace is understandable. However, mentally trapped in a constant battle, Nick notices himself in creatures such as the salmon, the big salmon leading the musty foundation while the smaller ones swim at the top of the water. Initially we find Nick continually haunted by frightening flashbacks of his past suffering and grief. Towards the end Nick overcomes his trauma. Thus the trip helps him to regain his spirits.

One of the major concerns of ecocritics is to analyse how literature brings about healthful actions. Nick’s act of fishing or camping shows that he is ecologically responsible. This kind of role is based on the understanding that humans and non-human organisms are both ecologically bound. Nicholas Low and Brendan Gleeson suggest that we have to expand the conception of the self. In their view, “the relationship between humanity and nature is best described as asymmetrically co-dependent” (155). Thus this kind of study helps humans to have broader view of nature.

Similar to this story where Nick is able to associate himself closely with the environment, a critic Venkataramana comments, on the tribal literature, that deals with symbiosis of all the living and non-living beings in their environment. The oikos of the tribal people not only integrates them with their immediate environment but also with their distant environment. According to Selvamony this phenomenon is termed
“integrative oikos” which “integrates the sacred, nature, and the humans in a complex kinship even as a family of kith and kin” (314).

Rarely in American literature has landscape been evoked with such scrupulous detail as in this story. The story uncovers a profound and beautiful emotional resonance in the natural environment. The river symbolizes harmony and regeneration. The camp signifies a psychic and spiritual rebirth.

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. And Thoreau’s *Walden* makes a parallel study. Like Nick who camps at Seney, Thoreau built a cabin on the banks of Walden pond. Thoreau and Nick are similar in their endeavour to lead a life away from the impediments of civilization. The major themes discussed in Walden are spiritual awakening and man as part of nature. Similar to Walden Pond that exhibits the living source, the river in the story is life giving. Both Nick and Thoreau exhibit their connections and interconnections with other oikos and integrate with nature. Both of them experience a unity with nature and spirit.

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the concept of the oikos. It is unique in the way it allows for the study of the protagonist in all facets and from all angles. Although Nick is the only character in both the stories he exhibits oikos with other organism and place. Thereby he is educated spiritually.
REFERENCES

