A Clean, Well-Lighted Place Study Guide

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place by Ernest Hemingway

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Contents

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....3

Author Biography....4

Plot Summary....6

Detailed Summary & Analysis....7

Characters....10

Themes....11

Style....13

Historical Context....14

Critical Overview....16

Criticism....18

Critical Essay #1....19

Critical Essay #2....22

Critical Essay #3....30

Critical Essay #4....46

Critical Essay #5....51

Topics for Further Study....57

Compare and Contrast....58

What Do I Read Next?....60

Further Study....61

Bibliography....62

Copyright Information....63

Introduction

Many of the 1933 short stories which make up the collection *Winner Take Nothing* were published just before the book. *"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"* is one of these. Its publication in collected form only succeeded by months its initial publication in *Scribner's Magazine,* a magazine, not uncoincidently, belonging to the titular publisher who first printed most of Ernest Hemingway's major fiction (including this collection).

By 1933, Hemingway was an established writer and this exceptional minimalist short story was seized upon for its presentation of major authorial concerns in an unprecedentedly concentrated form. These major authorial preoccupations include good conduct and solidarity. The younger waiter must be judged for his refusal to play by (unspoken) rules that say he must be polite and courteous to the old man. The older waiter, in contrast, upholds these standards by being willing to stay as late as the old man wants him to. The exceptionality of the piece made it an obvious choice for critics. Critics used the story either to laud or condemn Hemingway on the basis of their judgment of these minimalist aesthetics and these ethical concerns.

For supporters of Hemingway's talent, the story's emotional and philosophical austerity and bleakness amounts to profound and true tragedy. For detractors of Hemingway, it is Hemingway as a parody of himself, in which a purported thematics of stoic endurance only poorly covers an underlying self-indulgent masochism. This masochism, his detractors argue, blinds Hemingway to the variety and complexity of life. Stories in which little happens but extremes of simplicity interrupted by the highest drama do not resemble life, these critics insist. In defense of Hemingway, admirers argue that his stories are not meant to compete with fiction that presents life just as it is lived. The story's admirers argue that *"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"* is Hemingway at his most pure because he captures in both form and content an irreducible and tragic essence of life.

Author Biography

Ernest Hemingway will always be associated with the dynamic group of artists known as the "modernists" whose ideas set the European continent on fire in the first decades of this century. These artists came from many countries, and many of them, like Hemingway, honed their art and thought in Paris in the 1920s.

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois. By all accounts, he enjoyed a secure and unexceptional youth. His first taste of Europe came, at the age of eighteen (1918), when he volunteered to drive an ambulance in Italy during World War I (1914-1918, known as the "Great War"). He was wounded in Italy, and once he had recovered, he returned to the U.S.

He began his writing career as a journalist for the *Kansas City Star,* but soon interested himself in fiction. He befriended the writer Sherwood Anderson, who gave him letters of introduction to important writers in Paris. 1921 found him with his letters of introduction, and his first wife, sailing for the continent where he would socialize with, or learn from the likes of, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, and Djuna Barnes. Metropolitan, especially European, capital cities were bustling with artists in the 1920s, and this was why Paris was Hemingway's destination. These artists were restless war exiles (WWI) and other expatriates who espoused dramatic new ways of thinking accompanied by dramatic new styles in representation. Expatriates like Hemingway were self-styled internationalists in order to deplore the national borders and colonial politics that had caused the war conflict.

Hemingway's time in Europe confirmed his decision to be, first and foremost, a fiction writer, even though he never gave up writing journalism and other nonfiction. This time also confirmed his life-long attachment to Spain, its traditions, and peoples, and once he had returned to the states for good, he spent much time in other Latin enclaves (Southern Florida and Cuba). Indeed, he wrote about Spanish and Latin American subjects throughout his career, as in the short story "A Clean, Well- Lighted Place." And although after the 1920s he never again lived exclusively in Europe, he traveled around the world constantly until his death (Africa was a favorite destination).

Hemingway was a prolific writer who schooled himself relentlessly. He produced a large body of short stories, much journalism and nonfiction, a few novellas, and a series of novels. He never lost interest in news reportage and covered many world conflicts, including the devastating Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936. His personal life was adventurous and privileged. Financially comfortable thanks to his writing, his fame, or perhaps a wealthy wife (he married four times), Hemingway was able to cultivate his sporting passions expansively (big-game hunting and deep-sea fishing).

Ernest Hemingway wrote, hunted, sailed, traveled, and drank himself through a hectically muscular life. He seems to have been a driven man, and whatever propelled him finally led him to choose suicide as a means to die, in 1961. Hemingway suicided like his father before him, and one of his daughters after him. Before this sad event,

however, he secured himself a central place in American letters and lore. His renown and reputation was such, in fact, that he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

Plot Summary

The story begins at a cafe very late at night. Two waiters are watching their last, lingering customer, an old man who is by now very drunk. These are the story's three major characters. The older of the two waiters informs the young one that the old man tried to commit suicide the previous week. They then watch a couple go by, a soldier and a young woman, and comment on the soldier's chances of going undetected after curfew.

Next, the young waiter moves into action. When the old man indicates that he wants another drink served, the young waiter mutinies. He decides he wants to go home, regardless of an unspoken rule that dictates he not go until the last customer voluntarily leaves. He pretends not to know what the old man wants. The old man realizes that the younger waiter is being offensive, but ignores him and asks out loud for the drink. When the waiter brings it, he makes it spill deliberately. Moreover, knowing that the old man is deaf, as he walks away he says, "You should have killed yourself last week." With these actions, the character of the young waiter is established.

The two waiters then have a number of conversations about the old man and his suicide and situation. These talks are interrupted by the younger waiter finally telling the old man to leave, which he does. We learn various facts from these interchanges. For example, the young waiter is "all confi- dence," he is married, he has a job, he is content with life and has little pity for those who are not content. He defends his actions (being churlish and making the old man leave): a cafe is not an all-night venue; if the old man were considerate he would let the waiters go home to their beds; there are bars and bodegas for people wanting to stay out late. The older waiter resembles the old man: he is lonely and he lives alone with no wife. He is an insomniac. He insists that special deference is due the old man because of his recent suicide attempt.

Once the cafe is tidied and locked, the two waiters part amicably enough. The reader now finishes out this very short story with the older waiter. He does not go straight home. He thinks how he completely understands the old man's desire to linger at a cafe, because the ambiance of a cafe is entirely different from that of a bar or bodega. He ends up, however, at a bar. All the cafes are, after all, closed. The old waiter looks at the bar where he stands and points out to the barman that his venue is well-lighted, but not clean: "The light is very pleasant but the bar is unpolished." The barman ignores the waiter. The waiter does not stay for a second drink. Apparently, he now feels strong enough to go home to his insomnia: "He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted cafe was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he went home to his room. He would lie in the bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it."

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

This story begins in a café. It is late at night and the café's two waiters are watching their last customer, an old man. The old man, who is deaf, is a regular customer who tends to leave without paying his bill when he drinks too much. The two waiters suspect he is already drunk and so they keep a close watch on him.

As they watch, they discuss the old man's recent suicide attempt. One waiter comments that the man's despair could not have been over money, since he seemed to have plenty. As they talk, the waiters notice a soldier and a young woman pass by and they comment on the fact that the soldier is likely breaking curfew.

When the old man indicates he wants another drink, the waiter protests, saying he is already drunk. The old man insists and so that waiter retreats back inside the café to get the brandy. As he is getting the bottle, he complains to his colleague that he is tired and wishes to go home. He also comments that he would already be on his way home if the old man had succeeded in killing himself.

Returning to the old man's table, he fills the glass. As he fills the glass, he tells the man that he should have killed himself the previous week. Using his finger, the old man indicates that he would like more. The waiter fills his glass so that it overflows. The old man thanks the waiter.

Returning to his colleague, the waiter comments that the old man is drunk. The two men again discuss the old man's failed suicide attempt, noting it was his niece who discovered and saved him.

The waiter again expresses his desire to go home, saying his wife is home waiting for him. His colleague comments that the old man may have had a wife at one time as well. Noting that the old man must be nearly 80 years of age, the first waiter says he doesn't wish to live that long. His co-worker comments on the old man's cleanliness and ability to drink without spilling, despite the fact that he is drunk.

The old man motions for another brandy and the waiter that is anxious to go home goes to his table to tell him that the café has closed. The old man asks again for another drink, but the waiter is firm and finally, the old man pays for his drinks and leaves.

The waiter's colleague questions why the old man was not permitted to remain in the café to drink. The waiter replies that he is tired and wishes to go home. He tells his co-worker that if the old man wishes to drink more, he can buy a bottle and drink it at home.

His co-worker comments that drinking brandy at home is not the same as drinking it at the café. He then jokes with the waiter, asking him if he was fearful of returning home earlier than normal. The waiter replies that he is not fearful, in fact, he is confident.

In the exchange that follows, we learn that the waiter is a young, married, confident man while his co-worker is unmarried, older and lacks self-confidence.

The younger waiter replies that he would rather go home and go to bed. The older waiter notes that they are different and speaks of his reluctance to close the café each night due to his fear that there might be someone who needs it. When the younger waiter tells him that there are bodegas for that purpose, the older waiter argues that their café differs from the bodegas because it is clean and pleasant.

The two men go their separate ways. Alone with his thoughts, the older waiter thinks about the importance of keeping the café well lighted, clean and pleasant. He decides that music is not needed in order to keep the mood pleasant.

Rather than returning home, the older waiter goes to a bar for a drink. He comments to the barman that the place is well lit and pleasant, but points out that the bar is dirty. The barman does not answer.

After finishing his drink, the waiter leaves and returns home. He decides that when he arrives there, he will lie in bed and wait for daylight before falling asleep.

Analysis

This short story by Ernest Hemingway takes place during the pre-dawn hours at a café. There are three central characters: the old man, the young waiter and the old waiter.

The most significant theme throughout this story is the avoidance of darkness, specifically the dark of night. As we meet the old man, we find him seated in a café that is described repeatedly as a "clean, well-lighted place." Even so, the old man chooses to sit "in the shadow the leaves made against the electric light." We also learn that the man prefers the silence of night, which seems a bit strange considering he is deaf. Nonetheless, he seems to need some light in his life, which explains why he chooses to drink in this particular café rather than the typically darker bars or bodegas.

There is also a contrast between the image that typically comes to mind when one thinks of a drunken old man, and the description we are given of the old man in this story. The older waiter is quick to point out that the old man, despite his advanced age, is quite clean and takes great care not to spill his drink. Given this, the café seems to be a more appropriate place for the old man than would a bar.

The older waiter, while probably not despondent, is lonely and prefers the comfortable atmosphere of the café to that of a bar. For the old man, and indeed, the older waiter, the café represents a refuge from their despair. It is a place where they can usually linger for as long as they please. For this reason, the older waiter prefers to keep the

café open as long as possible in the event there is someone who will "need a light for the night."

The clean, well-lighted place, then, provides a refuge, if only a temporary one, from their troubles. We know that the old man is a frequent visitor, and we can infer from his reluctance to stop serving the old man, that the older waiter understands his need to be there. This point is reinforced at the end of the story when the older waiter, rather than going home, stops at a bar for a drink. Apparently uncomfortable in his surroundings, he has only one drink before leaving.

In contrast to the old man and the older waiter is the younger waiter. The younger waiter is anxious to go home because for him, darkness means it is time to return home to his waiting wife. In this way, the younger waiter does not experience the darkness of the two older men; there is light for him at home: literally in the sense that his wife probably has left a light on for him and figuratively in the sense that his wife likely brings him joy.

The concept of "nothing" also plays a central role in this story. First, as a deaf person, the old man can hear nothing. Additionally, when the waiters discuss the old man's suicide attempt at the beginning of the story, they are at a loss to identify exactly what made him despondent. "Nothing," one waiter says when asked what the old man was in despair over. Because the old man has a niece who looks after him - and who saved him from his suicide attempt - he is slightly better off than the older waiter.

"Nothing" comes to center stage again at the end of the story when the older waiter, left alone in the café, attempts to discern his feelings. He claims to not have specific fears, yet speaks of a sense of "nothing" that is all too familiar to him. Illustrating this point is his recitation of the Our Father in which all of the key nouns and verbs are replaced by the word "nada," Spanish for "nothing." In reciting the prayer in this way, the older waiter conveys his feeling that outside of the café, his life is unimportant.

Characters

Old Man

The old man is drowning his sorrows in drink, and his sorrows grow out of loneliness, if we are to believe the old waiter (the old man lives alone, his wife now dead). However, lest this turning to drink be interpreted as weakness, the author is careful to depict the old man as being punctiliously neat and controlled in his despair. He does not, after all, spill a drop. Rather, the old man is a heroic drunk, one whose pursuit of oblivion is depicted as a reasonable, even noble course of action in a world which can be too much for certain souls to withstand. Where the younger waiter seems to feel not enough, this man seems to feel too much.

Old Waiter

The older waiter, in contrast to the selfish younger one, is a sympathetic man. He knows the old man's history and identifies with it. Like the old man, the old waiter is lonely, a little sad, and he takes pleasure in a quiet public place. The old waiter is not, however, as desperate as the old man is. He seems to endure his loneliness with a certain objectivity, realizing that although he is alone, he is not alone in suffering. The older waiter seems wise and resigned.

Young Waiter

Set against the two mild and weary older men, the younger waiter's personality seems acerbic, even cruel. We learn about an unspoken rule of service which dictates that a cafe only close when the last customer leaves voluntarily, and never because of a pre-established closing time. But it is very late and the younger waiter wishes above all else to go home to bed. Accordingly, he serves the old man in a churlish way, purposefully slopping his drinks, to make the old man feel unwelcome and unwanted. Then, as the two waiters discuss the drunk old man, the younger waiter has only nasty things to say. He is depicted as someone who does not follow the rules of good social conduct, and who considers his own wishes more significant than anybody else's.

Themes

Solidarity

One of the most touching aspects of this short story is the older waiter's expressed solidarity with the old man. While the young waiter is all "youth" and "confidence," the old waiter and the old man seem overwhelmingly lonely and tired-out by life. This communality structures the older waiter's consistent thoughts of solidarity with the old man. He understands and defends him; he too prefers a clean, well-lighted cafe to a bar or bodega; he too seeks out such a place to forestall his own despair that night. The climax of this theme of solidarity is the climax of the story itself. It comes in its final line: "He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted cafe was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he went home to his room. He would lie in the bed and finally, with daylight, he would go to sleep. After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it." It is the "many" of the final sentence of the story with which the story is concerned. Against the singular and selfish young waiter, the coupled old men signify the group or community that hangs together out of loyalty and a sense of common cause. Hemingway's fiction around the time of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" frequently thematizes solidarity, undoubtedly because this principle of conduct was highly valued at the time. Much political advance was achieved in the first three decades of the century through the methods of mass demonstrations and movements (e.g., groups of workers and women bonded together for better working conditions and the vote). Solidarity fueled these mass rights' movements and ensured their success.

Good Conduct

Hemingway is a writer obsessed by ethical conduct. The bulk of his writing is concerned with questions of good versus bad actions. In this fiction, it's not about winning or losing, it's about how you play the game. This is true, perhaps, because in Hemingway's fictional universe one rarely wins. The title of the collection from which "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" comes suggests this complicated stance. It is called *Winner Take Nothing*.If one has won nothing as a winner, then all one has done is played the game.

The old waiter is the epitome of a someone who plays by the rules. No matter that it is a lone and drunk old man making this waiter stay up all night; the cafe offers a specific service, and is run according to certain rules from which the old waiter will not deviate. He cuts no corners in his social responsibilities.

The centrality and repetitiveness of this theme in this author's oeuvre costs him popularity in many camps. Hemingway's heroes consistently detect and perform unspoken ritual, usually in trying conditions so that their upholding of these rules seems all the more admirable. These beset characters are always male, and they are usually proving themselves while pursuing very traditional male pursuits (e.g. while big-game hunting or deep-sea fishing). This self-conscious cultivation of, and propensity for, an

agonistic and all-male world is immortalized in a title of another of his short story collections. Appropriately, it is called *Men Without Women.* This highly gendered world of strenuous physical and moral contest makes Hemingway's fiction seem dated in many respects.

The Unknowable and Nothingness

"Nothing," or the Spanish equivalent "nada," is the most important word in this short story—if only by virtue of the high number of times it is repeated in a story so very brief. It is the reason why the old man kills himself, according to the older waiter: "'Last week he tried to commit suicide,' one waiter said."/"'Why?"'/"'He was in despair."'/ "'What about"'/"'Nothing."'/ "'How do you know it was nothing?"'/ "'He has plenty of money."' It is the word which obsesses the old waiter as well. After work, he leans against a bar and recites two prayers to himself substituting "nada" for most of the prayer's major verbs and nouns. The result is a litany of "nadas."

This narrative pattern suggests at least two possible explanations. The first follows from considering the character of the older waiter. The waiter is a man of few words, an elemental soul. He is face to face with humanity itself under duress, what he identifies as "despair," and attributes the cause of this despair to be "nothing." This paradox of believing in an emotion (despair) with no cause ("Nothing") is unraveled if one decides that with "nothing" the waiter refers to intangible yearnings, as opposed to referring to bodily or material yearnings ("He has plenty of money"). In this case, he exemplifies a stance which does not presume to fathom the mysteries of life (intangible yearnings), but prefers to stand before them mute. "Nothing" has become his way of indicating the mystery of humanity and his own professed conceptual and verbal limitations when faced with it. Thus, this old waiter might be elemental or simple, but it is this simplicity that makes him wise. He is not afraid of admitting that the task of explaining humanity is beyond him, and his manner of speaking indicates this humble stance.

A second explanation follows from taking the old waiter's answer ("'Nothing"') to mean that the old man, at least in his opinion, is in despair over the fact that his life means "nothing." This can be linked, for example, to the old waiter later thinking, "It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too." In this case, despair follows from a belief in the inherent meaningless or absurdity of life. If one suffers one does so for no reason; it does not matter if one lives or dies. This is why despair is over nothing if one has "plenty of money." In this world view, there is no meaning beyond the bodily and material; all intangible yearnings are nothing but illusion. If the old man does not sink into nihilism because of this bleak knowledge, it is because of his ethical bylaws and his ability to revel in the physical present: "It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order." In the view above, however, this reveling in "light. . .[and] a certain cleanness and order" would indicate a certain blind, dumb faith. One's environment gives one proof of some "order" or meaning, it is simply that this meaning will never be known, expressible, or representable by mere human beings.

Style

Minimalism

A short story as glaringly brief and simplified as this one is rightly called "minimalist" in its aesthetics (the word aesthetics refers to how the author tells his or her story). It uses the minimum building blocks necessary to accomplish the job of telling a story. Hemingway uses simple diction, usually monosyllabic words of Anglo-Saxon, as opposed to Latin, origin. Grammatically, he uses simple as opposed to complex sentences. There is little figurative language—no metaphor or simile, for example. Character and plot are minimized. These three characters do not even have names. All that happens is that the two waiters talk, the old man drinks, and then they all go home.

Repetition

It is very clear to the reader what Hemingway does not do in this minimalist short story, but what *does* he do? One thing he does beyond the narrative minimum is repeat, or repeat with variation. For example, the story opens with an old man "who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light." A bit further in the story the old man is said to sit "in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind." And a few sentences later the old man is the one who is "sitting in the shadow. . . ." This repetition of the same with variation is the barest gesture at the figurative delights art can offer. In repeating, Hemingway seems to acknowledge the beauty of pattern or artifice, but instead of actually providing any he simply gestures at its possibility.

Point of View

Hemingway's narration seems designed to lessen the effect of a judging presence. His omniscient narrator may see and know all, but precious little is offered for consideration. This is an effaced narrator. Setting and character are barely described. What the cafe might look like, apart from the fact that it is clean and well-lighted, the reader never knows. Neither does the reader know what the waiters look like, what they are wearing, and so forth. More important, this narrator does not describe a character's psychology, or tell the reader what should be thought about a character or event. Omniscience like this hardly deserves the name. Third person narrators are supposed to know and tell all, but this narrator strives for objectivity. The readers are to judge what the characters say and do for themselves. Of course, the situation or plot is engineered by the author, so this sense of readerly autonomy is artificial. Nevertheless, the point of this style of narration is to cut down on authorial intervention.

Historical Context

Hemingway's Folk

Many things account for the rural or small town Spanish characters and scenery of Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." First, as an expatriate artist living on the continent in the 1920s, Hemingway developed a passion for Spain. He was a lifelong fan of Spanish popular traditions. He enjoyed the festivals, and he keenly appreciated the bullfight. He went to Spain often to fish in the countryside, and so he came to know its plainer people.

In addition to this familiarity with Spain's rural peoples, 'plain folk' (e.g. waiters in small towns) provide an escape from the effete, or anything resonant of "civilization" which Hemingway scrupulously wishes to avoid in his art. This is so because the disaster that was WWI was a founding event and trauma in Hemingway's life. His most admired novel, *Sun Also Rises*(1926), takes place around a Spanish popular festival and is about a wounded WWI veteran who is terribly in love but who has been made impotent by war injuries. This character's situation is highly symbolic. He is the sterile scion of a disastrous past, which is like saying that civilization has progressed so far only to have progressed not at all. It is no wonder that Hemingway turns to folk. If civilization and progress has wrought such ugliness and pain, then where better to turn than to those whom progress has seemed to pass by or touched less?

Everybody's Folk

The folk, as in the peasantry or working class of European cultures, were a population of keen historical import and significance during the teens, 20s and 30s. They were so for various reasons, the most important of which, however, boils down to the reformism of the time. The first three decades of the west are characterized by reformist mass political movements. The excesses of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution were curtailed thanks to workers' demonstrations fueled by socialist and communist ideologies. This striving for more equal or fair treatment extended to women, who gained the vote at this time. Immediately post-WWI, New York City saw the first twentieth-century race movement, the African-American Harlem Renaissance (1919-1935). Given how rights movements entail the basic argument and principle of each person's equal worth, regardless of race, status, or gender, the ideal of equality was touted frequently. Everyone, down to the simplest or uneducated man or woman is of equal worth, the argument goes, and in order to prove and support this, fiction writers everywhere turned to the folk for material. The desire to extend democracy and correct persistent social inequalities is mirrored in the aesthetics and subject of Hemingway's story. Hemingway's prosaic little story stresses the foundational sameness and dignity of all human beings.

Europe, Theater of War

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" was written at the start of the 1930s, a decade, it turns out, that would be as fraught as the one that preceded it. During the 1920s, most people were trying to come to terms with two major events. First, WWI, which killed and mutilated millions of young men, wiping out an entire male European generation and, second, the first wave of what we now call technology. Telephones and automobiles, for example, were becoming widely used and available. The 1930s, after the post-War trauma of the 1920s, delivered nothing other than the second major European war of the twentieth-century, World War II. This con- flict grew out of the rise of European fascism. The fascist troops of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler were beaten down during WWII, but fascism triumphed in Hemingway's beloved Spain in 1939 when Francisco Franco's rebel forces overcame the government.

Critical Overview

The critical literature on Ernest Hemingway is quite massive, and it is very diverse. His style and mechanics have been thoroughly analyzed, and he and his work have been the subjects of numerous studies by critics employing historical, biographical, psychological, feminist and other paradigms. His literary reputation has been strong ever since his fiction began to be taught widely in the 1950s. He is generally considered to be a talented, prolific, and disciplined writer whose early work was seminal in defining the sparer prose aesthetic that characterizes most twentieth-century anglophone fiction.

Any longer study of Hemingway's fiction will inevitably touch on "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." It was considered, from the first, the best of the stories in the 1933 collection, *Winner Take Nothing.* Along with a few African stories (about big-game hunting), it is one of a handful of perennially popular stories by the writer. Hemingway is particularly well-known for stylistic minimalism, and this brief gem is considered to be a tour de force in this respect.

Hemingway's major literary successes at the time this story was published were, from the point of view of the critics, the earliest sketches and stories of the 1920s and his first two novels *(The Sun also Rises and A Farewell to Arms).* Less favored was the nonfiction, and the collection *Winner Take Nothing* was not especially admired by critics. As a collection, it often received the epithets "bitter" or "depressing." Critical interpretation of the signifi- cance of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is quite consistent. For those who think the story too slight to be great, it is just more Hemingway "dumb ox" fiction (or so his fiction is described by his acerbic contemporary, Wyndham Lewis, in an essay entitled "The Dumb Ox: A Study of Ernest Hemingway"). By "dumb ox," Lewis means Hemingway's characters, and not Hemingway himself, no matter how confusing the title of his essay is. Lewis considers them beneath anybody's notice. Less elitist critics fault Hemingway for a "dumb ox" aesthetic by contending that simplicity of this nature could only be found in the writer's imagination, and that no one (not even a real rustic) is as simple as Hemingway's characters are. Even Frank O'Conner (a well-known writer in his own right), who finds much to admire in Hemingway, expresses this frustration. In his *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story,* a chapter concerning Hemingway presents his fiction as far too "abstract." He argues that is does not sufficiently capture the social and interpersonal complexity of life: "I. . .ask myself if this wonderful technique of Hemingway's is really a technique in search of a subject or technique that is carefully avoiding a subject, and searching anxiously all the time for a clean well-lighted place where all the difficulties of human life can be comfortably ignored."

For critics who take Hemingway seriously, the story is often aligned to notions associated with the 1950s philosophical doctrine known as existentialism. Propounded especially by two French thinkers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, existentialist belief stresses the need to live with stoic and ethical dignity in a meaningless or absurd world. The philosopher William Bennett discusses this short story in a book on existentialism entitled *Irrational Man*. Related to this position is

Warren Bennett's in *"Character, Irony, and Resolution in 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'."* He states that Hemingway espouses a type of despair in the story which "is a negation, a lack . . . . [a] lack of life after death, [a] lack of a moral order governing the universe, [and a] lack of trustworthy interpersonal relations."

An interesting problem associated with a "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" is a long-standing debate about discrepancies and variations in Hemingway's original manuscript versions of the story. Debate centers around the dialogue, and which lines should be attributed to which waiter. Specifically, there is a question as to which waiter should be given the line indicating knowledge of the old man's suicide attempt. Most critics argue that giving this knowledge to the older waiter maintains the story's logical and characteriological consistency throughout. This view is generally the one which informs publishing houses, and printed versions of the story uphold this logic and dialogical sequence. Hemingway's extreme minimalism which induces him to dispense with tags like "the old waiter said" or "the younger waiter replied," opens the door to this type of confusion.

BOOKRAGS

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Dell'Amico discusses Hemingway's short story within the context of the art movement known as modernism. The story's aesthetic minimalism is presented as an integral style of this movement, and the significance of this style is examined as a historical posture.

What stands out about "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is its minimalism. Known for simple sentences and simple diction, Hemingway positively outdoes himself in this famous short story. In the most pared down English imaginable, three nameless and unexceptional characters rehearse a brief, nocturnal scene. Thus, this story ostentatiously extols the virtues of the simple. This minimalism is so very dramatic, in fact, one feels that complexity or sophistication is not simply precluded, but actually *written against*.In writing such stripped-down prose and narrative, Hemingway counters the era which precedes him. Nineteenth-century prose and narrative is, by contrast, the epitome of ornateness and complexity. The extreme minimalism of a "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" connotes a turning away from the past, from history and progress, war and technology.

In *"Modernist Studies,"* a review essay in a collection called *Redrawing the Boundaries*, Marjorie Perloff states that "modernism perceived its own mission as a call for rupture." By "rupture," Perloff means that modernists dealt with what appeared to them to be a disappointing history by searching for completely transformed ways of going about politics and life. The idea was to break with a civilization that had not yielded the positive social progress it had so believed in and so loudly proclaimed it was delivering. This bleak sense of western culture not living up to its best promise was felt already before World War I, but the shocking carnage of the Great War, in terms of the sheer number and sheer horribleness of deaths and injuries, intensified and galvanized this feeling. This war left the west, but particularly Europeans, reeling. What had been an energetic movement in the arts before the war became deadly serious after it. Some modernist artists experimented with their prose (e.g. Virginia Woolf), or their painterly techniques (e.g. Picasso's cubism), in an effort to point to and usher in the transformations in social relations they so strongly desired. Others—Hemingway is preeminent in this group—chipped away at language and action to shuck off and scrupulously avoid the no longer desired. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is glaring proof of this. No "fancy" or sophisticated words or situations weighted with undesired history or civilization are of interest to him. Hemingway is after the truly enduring and noble underneath the destructive and suffocating clutter of civilization and history.

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"rests on the dramatic information of the old man's attempted suicide, and the difference between the two waiters. An old man sits alone, far too late into the night, drinking steadily. This is a scene of pathos. This is pathos, however, in which much is made of pathos contained, or reigned in. The man is known to be very drunk, but he is "clean," neither belligerent nor messy. By not calling attention to himself or his suffering he avoids making of it or himself an event. This story about

quietly endured pain connotes the idea that suffering is indeed so common, so mundane, no commemoration of it is necessary.

In the rather tragic universe of the cafe, there are two waiters. One of them sees a single customer sitting alone, someone who has been the last customer and has been sitting there alone for a long time. He decides he wants the person to leave so that he can close up and go home. This prosaic situation and wish is set against the older waiter's argument that they should not close up in case the man is finding solace in this "clean, well-lighted place." His having tried to kill himself, and his being in the cafe drinking at all, seems to suggest this. The older waiter's argument is a plea based on the simple question of "Wouldn't you want to be here if you were him?" The younger waiter must grudgingly agree, finally, that it means something to drink in a clean, well-lighted place, instead of at home alone. Nevertheless, he defends his actions and so essentially revels in the unthinking and selfish power of youth that cannot see ahead to the weakness of its own old age. Against this waiter, the second waiter exemplifies solidarity with the old and with all those who suffer on this earth.

This primal expression of solidarity and suffering characterizes the mood of Hemingway's modernism. As for his modernism itself, the substance of it can be approached through an examination of the story's transformation of the Catholic prayers "Our Father" and "Hail Mary."

By the time the older waiter thinks his crazily modified versions of the prayers, the younger waiter has expelled the old man from the cafe, the waiters have closed up, and the reader has learned that the older waiter is an insomniac. He is, like the old man, "[w]ith all those who need a light for the night." In fact, the older waiter intends to find himself a clean, well-lighted place of his own in order to consummate, as it were, his solidarity and pact with the old man. The older waiter has sunk into his own thoughts, and at some point in his physical transition from the cafe to the late-night bar to which he goes, he asks himself:

What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it was nada y pues nada y pues nada. [the modified "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" prayers now begin:] Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee. He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine.

If the reader feels this short story pulls off this litany of "nadas," the reader smiles with the old waiter. Indeed, if the story had not been called what it is, "Nada" or "Nothing" would have been a good second choice as it is the single-most important word in the story. Its importance is established, indeed, at the story's start, when the older waiter is asked by the younger why the old man tried to kill himself:

"Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said. "Why?" "He was in despair." "What about?" "Nothing." "How do you know it was nothing?" "He has plenty of money."

Once it is learned that the older waiter sympathizes with the old man, this "nothing" takes on major significance. How can he sympathize with someone so completely if he feels that the man killed himself for no reason? What, then, does this "nothing" really mean? We are given a clear and obvious clue. Nothing is what is left over after money is taken is care of: "'How do you know it was nothing?"/"'He has plenty of money."' What that means is that all the man's physical wants must be guaranteed, so all that could be plaguing him are intangible yearnings. Or, to put this another way, what is plaguing the old man are not wishes for things he needs like food and shelter, but rather thoughts about profundities. "Nothing" is the old waiter's way of referring to the most important things in life after one's bodily wants have been satisfied. Thus, it is not surprising that the old man inserts a series of "nadas" into a prayer; a prayer, after all, is a significant event. To pray is to indicate a belief in a religion, in a system and an order for life, to indicate, in short, that one has a map to life's profundities. But the reader knows from the story's opening that this is precisely what the older waiter does not have. Profundities are precisely that for which he has no name. Thus, it comes as no surprise that what he does in his praying is utilize a "form" (a prayer) but then deny its "contents" (Catholicism). He borrows the structure of the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary," but inserts "nada" into any place that matters. In these prayers, the values upon which the religious faith of the west are based are not so much denied, as "no thing" is put in their place. Thus, this story by Hemingway could be said to desire belief or faith, in its gesturing toward the "forms" of faith and belief, but as to what those beliefs or values might or could be, the story is overwhelmingly silent ("nada"). What Hemingway's minimalism is ultimately designed to achieve is precisely this refusal or forestalling of values or valuation. If western civilization has gone wrong, this modernism seems to convey, then it is best to hold off believing for a time in order to discover new and better beliefs and values.

The twentieth-century had dawned fully industrialized and fully armed for the bloodiest of wars. Like many of his "lost generation" (so named by the writer Gertrude Stein), Hemingway in this story exemplifies a disaffection with, and avoidance of, tradition and history. Hemingway's "A Clean, Well- Lighted Place" is a preeminent, representative example of modernist minimalist narrative. In utilizing only the bare minimum for narrative, in terms of language, character, scene, and action, Hemingway tries his best to skirt the traps and habits of the past. Modernists, thus, are as attached to notions of progress as their nineteenth-century predecessors, it is simply that they decide that the best way to get ahead is to start from scratch.

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Kerner discusses the ambiguity of the dialogue between the two waiters and the importance of understanding who says what, and why.

Since Warren Bennett's 13,000-word defense— concluding, "All printings of ["A Clean Well- Lighted Place"] should, therefore—in fairness . . . most of all, to Hemingway—follow the 1965 emended text"—has passed muster with Paul Smith, the earlier cries of "Enough!" were premature: a comprehensive demonstration of the accuracy of Hemingway's text is needed, lest we wake up one day to find the emendation enshrined in the Library of America. The need is evident too when Gerry Brenner can write: *"must* we know which waiter answers the question 'How do you know it was nothing?' with 'He has plenty of money.'? I think not." One cannot take this answer away from the younger waiter without redistributing 19 other speeches; and to think that this can be done without damaging the intention in a story that so sharply differentiates the two waiters is to reveal once again that the story being read is not yet the one Hemingway wrote.

Anyone drawn to the notion that in Hemingway's text, whether by accident or design, there is an inconsistency that cannot be resolved has failed either to consider or to study the context of the crucial disputed line. No one, when first reading the story, can know which waiter is saying, as the dialogue opens, "Last week he tried to commit suicide." The deliberateness of the uninformative "one waiter said" is undeniable, for in the second short dialogue (about the soldier), critics will never agree that it is possible to *know* which waiter is saying what. The third dialogue continues the challenge, as the younger waiter begins:

"He's drunk now," he said."He's drunk every night.""What did he want to kill himself for?"

By habit we assign this question and the succeeding ones to the younger waiter, so we are surprised, some lines later, to find the *older* waiter saying, "You said she cut him down," for *he,* it would seem, has been answering the questions. But since this apparent inconsistency complements the riddling "one waiter said"s, the context of controlled ambiguity assures us that when Hemingway decided to insert "You said she cut him down," he knew that his assignment of this indispensable line was decisive, and consequently he knew which waiter he was giving it to. The function of this dual ambiguity is clear even before we know it is dual: once we have heard about "nada," the withholding of identification throws a spotlight on the opening "Nothing":

"What [was he in despair] about?""Nothing."

Then, after we have detected the apparent inconsistency, we realize that without the disputed insertion, we might decide that this "Nothing" (whose overtones Hemingway must have been aware of before he began) is the older waiter's "nada," and the insertion is there to tell us we would be mistaken. But it tells us ambiguously, not immediately ending the puzzle of the "one waiter said"s, prodding us to see *why* "Nothing" cannot be the older waiter's "nada" and must be the younger waiter's line. If

the opening "Nothing" *were* the older waiter's line, there would be no reason for the web Hemingway took pains to weave. In pulling that web apart without studying it, the emenders, like surgeons cutting blindly, destroyed its function and lopped off an organic part of the story's meaning, for the younger waiter's "Nothing" opens up a kind of flanking attack that turns out to be the central location of the battle.

Bennett argues that the reply to "Why [did the old man try to commit suicide]?"—"He was in despair"—indicates the speaker's familiarity with "nada," and therefore the older waiter must be the one answering the questions. True, in the whole story this "despair" is the one word that can make us hesitate, but what follows it only supports our seeing the younger waiter throw up his hands mockingly as he replies, "He was in despair"; for, coming from him, these words are a vacuous formula, forcing the questioner to repeat his question, and the mockery is confirmed when we see that the proffered answer "Nothing" is a set-up for a joke:

"How do you know it was nothing?""He has plenty of money."

Because the older waiter could not think that anyone with "plenty of money" can have no reason to kill himself, Bennett is forced to construe "Nothing" as the later "nada." But a premature, ambiguous "Nada" here, followed by an equally unenlightening, mocking deflection of the appeal for an explanation, would make the whole passage a pointless, as well as a misleading, anticipation, and it would also make the older waiter uncharacteristically glib and smug: it would be inconsistent with his patience as a teacher ("You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant café"), with his feeling for the old man, and with the fact that, as he begins his interior monologue, he is not out to explain the old man's suicide attempt—he is asking, rather, why he himself has "never had confidence," why does *he* "need a light for the night," "What did he fear?," as though he is only now, for the first time, naming his trouble. If "Nothing" were the older waiter's reply and meant what Bennett claims, this waiter's next reply would make Sense—for example:

"How do you know it was [nada]?""He has a loving wife."

That is what but "nada" can explain the suicide attempt when even such affection fails? The hypothetical answer helps us see the actual answer as a coarse joke; but that it is such a joke and stays a joke, Hemingway makes clear when the persistent questioner asks, "What did he want to kill himself for?" The new answer is not an explanation of "nada" but a callous dismissal—"How should I know"—which shows us again that behind the answer "Nothing" there was no idea the speaker might expand on; he now openly shrugs the question off, as though saying, "What are you asking foolish questions for? What difference does it make? Who cares?" Three times the older waiter has asked "Why?" and three times there has been no genuine answer. This persistent rebuff of a serious question is not the way of the older waiter. Bennett is insensitive to the tone of "How should I know" when he hears in it the older waiter's "existential uncertainty," not the crude impatience that Hemingway helpfully suggested by removing the question mark and restoring the period with which he had originally ended the line (MS 3). And since the opening "Nothing" was meant as a set-up for a wise-guy answer,

the older waiter cannot be said, in his monologue, to be expounding already, with stunning eloquence, on the "'despair'" he had just "'learned' about from" his insensitive colleague.

The principal argument, however, against attributing "Nothing" to the older waiter is in what Hemingway meant by contriving this line for the younger waiter. Bennett asserts that since the older waiter "knows and understands the 'nothingness' behind suicidal thoughts," *he* "could not 'stupidly' ask 'Why [did the old man try to commit suicide]?'" This distortion makes us think immediately of Hemingway's suicide. We are still asking "Why?"—as Hemingway himself asked, more than once, about his father *(Winnerw; Bell).* In *Darkness Visible* William Styron concludes that clinical depression, even when it does not end in suicide, is an "all but impenetrable mystery." The older waiter's persistent return to the question "Why?"—an effort to learn what may be known—reflects the compassionate, intelligent involvement behind his pursuit of the subject —*"How* did he do it?," *"Why* did they do it [cut him down]?" (emphasis added). But the more important mistake in Bennett's distortion here is his failure to realize that the older waiter neither says nor implies that "nada," as he defines it, causes suicide. His monologue laments the loss of the traditional image of a fatherly God; what it says is what Freud says in *The Future of an Illusion* (had Hemingway read it?), though Freud, arguing, like the waiter,"light was all it needed" exhibits rather more confidence in the café he had opened. In this context, "a man was nothing too" has two meanings, which Hemingway, with grim humor, had recently explained in "A Natural History of the Dead," puncturing the rhetoric of Mungo Park: our individual survival means nothing to the universe, and what happens to an untended corpse ridicules our exalting ourselves above natural law. No more than Hemingway there does the waiter here connect this atheism with suicide. Rather, he is raising the question, What *are* we (the human race), now that the God who marks the sparrow's fall is gone and we are no longer immortal? The answer, "a man was nothing too," means we are only another kind of animal, so that our "place" now is merely a refuge, a sort of wildlife sanctuary, like the café for the old man. The symbolic meaning of this refuge is not the older waiter's□he is too modest ("it is probably only insomnia"); behind him, it is Hemingway who is suggesting that religion□and every other kind of home we carve for ourselves out of this harsh cosmos that doesn't know we are here□is no more than such a refuge.

But the story does not stop with the monologue: having shown us how different the waiters are, Hemingway has maneuvered us into going back to see what he is up to with those "one waiter said"s—a challenge that is reinforced when, as we puzzle over it, we detect the apparent inconsistency; and now we discover that the younger waiter's role is to dramatize how "a man was nothing too," in the way his behavior answers "What *are* we?" with the complementary question "Who am I?" His bristling when his colleague teases, "You have no fear of going home before your usual hour?," implies that under the boast "I am all confidence" is a man who does not know himself, and who is fated, like Oedipus, to find out who he is, disastrously. This ominous ignorance is equally noticeable when he tells the deaf old man, "You should have killed yourself last week": such self-satisfied callousness is excessive, a gratuitous display of this waiter's assurance that he has nothing in common with the despairing old man; and the excess, like a neurotic symptom, is a measure of the strength of the anxiety the waiter is hiding

from himself. Our understanding of this defensiveness is enlarged by Mr. Frazer's interior monologue at the end of "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio," which Hemingway was finishing around the time he wrote "A Clean, Well- Lighted Place": life, Frazer thinks, is surgery without Anesthesia—what Dr. Adams does in "Indian Camp" is how the universe operates—and we block the pain openly, with alcohol or other drugs, or covertly, with the protective coloration or identity we assume. Frazer's catalogue of such identities includes the macho façade—the anxiety-pacifying use of "sexual intercourse"—that is the younger waiter's "opium." Hemingway leaves it to us to figure out that the incident of the soldier hurrying with the girl is meant to give this waiter the rope to hang himself, when he says, in a display of his own sexual powers, "What does it matter if he gets what he's after?" We hear the choral commentary on this line when Frazer, learning that the nun wants to be a saint, tells her, "You'll be one. Everybody gets what they want. That's what they always tell me." Behind the restrained, good-humored irony of this speech is Frazer's knowledge of how we disappoint ourselves (the rodeo rider "now, with a broken back, was going to learn to work in leather and to cane chairs"). The younger waiter needs to delude himself that he is "of those" who get "what they want," *he* "gets what he's after."

So when the old man's "despair" is said to be about "Nothing"&mash;and we listen carefully, rereading, because the ambiguity has forced us to wonder what this means (Is it a contemptuous dismissal? Is it the older waiter's "nada"?)—the conjunction of these alternatives, now that we have seen what thin ice the younger waiter is on, suddenly makes *him* the concealed subject of the inquiry when his unwitting "Nothing" explodes into a revelation of a second kind of "nada": since he is "of those" who "lived in it and never felt it," we realize that the cause of *his* eventual despair, when his macho conception of himself collapses, will not be the older waiter's metaphysical, outer "nada," but a psychological, inner "nada"—the younger waiter's own nothingness that, unconsciously, he is anesthetizing with his sexual persona—which we are being asked to hear in the resonance of that spotlighted "Nothing," as though Hemingway, whose symbolism looms behind the older waiter's monologue, could here be heard murmuring in the wings, like Bugs in "The Battler," "'Nothing,' eh? Ah, Buster! You've 'got a lot coming to' you." With this, we have discovered the initial purpose of the ambiguity: we have been driven to see that the story is a tale of *two* "nada"s. The conclusion "a man was nothing too," which is contestable when the older waiter infers it from the silence of the cosmos, is reached unarguably from below, in the human condition the younger waiter's insubstantial identity reveals; for it is this inner "nada" that turns out to be fundamental, since it still takes its toll when the outer "nada" is vigorously denied (as in Hemingway's view of his father's suicide, for Dr. Hemingway was a lifelong devout Christian).

The initial purpose of the ambiguity is joined by a corollary purpose when we realize the relation between the two "nada"s. The young waiter's "bogus self-assurance," as Steven Hoffman has observed, is matched in "Indian Camp" when little Nick Adams, with "willed ignorance," feels "quite sure he would never die." Hoffman does not explore where this leads. In "Three Shots," the discarded original opening of "Indian Camp," three times we are told that "Nickie" (like Mr. Frazer) tries to avoid thinking, about either his shame or his fear. A few weeks before, the hymn "Some day the silver cord must break" had

made him realize for the first time "that he himself would have to die sometime," and he had sat up all night in the hall, reading. That is no small feat for a little boy—it expresses intolerable anxiety, which returns now when he is alone in the tent, where no "silver cord" ties him to his source. "Nickie" here—can he be more than 10?—knows nothing of "the death of God"; the absence frightening him is that of his earthly father, for his fear goes away, and he falls asleep, as soon as he fires the signaling shots, since he has complete faith his father will return at once, and the firing itself identifies him with his father— which shows that the threat facing the boy was not death but separation, the inescapable demand that he be himself, with an identity of his own to protect him. So his concluding denial of how he must end expresses his unwillingness to relinquish the Nirvana of his "silver cord" beginnings.

In little Nick this childish denial is healthy; in the younger waiter it has become a sick denial that exposes his whole character structure as a defense against the reactivation of an intolerable indelible infantile threat. Hemingway's appreciation of this threat is clear in Frazer's belief that we are being operated on without anesthesia when we are stripped of the illusory identity that is all we have. And since, from the older waiter's mock prayer and "A Natural History of the Dead," we see that for Hemingway, as for Freud, the God who marks the sparrow's fall can be nothing but a projection of the infant's experience of omnipotent parental protection, then the older waiter's sense of cosmic desolation is a recapitulation of the primal psychological loss the younger waiter has unsuccessfully buried. Astonishingly, we now gather that the ambiguity, by leading us to entertain the possibility that either waiter might be saying certain significant lines, has as a corollary purpose a dreamlike blurring of the explicit difference between the waiters: though the older one says, "We are of two different kinds," we are meant to see that the younger one's overpowering need to deny the residue of his smoldering infantile helplessness makes his blustering "confidence"—his assurance that the old man's despair is "a way *[he'll]* never be"—an illusion, which may well be identified before long as the mask of the first stage of the depression that, when catastrophe strikes, may overwhelm *him* with the older waiter's insomnia, and may in the end bring him too to suicide (just as little Nick's confidence "he would never die" presages that he too will one day suffer the Indian husband's unanesthetized anguish). This psychological relation between the waiters does not, of course, make their speeches interchangeable. The older waiter himself—with his protesting "What did he want to kill himself for?"—does not yet realize where he is heading. The three characters in the story are an allegory for the stages of our encounter with our inner "nada"—a post-theological pilgrim's progress that Hemingway's life has mapped for us.

The "clean, well-lighted place," then, insofar as it symbolizes a refuge one can achieve for oneself, is only a resting place, a holding action, as Hemingway intimates by the sly echo when Frazer attributes his climactic discovery ("Bread is the opium of the people") to "that well-lighted part of his mind that was there after two or more drinks in the evening; . . . (it was not really there of course)." In "Big Two-Hearted River" Nick Adams builds "the good place" of his own tent and camp, his "home where he had made it"—he has learned how fishing can control his anxiety, whatever its roots; but when Frazer concludes, "He was thinking well, a little too well," it is not fellow-traveling book reviewers he is afraid of, if he lets them read, in 1933, his judgment on the Russian

revolution—he is afraid that in another minute he will be asking himself why he has omitted fishing and hunting from his catalogue of opiums (for the story is autobiographical), and his next question would be, Why did he omit art—his stories? Does the "clean, well-lighted place" his talent makes available certify his salvation? Hemingway does not have to identify for us the personal failings implied in "Usually [Frazer] avoided thinking all he could, except when he was writing"—such failings are universal, and Hemingway could be a merciless judge of his own, as in "Hills Like White Elephants." In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," which too is autobiographical, Harry's dream of heavenward flight as he dies—a remorse-inspired illusion rising from his betrayal of his talent—is only one of the story's echoes of Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych," perhaps the most devastating story ever written about inauthentic identity as a defense against the anxiety radiating from the buried soul. For though the loss of the parental God has again brought our professed identity into question, the unique willingness of the human animal to submit to judgment survives. "Fear for his soul" on the lips of the younger waiter is part of the Sophoclean irony. He does not know what danger his own soul is in, since he has not permitted himself to learn that the soul is no imaginary religious atavism—it is still, as it always was, inescapably, the self we create by our choices (insofar as we have them). That Hemingway, after his affair with Jane Mason (following his choice of Pauline Pfeiffer), could make the younger waiter a withering caricature of his own macho bristling, and then imagine for himself an inauthenticity that evoked for him "The Death of Ivan Ilych," reinforces the allegory revealing the "clean, well-lighted place" as hardly more secure than the heaven that has dissolved like a mirage.

But we have yet to see the range of Hemingway's insight into the younger waiter's insubstantial identity as representative of the human condition. The younger waiter unwittingly betrays himself by overeagerly proclaiming that *he* is something (he is not "nothing too"), while Hemingway, behind the older waiter, is telling us that our need to establish a "clean, well-lighted place" of our own is due to the failure of our social institutions to live up to *their* claims that we are something (they have provided us such well-lighted mansions of meaning as the one that sustained Mungo Park in the desert); and this parallel between the younger waiter and civilization—a bristling "confidence" in the solidity of a shaky identity—is what gives the story its fundamental unity, climaxing the significance our attention to the ambiguity has found in the younger waiter. The range of the parallel is immense—it takes us immeasurably back and forward. For the older waiter's "What are we *now?"* is not new—it goes back to the emergence of the human race, when there was no question of "the death of God" or the "meaninglessness" of life: we alone among animals had to ask ourselves what we were, now that we'd been ejected from the closed programming of our animal Eden; we were already bristling, like the younger waiter, the first time a tribesman shrouded his head and trunk in an animal hide to reassure himself (and all others concerned) who his ancestors were; and the problem is permanent, as Hemingway learned from the collision of Oak Park with the twentieth century, which we see in "Soldier's Home." In "Winner Take Nothing" Frazer's monologue is followed immediately by the first paragraph of "Fathers and Sons," where "the traffic lights" "would be gone next year when the payments on the system were not met." As an allusion to Prohibition (the story before "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" is "Wine of Wyoming"), this introduces a

bristling theocratic eagerness to overregulate; for Dr. Adams's contribution to the sexual education of his son advises us that a system of rules telling us when to stop and when to go, permitting us to go about our business without slaughtering each other, must be inspired by a mistaken image of ourselves when it comes at a price we cannot afford (Dr. Adams will pay with his life).

In "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" Hemingway faces us with such a system in the injunction against suicide, the dereliction the girl's uncovered head represents, the hurry of this couple, the curfew, and the patrolling police. As "Fathers and Sons" opens, a detour sign has not been removed, though "cars had obviously gone through," so Nick Adams does not detour; but the soldier's graceless infraction classes him with the drunks the Fontans turn away in "Wine of Wyoming." What his hurry exposes (emphasized by the contrast with the "very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity") is less a self than a sexual urgency that we are invited to see as an inner uniform—a biological herding that pacifies us with an illusion of identity; and this implicit metaphor explains why "walked out to the old man's table" in the holograph (3) was changed to "marched" in the typescript (2). We are not told precisely how the younger waiter's macho uniform will one day explode, but the strength his behavior leads us to attribute to the unresolved threat he has buried urges us to realize that when a man murders his estranged wife and her lover and then kills himself (a news item we've seen often), he has found that losing her robs him of his identity— without her he is *nothing* —and this is a danger that makes death preferable. In "The Battler" Bugs says of Ad Francis's wife, "one day she just went off and never come back." ". . . He just went crazy." But whether or not the crazy violence with which the punch-drunk ex-fighter hallucinates his old identity in the ring may be expected, in one form or another, from the similarly dependent younger waiter, his double, the soldier, is there so that we may ponder the possible imminent collision with the police, which adumbrates the younger waiter's problem in its broadest, tragic significance; for the state or culture, when *its* uniform—its bristling profession of a deep-rooted illusory identity (like the primitive animal hide)—is seriously threatened, knows no restraint, and lesser groups often claim such juggernaut authority. In this way, the younger waiter's desperate flailing when he feels his identity escaping him becomes a microcosmic suggestion of the suicidal extremes that erupt in all racial, religious, ethnic, and political hostilities where persecution of a scapegoat is needed to shore up a precarious identity.

This is what Frazer is thinking in 1933 when he sees patriotism as "the opium of the people in Italy and Germany": the "doctor," it would turn out (in *Scribner's Magazine* the story was called "Give Us a Prescription, Doctor"), was prescribing, for those people's tranquility, 50 million deaths. Every culture struggles, with its back to the wall, against the realities threatening the identity it claims. For Socrates, wisdom begins when we admit we do not know; but society, denying to the end what its professed identity will not permit it to admit, must bristle like the younger waiter, and self-destruct. From the older waiter's rejection of the bodega, with its "shining steam-pressure coffee machine," we gather that Hemingway foresees no salvation in the identity technological civilization offers. Our effort to discover what the human race is turns out to be back-breaking Sisyphean labor—a cruel joke— if our vaunted openness to cultural development is an endless, savage turmoil of one self-deception after another. But Hemingway does not

believe it endless. Whether justifiably, or only reflecting his own depression, he gives us, in his next book, *Green Hills of Africa,* his opinion of our ability to solve our problem. He compares what the human race will leave behind—after "the systems of governments, the richness, the poverty, the martyrdom, the sacri- fice and the venality and the cruelty are all gone"— to the five loads of garbage dumped on a good day outside Havana, turning the Gulf Stream to "a pale green to a depth of four or five fathoms": "in ten miles along the coast it is as clear and blue and unimpressed as it was ever before the tug hauled out the scow." There, for Hemingway—after the floating debris is gone ("the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty condoms of our great loves") and as long as the sun rises—is the lasting "clean, well-lighted place."

Source: David Kerner, "The Ambiguity of 'A Clean Well lighted Place,'" in *Studies In Short Fiction,* Vol. 29, No. 4, Fall, 1992, pp. 561-74.

Critical Essay #3

In this essay Hoffman examines the three characters' experiences of "nada," or nothingness, in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and shows how the concept pervades Hemingway's work.

One of his most frequently discussed tales, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is justly regarded as one of the stylistic masterpieces of Ernest Hemingway's distinguished career in short fiction. Not only does it represent Hemingway at his understated, laconic best, but, according to Carlos Baker, "It shows once again that remarkable union of the naturalistic and the symbolic which is possibly his central triumph in the realm of practical aesthetics." In a mere five pages, almost entirely in dialogue and interior monologue, the tale renders a complex series of interactions between three characters in a Spanish cafe just prior to and immediately after closing: a stoic old waiter, a brash young waiter, and a wealthy but suicidal old man given to excessive drink.

Aside from its well-documented stylistic achievement, what has drawn the most critical attention is Hemingway's detailed consideration of the concept of *nada*. Although the old waiter is the only one to articulate the fact, all three figures actually confront nothingness in the course of the tale. This is no minor absence in their lives. Especially "for the old waiter," Carlos Baker notes, "the word *nothing* (or *nada*) contains huge actuality. The great skill in the story is the development, through the most carefully controlled understatement, of the young waiter's mere *nothing* into the old waiter's Something—a Something called Nothing which is so huge, terrible, overbearing, inevitable and omnipresent that once experienced, it can never be forgotten." Because the terrifying "Something called Nothing" looms so very large, and since "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" appeared in a 1933 collection in which even "winners" take "nothing," critics have generally come to see the piece as a nihilistic low point in Hemingway's career, a moment of profound despair both for the characters and the author.

If this standard position does have a certain validity, it also tends to overlook two crucial points about the story. First is its relation to the rest of Hemingway's highly unified short story canon. In the same way that two of the three characters in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" meet *nada* without voicing the fact, all of the major short story characters also experience it in one of its multiple guises. Thus "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," a rather late story written in 1933, is something of a summary statement on this recurrent theme; the tale brings to direct expression the central crisis of those that precede it—including the most celebrated of the Nick Adams stories—and looks forward to its reso lution in the masterpieces that come later, "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936) and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936).

Second, because *nada* appears to dominate "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," it has been easy to miss the fact that the story is not about *nada per se* but the various available human responses to it. As a literary artist, Hemingway was generally less concerned with speculative metaphysics than with modes of practical conduct within certain *a priori* conditions. The ways in which the character triad in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"

respond to *nada* summarize character responses throughout the canon. The fact that only one, the old waiter, directly voices his experience and manages to deal successfully with nothingness is also indicative of a general trend. Those few Hemingway characters who continue to function even at the razor's edge do so in the manner of this heroic figure—by establishing for themselves a clean, well-lighted place from which to withstand the enveloping darkness. For these reasons, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" must be termed the thematic as well as the stylistic climax of Hemingway's career in short fiction.

Although the difficulty of attributing certain individual statements in the tale creates some ambiguity on the subject, it is clear that the young waiter's use of the term *nada* to convey a personal lack of a definable commodity *(nothing)* is much too narrowly conceived. In his crucial meditation at the end, the old waiter makes it quite clear that nada is not an individual state but one with grave universal implications: "It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was *all* a nothing and a man was nothing too" [my italics]. According to William Barrett, the *nada*-shadowed realm of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is no less than a microcosm of the existential universe as defined by Martin Heidegger and the existentialist philosophers who came before and after him, principally Kierkegaard and Sartre. Barrett's position finds internal support in the old waiter's celebrated parody prayer: "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada." The character's deft substitution of the word *nada* for all the key nouns (entities) and verbs (actions) in the Paternoster suggests the concept's truly metaphysical stature. Obviously, *nada* is to connote a series of significant absences: the lack of a viable transcendent source of power and authority; a correlative lack of external physical or spiritual sustenance; the total lack of moral justifi- cation for action (in the broadest perspective, the essential meaninglessness of *any* action); and finally, the impossibility of deliverance from this situation.

The impact of *nada*, however, extends beyond its theological implications. Rather, in the Heideggerian sense ("das Nicht"), it is an umbrella term that subsumes all of the irrational, unforeseeable, existential forces that tend to infringe upon the human self, to make a "nothing." It is the absolute power of chance and circumstance to negate individual free will and the entropic tendency toward ontological disorder that perpetually looms over man's tenuous personal sense of order. But the most fearsome face of *nada*, and clear proof of man's radical contingency, is death—present here in the old man's wife's death and his own attempted suicide. Understandably, the old waiter's emotional response to this composite threat is mixed. It "was not fear or dread," which would imply a specific object to be feared, but a pervasive uneasiness, an existential anxiety that, according to Heidegger, arises when one becomes fully aware of the precarious status of his very being.

That the shadow of *nada* looms behind much of Hemingway's fiction has not gone entirely unnoticed. Nathan Scott's conclusions on this issue serve as a useful summary of critical opinion: "Now it is blackness beyond a clean, well-lighted place—this 'nothing full of nothing' that betrays 'confidence'; that murders sleep, that makes the having of

plenty of money a fact of no consequence at all—it is this blackness, ten times black, that constitutes the basic metaphysical situation in Hemingway's fiction and that makes the human enterprise something very much like a huddling about a campfire beyond which looms the unchartable wilderness, the great Nada." The problem with this position is that it tends to locate *nada* somewhere outside of the action, never directly operative within it. It is, to William Barrett, "the presence that had circulated, *unnamed* and *unconfronted,* throughout much of [Hemingway's] earlier writing" [my italics].

The clearest indication of *nada's* direct presence in the short stories is to be found in the characters' frequent brushes with death, notably the characteristic modern forms of unexpected, unmerited, and very often mechanical death that both Frederick J. Hoffman and R. P. Warren consider so crucial in Hemingway. Naturally, these instances are the climactic moments in some of the best known tales: the interchapters from *In Our Time*, "Indian Camp," "The Killers," "The Capital of the World," and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." But death or the imminent threat of death need not be literally present to signal an encounter with *nada*. What Philip Young and others have called Nick Adams's "initiation" to life's trials is actually his initiation to *nada*. In "The End of Something" and "The Three Day Blow," Nick must cope with the precariousness of love in a precarious universe; in "The Battler," with the world's underlying irrationality and potential for violence; in "Cross- Country Snow," with the power of external circumstance to circumscribe individual initiative. In several important stories involving the period in Nick's chronology after the critical "wound," *nada* as the ultimate unmanageability of life, appears as a concrete image. In "Big Two-Hearted River," it is both the burnt-out countryside and the forbidding swamp; in "Now I Lay Me," the night; in "A Way You'll Never Be," a "long yellow house" (evidently the site of the wound).

Other imagistic references to *nada* appear in the non-Nick Adams tales. In "The Undefeated," it is the bull, a particularly apt concrete manifestation of active malevolence in the universe, also suggested by the lion and buffalo in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." These particular images, however, are potentially misleading because *nada* does not usually appear so actively and personally combative. An example to the contrary may be found in "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" where *nada* is the distinctly impersonal and paralyzing banality of life in an isolated hospital, as well as the constant "risk" of a gambler's uncertain profession. Regardless of its specific incarnation, *nada* is always a dark presence which upsets individual equilibrium and threatens to overwhelm the self. And, as Jackson Benson has pointed out, "A threat to selfhood is the ultimate horror that the irrational forces of the world can accomplish." In that each story in the canon turns on the way in which particular characters respond to the inevitable confrontation with *nada*, the nature of that response is particularly important. The only effective way to approach the Void is to develop a very special mode of being, the concrete manifestation of which is the clean, well-lighted place.

Again, it is the old waiter who speaks most directly of the need for a physical bastion against the all-encompassing night: "It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity." In direct contrast to the dirty, noisy *bodega* to which he repairs after closing and all the "bad" places that appear in Hemingway's

fiction, the pleasant cafe at which the old waiter works possesses all of these essential attributes: light, cleanness, and the opportunity for some form of dignity. Perhaps the most direct antithesis of this legitimate clean, well-lighted place is not even in this particular story but in one of its companion pieces in *Winner Take Nothing,* the infernal bar in "The Light of the World" (1933). Here, light does little more than illuminate the absence of the other qualities, the lack of which moves one of the characters to ask pointedly, "'What the hell kind of place is this?"' Thus, in an inversion of the typical procedure in Hemingway, Nick and his companion are impelled outside where it is "good and dark."

Evidently, well-lighted places in Hemingway do not always meet the other requirements of the clean, well-lighted place. Moreover, since the cafe in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" must eventually close, even the legitimate haven has distinct limitations. These facts should be enough to alert us to the possibility that tangible physical location is not sufficient to combat the darkness. The clean, welllighted place that is, is not actually a "place" at all; rather, it is a metaphor for an attitude toward the self and its existential context, a psychological perspective which, like the cafe itself with its fabricated conveniences and electric light, is man-made, artifical. The "cleanliness" of the metaphor connotes a personal sense of order, however artifical and temporary, carved out within the larger chaos of the universe, a firm hold on the self with which one can meet any contingency. By "light" Hemingway refers to a special kind of vision, the clear-sightedness and absolute lack of illusion necessary to look into the darkness and thereby come to grips with the *nada* which is everywhere. At the same time, vision must also be directed at the self so as to assure its cleanness. With cleanness and light, then, physical locale is irrelevant. Whoever manages to internalize these qualities carries the clean, well-lighted place with him, even into the very teeth of the darkness. The degree to which the Hemingway character can develop and maintain this perspective determines his success (or lack thereof) in dealing with the Void.

The man who does achieve the clean, welllighted place is truly an existential hero, both in the Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian senses of the term. In the former, he is content to live with his *angst*, and, because there is no other choice, content to be in doubt about ultimate causes. Nevertheless, he is able to meet the varied and often threatening circumstances of day-to-day living, secure in the knowledge that he will always "become" and never "be." In the latter, he can face the unpleasant realities of his own being and the situation into which he has been "thrown," and can accept with composure the invitability of his death. In both instances, he is an "authentic" man.

Two of the main characters in "A Clean, Well- Lighted Place," as well as a host of analogous figures in other tales, fail to develop this attitude either for lack of "light" (the young waiter) or for lack of "cleanness" (the old man). As is evidenced by his inability to grasp the full impact of his partner's use of the word *nothing,* the egotistic young waiter has not even grasped the fact of *nada*—has not *seen* clearly—and therefore can hardly deal with it. "To him," comments Joseph Gabriel, "*nada* can only signify a personal physical privation. *Nothing* refers simply to the absence of those objects capable of providing material satisfaction. And by extension he applies the term to all behavior which does not grant the sufficiency of things." Unable to see that the old man's wealth

is a woefully inadequate bulwark against the Void, he is, in his ignorance, contemptuous both of the man and his predicament. Perhaps as a direct outgrowth of this lack of light, the young waiter also violates the principle of cleanness by sloppily pouring his customer's desperately needed brandy over the sides of the glass. Thus, he easily loses himself in a fool's paradise of blindness and illusion. Still young, secure in his job, and, as he boasts, "'I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me,'" he is "all confidence": as such, a particularly patent example to the old waiter of those who "lived in it [*nada*] and never felt it."

Yet, in the course of the story, even this naif has an unsettling glimpse of the fundamental uncertainty of existence and its direct impact on his own situation. What else can account for his sharply defensive reaction to the old waiter's joke? [Old Waiter]: "'And you? You have no fear of going home before your usual hour?' " [Young Waiter]: "'Are you trying to insult me?'" [Old Waiter]: "'No, hombre, only to make a joke.'" The youth's subsequent grandiose claims to security notwithstanding, the force with which he objects to the merest possibility of marital infidelity clearly underscores the shaky foundations of his "confi- dence." This bogus self-assurance does not emanate from a mature awareness of himself and his world, but is based on the most transitory of conditions: youth, present employment, sexual prowess, and the assumed loyalty of his wife. The young waiter depends for his very being on factors over which he has no control, leaving him particularly vulnerable, in the case of marital uncertainty, to what Warren Bennett calls the "love wound," a common form of deprivation in Hemingway. But because he is essentially devoid of light or insight, he is not cognizant of the significance of his testy reply; his vision is so clouded by putative "confi- dence" that he fails to see through the ephemeral to the underlying darkness in his own life. Consequently, he cannot even begin to reconstruct his existence upon a more substantial basis.

Hemingway must have reveled in such naifs, aflame with so obviously compromised bravado, for he created many of them. Perhaps the most notable is Paco, the would-be bullfighter of "The Capital of the World" (1936), who even in the face of his own death, is "full of illusions." For many of these characters, moreover, blindness is not a natural state but a willed escape from *nada.* Conscious flight from reality is particularly prevalent in the early stages of the "education" of Nick Adams. In "Indian Camp" (1924), for instance, one of the first segments in the Adams chronology, Nick has a youthful encounter with *nada* both as the incontrovertible fact of death (the Indian husband's suicide) and as human frailty, the intrinsic vulnerability of mankind to various species of physical and psychic suffering (the Indian woman's protracted and painful labor). The pattern of avoidance set when he refuses to witness the Caesarean section climaxes in his more significant refusal to recognize the inevitability of death itself at the end. Lulled by the deceptive calm of his present circumstances—a purely fortuitous and temporary clean, well-lighted place—he maintains an internal darkness by retreating into willed ignorance:

They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the

water. He felt the sharp chill of the morning.In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die.

In another early story, "The Killers" (1927), the somewhat older Nick is again faced with harsh reality, but his reaction to it has not appreciably altered. Again, death (the Swede's) is the primary manifestation of the Void. But here the manner of its coming is also particularly important as a signature of *nada*. As represented by the black-clad henchmen who invade the café another inadequate place of refuge—*nada* is totally impersonal; in the words of one of the killers, "'He [the Swede] never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us.'" Moreover, *nada* displays its tendency to disrupt without warning any established external order, and, ironically, is visited upon its victims not without a certain macabre humor. Naturally, as Nick learns from the intended victim, its effects are totally irremediable. Thus, in spite of their suggestive black clothing, the killers do not represent forces of evil unleashed in an otherwise good world, as so many critics have claimed: rather, they stand for the wholly amoral, wholly irrational, wholly random operation of the universe, which, because it so clearly works to the detriment of the individual, is *perceived to* be malevolent and evil.

In spite of the clearly educational nature of his experience, Nick once again refuses initiation. Only now his unreasoned compulsion to escape is more pronounced than that of his younger counterpart. Deluded into thinking that this is the kind of localized danger that can be avoided by a mere change in venue, Nick vows not only physical flight ("'I'm going to get out of this town'") but psychological flight as well: "'I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful.'" Both versions of Nick Adams, then, are "young waiter" figures because they neither will allow themselves to look directly at the fearsome face of *nada* nor recognize its direct applicability to their own insecure lives.

That such an attitude is ultimately insupportable is exemplified by a third early tale, "Cross- Country Snow" (1925). Here, yet another Nick employs a physically demanding activity, skiing, as an escape from yet another incarnation of nada, entrapping circumstance. This appearance of the Void is also ironic in that the specific circumstance involved is the life-enhancing pregnancy of Nick's wife. Nevertheless, its impact on the character is much the same as before in that it serves to severely circumscribe independent initiative, even to the point of substituting an externally imposed identity— in this case, fatherhood—on the true self. Once again misled by the temporary security of the "good place," this Nick also attempts to escape the inescapable, and, at the height of his self-delusion, is moved to raise his pursuit of physical release to the level of absolute value: "'We've got to [ski again]. . . . It [life] isn't worth while if you can't.'"

The ski slope, however, offers only apparent protection from *nada*, for even in his joyous adventure, Nick encounters its own form or hidden danger: "Then a patch of soft snow, left in a hollow by the wind, spilled him and he went over and over in a clashing of skis, feeling like a shot rabbit." Unlike the others, this story ends with clarified vision, and Nick does come to terms with the inevitable external demands upon him. Finally, he is no longer able to pretend that the pleasures of the ski slopes— themselves, not always

unmixed—are anything more than temporary, in no way definitive of human existence or even a long-lived accommodation to it. Thus, in response to his companion's suggested pact to repeat their present idyll, Nick must realistically counter, "'There isn't any good in promising.'"

In his relationship to *nada*, the old man of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is cast as the polar opposite of the young waiter. Said to be eighty years old, virtually deaf, and recently widowed, he is "in despair" in spite of his reputed wealth, and has attempted suicide shortly before the story begins. Unlike the young waiter, he has the light of unclouded vision because he has clearly seen the destructive effects of time and circumstance on love and the self and directly witnessed *nada* in its death mask. But unlike the old waiter, he has not been able to sustain a satisfactory mode of being in the face of these discoveries. He therefore seeks escape from his knowledge either through the bottle or the total denial of life in suicide. Undoubtedly, the old man senses the importance of the clean, well-lighted place, but to him it is very literally a "place" and thereby no more helpful in combatting *nada* than Nick's ski slope. That it is inadequate is suggested imagistically at the outset; darkness has indeed invaded this character's "place," for he sits "in the shadows the leaves of the trees made against the electric light."

What seems to offer the old man the little balance he possesses, and thus helps keep him alive, is a modicum of internal cleanness and self-possession, his dignity or style. Of course, this is an issue of great import in Hemingway in that an ordered personal style is one of the few sources of value in an otherwise meaningless universe. The old waiter draws attention to this pitiful figure's style when he rebukes the young waiter for callously characterizing the old man as "'a nasty old thing'": "'This old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk.'" But even this vestige of grace has been compromised over time. While the old man leaves the cafe "with dignity," he is "walking unsteadily."

The product of a series of encounters with *nada*, the old man's despair is mirrored in two Nick Adams stories on the period immediately following the critical war wound. In "Now I Lay Me" (1927), the emotional dislocation stemming from his brush with death is continued in an almost psychotic dread of the night and sleep. *Nada,* is imaged both as the night itself and, as Carlos Baker has suggested, by the disturbing and seemingly ceaseless munching of silkworms, just out of sight but most assuredly not out of Nick's disturbed mind. Paradoxically, the protagonist's abject terror in the face of potential selflessness—permanent in death; temporary in sleep—has resulted in a severe dissociation of the self. Using Paul Tillich's descriptive terminology from *The Courage To Be,* one can say that he is burdened by "pathological" anxiety: a condition of drastically reduced self-affirmation, a flight from nonbeing that entails a corresponding flight from being itself: "I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time, ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back."

Awakened to the fact of his own death, Nick experiences *angst* so strongly that he is virtually paralyzed. Unwilling to sleep in the dark and not yet able to develop an internal light and cleanness to cope with his trauma, he depends entirely on external sources of illumination: "If I could have a light I was not afraid to sleep." In the absence of this light, however, he attempts to pull back from the awareness of *nada* by reliving the happier times of his youth, a period of cleanness and assured order. But the search for a good "place" in the past is ultimately fruitless; his memories of favorite trout streams tend to blur in his mind and inevitably lead him to unpleasant reminiscences of his father's ruined collection of arrowheads and zoological specimens, a chaotic heap of fragments that merely mirrors his present internal maelstrom.

In "A Way You'll Never Be" (1933), Nick's dissociation has not been remedied and is suggested initially by the post-battle debris with which the story opens. Plagued by a recurring dream of "a low house painted yellow with willows all around it and a low stable and there was a canal, and he had been there a thousand times and never seen it, but there it was every night as plain as the hill, only it frightened him," he is close to an old man's despair. He now intuits something of the significance of the vision: "That house meant more than anything and ever night he had it [the dream]. That was what he needed." But he is still too traumatized by the experience there to examine it more closely, and can only ramble on in self-defense about the "American locust," another familiar item from his childhood. In his present condition, Nick is an oddly appropriate choice for the absurd mission on which he has been sent, to display his American uniform in order to build morale among the Italian troops. At the moment, his "self," like the entire American presence in the region, is solely the uniform; the clothes are as dimly suggestive of a more substantial identity as they are of the substantial military support they are designed to promise. For the present, though, this barely adequate package for his violently disturbed inner terrain is Nick's only semblance of the clean, well-lighted place. Still insufficiently initiated into the dangerous world in which he is doomed to live, he desperately clutches at any buffer that will hold *nada* in abeyance.

The other side of Hemingway's "old man" figure is epitomized by Manuel Garcia, the aging bullfighter of "The Undefeated" (1925). After numerous brushes with death in the bullring, he too depends for his very being on style. Garcia's style has also eroded, leaving him defenseless against the bull, Harold Kaplan's "beast of *nada*." Banished from the brightly lit afternoon bouts, he now performs in the shadowy nocturnals for a "second string critic" and with bulls that "'the veterinaries won't pass in the daytime.'" The performance itself is merely "acceptable" if not "vulgar." Largely as a result of his diminished capabilities, he is seriously (and perhaps mortally) wounded, and, at the conclusion, is left with only his *coletta,* as is the old man his shred of dignity. With these all-important manifestations of internal cleanness sullied, the fates of both are equally uncertain: Manuel's on the operating table, and the old man's in the enveloping night.

Of all Hemingway's short story characters, however, the one who most fully recapitulates the "old man" typology is Mr. Frazer of "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" (1933). Confined to a backcountry hospital as a result of a riding accident, Frazer too experiences *nada*, "the Nothingness that underlies pain, failure, and disillusionment alike," in the form of his own incapacity and that of the broken men who

share his predicament. He also experiences banality, one of the less overtly disturbing but nonetheless ominous visages of *nada*, in the form of the numbing routine of this claustrophobic, but clean and well-lighted place. If Frazer has an old man's clear perspective on nothingness, he is no better able to achieve the cleanness of character necessary to cope with it. As is suggested by Hemingway's first title for the story, "Give Us a Prescription, Doctor," Frazer too seeks external anodynes for his *nada*—induced pain. His compulsion to monitor random radio broadcasts and so imaginatively transport himself from his present circumstances is analogous to the old man's drinking because each involves a flight from, rather than a confrontation with reality. His very choice of songs—"Little White Lies" and "Sing Something Simple"—serves to underscore the escapism of this pastime.

In the end, however, neither escape succeeds. The old man remains in despair, and Frazer is given to periodic fits of uncontrollable weeping. In the same way that the former cannot entirely banish the specter of loneliness and death from his consciousness, neither can Frazer, nor any man, completely cloud his view of *nada* with the various "opiums" at his disposal. The very consideration of the question of release leads Frazer through the opium haze to the terrible truth that lies beneath:

Religion is the opium of the people. . . . Yes, and music is the opium of the people. . . . And now economics is the opium of the people; along with patriotism the opium of the people in Italy and Germany. . . . But drink was a sovereign opium of the people, oh, an excellent opium. Although some prefer the radio, another opium of the people, a cheap one he had just been using. . . . What was the real, the actual opium of the people? . . . What was it? Of course; broad was the opium of the people. . . . [Only] Revolution, Mr. Frazer thought, is no opium. Revolution is a catharsis; an ecstasy which can only be prolonged by tyranny. The opiums are for before and for after. He was thinking well, a little too well.

The old waiter definitely stands apart from the other two characters in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." If the running controvery over dialogue attribution has thrown some doubt on whether he or his young partner first learns of the old man's attempted suicide, it has done nothing to contradict earlier assumptions on which of the two is more sensitive to the reasons for it. It is evident throughout that the old waiter's insight into the word *nothing* he so frequently uses is much broader. He recognizes from the first that the old man's despair is not a reaction to a material lack but to a basic metaphysical principle. Thus, he is unable to delude himself into a bogus "confidence." When he responds to the youth's boasting with "'You have everything,'" he is clearly being ironic; the latter indeed has "everything," *except* a firm hold on the "nothing" which underlies "everything." They are "of two different kinds" because the old waiter knows the ability to withstand the dark "is not only a question of youth and confidence although those things are very beautifu." In spite of their superfi- cial beauty, both the transitory condition of youth and the illusory confidence that so often goes with it are clearly inadequate tools with which to combat the darkness.

There is a closer connection with the old man, however, initially because the news of his attempted suicide begins the old waiter's formal consideration of the reasons for it. In

this sense, at the beginning of the tale, the old waiter is a representation of Earl Rovit's "tyro" and Philip Young's "Hemingway hero" (as opposed to the "tutor" and "code hero") in that he is in the process of learning about the dark underside of life. But while the old man's plight is a necessary goad for the old waiter's musings on his own situation, the latter certainly outstrips his "mentor" in the lengths to which he pushes his speculations on *nada* : "What did [the old waiter] fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada."

Like the old man, then, the old waiter sees clearly, in fact more clearly, the fearsome nothing, but he reacts far differently to his discovery. Instead of lapsing into despair or escaping into drunkenness, this character displays true metaphysical courage in raising the concept of *nada* to a central article in his overtly existentialist creed, climaxing with his mock prayer of adoration, "Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee." Perhaps even more importantly, he refuses to limit himself to abstract speculation but willingly embraces the impact of universal nothingness on his own person. Thus, in response to the barman's question, "'What's yours?'" he demonstrates the ironic sense of humor that typifies him throughout by unflinching answering, "'Nada.'" No other statement in the tale so clearly designates the old waiter as the central figure of Hemingway's 1933 collection: he is the "winner" who truly takes "nothing" as his only possible reward.

If his stoic courage in the shadow of the Void differentiates the old waiter from the old man, so does his method for dealing with it. Again, the old waiter provides some grounds for confusing the two modes of existence when he insists upon the importance of a purely physical haven: "'I am one of those who like to stay late at the cafe. . . . With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night.'" Yet, he does more than merely accept the dubious protection of an already established "place"; he is, in fact, the keeper of the "clean, well-lighted place," the one who maintains both its cleanness and its light. To cite Cleanth Brooks on this subject, "The order and right are supplied by *him*. They do *not* reflect an inherent, though concealed, order in the universe. What little meaning there is in the world is imposed upon that world by man." Given the stark contrast between his cafe and the distinctly unclean and illlighted bar he frequents after work, his almost ritualistic efforts to furnish and consistently maintain these essential qualities are definitely not representative of those around him. Finally, the old waiter's clean, well-lighted place is distinctly portable—transcending "place" altogether—because it is so thoroughly internalized. He carries it in the form of equanimity and dignity to the shabby *bodega*, and he carries it home as well.

Thus, it is the old waiter, a man who can see clearly the darkness surrounding him yet so order his life that he can endure this awareness, who most fully attains the attitude symbolized by the clean, well-lighted place. In the society presented by this tale, and in the Hemingway canon as a whole, he is indeed "*otro loco mas*" when set against a standard of sanity epitomized by an egotistical partner, unfeeling barmen, lustful soldiers, and suicidal old men. Both realist and survivor, epitome of "grace under pressure," he is by the end of the tale an exceptional man and very much a

representation of the highest level of heroism in Hemingway's fictional world, whether it be denoted by Young's "code hero" or Rovit's "tutor." Even his insomnia, which he regards as a common trait ("Many must have it"), is a mark of his extraordinary character: his vision is too clear, his sense of self too firm, to allow him the ease of insensate slumber. One need only compare this insomnia with Nick Adams' pathological fear of sleep in "Now I Lay Me" to appreciate the qualitative difference between the old waiter and other men.

Some of Hemingway's most important tales also contain characters who either presage an achievement of or actually attain the old waiter's clean, well-lighted place. A notable early example is the Nick Adams of "Big Two-Hearted River" (1925). Again, the confrontation with *nada*, is critical here, but the appearance of *nada* is more artfully veiled than in other tales. There are hints of the Void in the description of the burned-over countryside at the beginning, in Nick's vision of the trout "tightened facing up into the current" shortly thereafter, and in the methodical series of tasks that comprise the central action of the story. As Malcolm Cowley first suggested and Sheridan Baker has since amplified, the ritualistic series connotes a desperate attempt to hold off something "he had left behind"; in Philip Young's reading, the "something" is the memory of the traumatic war wound that so discomfits other versions of Nick in "Now I Lay Me" and "A Way You'll Never Be." But *nada* is most overtly suggested by the forbidding swamp: "Nick did not want to go in there now. . . . 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." Aside from the old waiter's prayer, this is Hemingway's most detailed characterization of *nada*: 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.

As the "patches" of sunlight suggest, though, the *nada*/swamp can be discerned and therefore analyzed by human vision. And, by the end of the story, Nick seems to have gained the light necessary to see into the Void—at the very least, to realize that he can never truly leave it behind him. Yet Nick still lacks the inner cleanness to delve further into *nada*; he is still too dependent on a distinct physical locale as a buffer zone. As he says early on, "He was there, in the good place." But the very ritualistic behavior that alerted Cowley to the possibility of a mind not right also suggests progress toward an internalized order. 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. Thus, while the tale ends with a temporary withdrawal from direct confrontation, Nick strikes a positive note when he says, "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp."

Two characters in the late short stories actually do "fish" the swamp of *nada*, the sportsman Macomber in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936) and the writer Harry of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936). The two men approach the clean, well-lighted place from different directions, however: Macomber, from an old man's despair; and Harry, from a young waiter's naive faith in transitory material security. For Macomber, the master of "court games" and darling of drawing rooms, it is necessary to leave the protective enclosures of the rich to meet his *nada* in the African tall grass in

the figure of the wounded lion, an epitome of pure destructive force: "All of him [the lion], pain, sickness, hatred and all of his remaining strength, was tightening into an absolute concentration for a rush." The brush with externally conceived *nada* triggers Macomber's cowardly flight, but more importantly leads him to an appreciation of his own inner emptiness, a Sartrian version of nothingness, as well as a Sartrian *nausea* at his inauthenticity. Granted, Macomber responds to the threat with fear, but it is also more than fear, "a cold slimy hollow in all the emptiness where once his confidence had been and it made him feel sick." Thus Macomber comes face to face with the fact that nada need not destroy the physical being to make man a "nothing"; man is a nothing unless and until he makes himself "something."

The black despair that follows his initiation to *nada* without and within is not Macomber's final stage. Through the ministrations of the hunter Wilson and the familiar, secure place (the jeep), he undergoes a significant and almost miraculous change at the buffalo hunt. As Wilson describes it, "Beggar had probably been afraid all his life. Don't know what started it. But over now. Hadn't had time to be afraid with the buff. That and being angry too. Motor car too. Motor cars made it familiar. Be a damn fire eater now." The jeep is indeed useful as a means for facing *nada* analogous to the old waiter's cafe and Nick Adams' peaceful campsite, but Macomber's real "place" is distinctly internal. Again, Wilson furnishes the analysis: "Fear gone like an operation. *Something else grew in its place.* Main thing a man had. Made him into a man [italics mine]." Macomber's real achievement, then, is the creation of an ordered "something" to fill the inner void. It not only prepares him for the buffalo hunt but enables him to see clearly, as if for the first time, his inauthentic condition, not the least important facet of which has been his sacrifice of personal identity to an unfulfilling marriage and social expectation. With his "place" securely inside him, he can face with dignity and courage another brush with *nada* in the "island of bushy trees," a hostile testing ground certainly reminiscent of Nick's swamp.

In "Snows of Kilimanjaro," Harry too has multiple confrontations with *nada*, the first of which is with the ultimate manifestation of the Void, death: "It came with a rush; not as a rush of water nor of wind; but of a sudden evil-smelling emptiness." As we learn later, this appearance certainly fits Carlos Baker's oxymoronic designation for *nada* as the "nothing that is something," for "It had no shape, any more. It simply occupied space." The immediate effect of the experience is to lead Harry to an appreciation of the underlying absurdity of an existence that could be doomed by such a trivial injury— a small scratch which becomes gangrenous for lack of proper medication. With this awareness of his radical contingency, the protagonist can defuse death of its terror: "Since the gangrene started in his right leg he had no pain and with the pain the horror had gone and all he felt now was a great tiredness and anger that this was the end of it. . . . For years it had obsessed him; but now it meant nothing in itself."

Like Macomber's, Harry's brush with imminent death also awakens him to a second face of *nada*, the inner nothing caused by his failure to preserve artistic integrity, his very self, against the lures of the inconsequential: material comfort, fi- nancial security, hedonistic pleasure. Every bit as much as Macomber, this most autobiographical of Hemingway's short story characters suffers a hollowness at the very core. Therefore,

the basic thrust of the tale is Harry's effort to cleanse and reorder his life through a pointed self criticism. Gradually he manages to "work the fat off his soul" by jettisoning the excess baggage of a young waiter's facile confidence in the material and replaces it with something more substantial, a pledge to take up his writing once more. Again, the process is facilitated by his being situated in a tangible clean, welllighted place: "This was a pleasant camp under big trees against a hill, with good water, and close by, a nearly dry water hole where sand grouse flighted in the morning." But again, the important "place" is actually within. According to Gloria Dussinger, Harry's difficult rite of purification leads, as it should, to a reclamation of his own identity: "Harry is left with his naked self, the irreducible *I am* that defies chaos." Though the climactic dream flight from the plain is decidedly ambiguous, it does seem to vouchsafe Harry's success at this endeavor, for the author allows him imaginative entry into the cleanest and best lighted of all the places in the short story canon: "great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that there was where he was going."

Although Harry and Macomber both achieve the clean, well-lighted place, their premature deaths deprive them of the opportunity to bring additional value to their lives, as the old waiter most assuredly does. Having controlled his own life through the implementation of a clean, well-lighted place, he fulfills the remaining provisions of Eliot's "Waste Land" credo by sympathizing with the plight of others and aiding them in their own pursuits of this all important attitude. In so doing, he becomes an existential hero in Martin Buber's particular sense of the term, a champion of the "I-Thou" relationship. His "style" is essentially compassion, the willingness to treat others as valid, subjective "Thous" rather than depersonalized "Its." This facet of his personality is implicit as early as his expression of sympathy for the pleasure-seeking soldier who risks curfew violation. As he himself comments on the risks involved, "'What does it matter if he gets what he's after?'" But his capacity for true compassion is made most explicit near the end, particularly in his admission, "'Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the cafe.'"

The ability to extend outward to others from a firmly established self is once again in direct contrast to the narrow, selfish pride of the young waiter, who is unmoved by the needs of the old man and sees love as a matter of blind loyalty (verging on bondage) and physical gratification. This inclination is made all too clear by his insensitive comment on the old widower's plight: "'A wife would be no good to him now.'" The old waiter's attitude is also contrasted to that of the old man, who is so absorbed by his own misery that he is barely cognizant of others. This admirable figure passes beyond Rovit's "tyro" stage to that of "tutor" when he humorously, but pointedly, attempts to instruct the youth on the evanescence of "confidence" and the latter's serious misuse of love (e.g., by the joke). Moreover, he tries to provide the morose old man with some basis upon which to reconstruct his shattered life by rendering to this wretched figure the respect and sympathy he so desperately needs. Thus, in Buber's sense as in Heidegger's, Kierkegaard's, and Sartre's, the old waiter "authenticates" his life by fulfilling his responsibilities both to himself and to others.

The picador Zurito in "The Undefeated," the dignified major in "Another Country" (1927), and the guide Wilson of "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" all transcend the limits of selfsufficiency by sympathizing with and proferring aid to those who most need it. But the character who most closely approximates the old waiter's multifaceted heroism is Cayetano Ruiz, the luckless gambler of "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio," a story whose three main characters (Ruiz, Frazer, Sister Cecilia) form a triadic grouping analogous to the hero, victim, and nail of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place."

That the gambler does attain the exemplary attitude is implicit in William Barrett's summary characterization of him: "Cayentano is the absurd hero who carries on his code, even if it is only the code of a cheap gambler, defiantly and gracefully against the Void." Cayetano, of course, earns his heroism in that he too encounters the death mask of *nada*. Like Harry's, his wound comes totally without warning, and, given the rather unreliable aim of his assailant, almost totally by accident. Yet even before this crisis, the perspicacious gambler with eyes "alive as a hawk's" has undoubtedly sensed its presence in the form of chance and the everpresent risk of his chosen profession. In spite of the fact that his work takes him into places that are anything but clean and well-lighted, he has so internalized the "place" that he can calmly face external hostility and internal suffering, and face them with honor and exemplary courage. Consequently, he refuses to inform on his assailant and also refuses opiates to dull the physical pain that serves as metaphor for the metaphysical pain *nada* induces.

But Ruiz is far more than Barrett's "cheap," albeit heroic, gambler because he strives to communicate his insights on life to others. Indirect proof of his compassion is to be found both in his embarrassment over the offensive odor of his peritonitis and in his considerate silence even in periods of terrible pain. Direct evidence is available in the conversations with Frazer. Here Ruiz incisively analyses the untreatable ills of the human condition□the absurd irony, the prevalence of accident and risk, and, most of all, the difficulty of maintaining a self amidst the vagaries of fortune that have driven his auditor to tears. Like the old waiter, he is quite capable of humbling himself, denigrating his own considerable courage, in order to provide comfort to one less able to withstand *nada*. Surely he consciously misstates fact when, in an attempt to assuage Frazer's shame at lapsing into tears, he declares, "'If I had a private room and a radio I would be crying and yelling all night long.'" Evidently this self-described "victim of illusions" also possesses the old waiter's ironic consciousness, for it is at the very heart of his dispassionate self-analysis, also delivered principally for Frazer's benefit: "'If I live long enough the luck will change. I have bad luck now for fifteen years. If I ever get any good luck I will be rich.'" Although he fully realizes that "bad luck" will continue to predominate, like the other residents of the *metaphoric* clean, well-lighted place, the gambler is content to "continue, slowly, and wait for luck to change." In the interim, he will continue to try to instill in others some of the light and cleanness essential to the authentication of the self.

In their dealings with the various faces of *nada*, then, the old waiter figures represent the highest form of heroism in the Hemingway short story canon, a heroism matched in the novels perhaps only by the fisherman Santiago. Those who manage to adjust to life on the edge of the abyss do so because they see clearly the darkness that surrounds

them yet create a personal sense of order, an identity with which to maintain balance on this precarious perch. The failure either to see the significance of the encounter with *nada* or, if seen, to constitute an inner cleanness vitiates the lives not only of the young waiter and old man of "A Clean, Well- Lighted Place" but also of a host of similarly flawed figures throughout the canon.

Because of the frequency with which *nada* appears in the short fiction, we can only assume that the Void also played a major role in Hemingway's own life, whether as the shattering war wound or the countless subsequent experiences, both real and imagined, that threatened to make him a "nothing." Carlos Baker concluded as much in his biography: "'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place' was autobiographical . . . in the sense that it offered a brief look into the underside of Ernest's spiritual world, the nightmare of nothingness by which he was still occasionally haunted." But if we are justified in seeing Hemingway's life in terms of his encounters with *nada*, are we not equally justified in following Earl Rovit's lead and thereby treating his fiction as one of the by-products of these encounters—in fact, as a primary strategy for dealing with *nada?*

Both the fiction itself and the author's comments on it seem to support us in this regard, for Hemingway's basic aesthetic suggests precisely the sort of perspective symbolized by the clean, welllighted place. The need for clearsightedness, for instance, is the essence of the writer's celebrated remark on art in *Death in the Afternoon*(1932), a personal testament published just a year before "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place": "Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole. Then any part you make will represent the whole if it is made truly." But unclouded vision alone, not uncommon among his fictional progeny, could guarantee neither a psychological nor an aesthetic clean, well-lighted place. A careful and conscious ordering of disparate material was also required in order to fill the Void of nothing (the blank page) with an enduring something. Thus, the characteristic Hemingway style: the clean, precise, scrupulously ordered prose that so often serves to illuminate shimmering individual objects against a dark background of chaos. As for his old waiter figures, the actual places that inspired the author's descriptions pale against the deftly constructed "places" that *are* the descriptions; because the latter are no longer subject to the random, transitory world of fact but rather interiorized and subsequently transmuted into art itself, they are much more secure, and certainly more permanent, strongholds against nothingness.

In spite of the apparent disdain for utilitarian art in the passage from *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway also performed some of that function, albeit indirectly, by probing the sources of our welldocumented modern malaise and offering at least tentative solutions to it in the form of resolute personal conduct. In this way he too displayed some of the Buberesque qualities of his short story heroes. It should come as no surprise, then, that Granville Hicks' summary of the author's artistic mission has a rather direct applicability to that of the old waiter as well. For in their potential impact on an attentive audience, Hemingway and his extraordinary character are virtually one and the same. Like the latter, "The artist makes his contribution to the salvation of the world by seeing it clearly himself and helping others to do the same."

Perhaps nothing so effectively demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining the clean, well-lighted place than Hemingway's own failure to do so in the years immediately preceding his death. Like so many of his "old man" figures, he never lost sight of *nada* but did lose the essential inner cleanness, without which the light must eventually be overpowered by darkness. With his internal defenses in disarray, Hemingway turned to an old man's despairing act. In effect, in his suicide, he opted for the release from turmoil offered by the metaphorical "opiums" of Mr. Frazer: "He would have a little spot of the giant killer and play the radio, you could play the radio so that you could hardly hear it."

Source: Steven K. Hoffman, *"Nada* and the Clean Well- Lighted Place," in *Essays In Literature,* Vol. VI, No. 1, Spring, 1979, pp. 91-110.

Critical Essay #4

Discussing the imagery, characterization, and theme of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Benert concludes that it is not in fact a story about nothingness but "a totally affirmative story" that dramatizes "the possibility . . . of man continuing to act, to feel even for others, to think even about metaphysics, to create (with a smile), to control and thereby to humanize both himself and his environment."

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" has with justice been considered an archetypal Hemingway story, morally and aesthetically central to the Hemingway canon. But its crystalline structure and sparse diction have led many critics to judge the story itself a simple one, either about nothingness, "a little *nada* story," or about the author's positive values, a story "lyric rather than dramatic." I would like to suggest that it is in neither sense simple, but that the feelings and ideas which lie behind it are complex and are expressed dramatically, chiefly through the characterization of the older waiter. The latter is a man of enormous awareness continually torn between what might be called religious idealism and intellectual nihilism, a combination that surfaces in irony in several places in the story. This tension between two modes of viewing the world is developed through imagery that functions as a setting, through characterization, and, more abstractly, through a theme which I take to be the barriers against *nada.*

The most obvious source of imagery is the words of the title, the qualities of light and cleanness, to which one may add quietness. These terms admirably illustrate what Richard K. Peterson calls the "use of apparently objective words to express values"; they may be followed with profit throughout Hemingway's stories, novels, and non-fiction. But in this story each of these qualities exists also in its negative aspect, its shadow side.

Light provides the most striking image pattern. The cafe has an "electric light" that the older waiter eventually turns off. A street light is picked up by the brass number on a passing soldier's collar. The older waiter is "with all those who need a light for the night." The cafe where he works is "well lighted"; its "light is very good." In the bodega where he buys coffee "the light is very bright and pleasant." After going home he would be able to sleep "with daylight." Obviously, light is not only the antithesis of darkness but an effective barrier against it, or, rather, as Randall Stewart puts it, the light "at any rate, must be made to do."

But it is stated twice that the patron, the old man, "sat in the shadow of the leaves," and the older waiter likes the cafe not only because its light is good but because "now there are shadows of the leaves," Further, the old man particularly liked sitting in the cafe at night because "the dew settled the dust" of the day and "it was quiet and he felt the difference," though he was deaf. Here shadow clearly has a positive connotation, in the sense of shade, of protection from the glare of the light, perhaps because the light is artificial but more likely because any direct light hurts the eyes and exposes the person. In addition, the night is clean and quiet, positive values contrasted to the day's dirt and noise.

The older waiter is equally concerned that his "place" be clean. He contradicts the younger waiter's remark that "an old man is a nasty thing" with "this old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk." In contrast to the younger waiter, who wipes "the edge of the table with a towel" to emphasize that the old man should leave, but earlier had poured brandy so that it "slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile," the older waiter emphasizes several times the necessity of cleanness. Bars and bodegas are open all night, and they have light, but one cannot "stand before a bar with dignity, with correctness."

Its natural occurrence, however, is at night, when "the dew settled the dust." Its negative aspect is even more evident in that statement of the younger waiter that "an old man is a nasty thing," which, as a generalization, the older waiter does not contradict. Since age, as opposed to youth, is specifically associated in this story with greater awareness and sensitivity, in Hemingway terms "imagination," cleanness may be linked with ignorance and insensitivity.

The third positive quality of the cafe is its quietness; the old man, in addition, is deaf. There is the suggestion that another thing wrong with bars is that they may have music, but, in any case, "you do not want music. Certainly you do not want music." Any form of noise, then, like darkness and dirt, is to be avoided.

In this quality is the negative side of all three most evident. The old patron not only cannot tolerate direct light and can be classified with "nasty things," but also he is actually deaf so that no sound even has relevance for him. That the shadow side of quietness is its extreme, in the form of a negation of one whole sense faculty and a major art form, reminds the reader that all three qualities are in some sense negations. Light functions as an absence of darkness, cleanness as an absence of dirt, quietness as an absence of sound. Yet all three are posited as barriers against the ultimate negation, against Nothingness itself—perhaps, for once in literature, a genuine paradox, but certainly a major source of irony in this story.

Other images are less important but function in the same way. Liquor, the "giant killer" of other stories, is a weapon against the darkness, but it also impairs physical functioning, making the old man walk "unsteadily," so that the older waiter notices with pride that he can drink "without spilling. Even now, drunk," walk "with dignity." The younger waiter is "not lonely" because he has "a wife waiting in bed," but for the old man who "had a wife once" now "a wife would be no good," making women, a relationship to a woman, a material, but very temporary and thus illusory, protection against nothingness. All Hemingway's sleepless heroes desire sleep, but the old waiter, acutely conscious of the darkness lurking behind the light, cannot allow himself to lose that consciousness until he has light to protect him. There is a synonymity between being aware and being awake that overrides the psychologically negative connotations of insomnia. Thus, the man who can sleep is unaware and insensitive.

But in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" characterization is even more important than imagery. Though the old patron is the main topic of conversation between the two waiters, he is less important as a character than either of them. He functions more as

part of the setting, a demonstration of the way things are, and as an indirect means for the characterization of the other two men. The younger waiter, also called "the waiter who was in a hurry" and "the waiter with a wife," is not the villain he is often cast to be; he after all "did not wish to be unjust," He is merely *l'homme moyen sensuel,* lacking that moral and aesthetic sensibility Hemingway calls "imagination." He alone should serve as a refutation of the "locker-room" Hemingway, if such is still needed, but he is much less important than his co-worker, indeed serving as a kind of foil for him.

That the older waiter is also called "the unhurried waiter" makes evident the pun in the appellation. The younger man is "waiting" impatiently to go home and the older is "waiting" patiently or has transcended "waiting" altogether, has gone one step beyond Beckett's tramps, having learned that there is nothing to wait for. As Joseph Gabriel has it, he "must bear at the same time his intense spiritual hunger and the realization of the impossibility of its fulfillment." His alienation is dramatized, as Robert Weeks has noted, by his being "in the presence of others who either do not even notice him, or if they do are unaware of his ordeal and of the gallantry with which he endures it." But he is also something more, and something more complex, than these tragic, heroic qualities would suggest.

He first appears in that initial dialogue, which, by its lack of speech tags and the ensuing possible mis-assignment of them, has plagued so many readers. The second long dialogue makes clear that the older waiter provides the younger with information concerning the old patron's attempted suicide, and that the older man possesses the greater degree of sensitivity and awareness. This characterization is then read back into the first dialogue, making the younger waiter tell about the old man's act, so that he may be given the line "Nothing" to describe the old man's despair. That Hemingway, nothing if not a craftsman of the first rank, could have made such a major error is simply beyond belief. The passage surely must be read as follows:

Older waiter: "Last week he tried to commit suicide."Younger waiter: "Why?"Older waiter: "He was in despair." [as he of all men would understand]Younger waiter: "What about?"Older waiter: "Nothing." [that is, *nada,* Nothingness]Younger waiter: "How do you know it was nothing?" [that is, nothing tangible or material]Older waiter: "He has plenty of money." [that is, his despair must have had metaphysical, rather than physical, grounds].

Ambiguity exists, not as Joseph Gabriel would have it, in that the speeches may be assigned either way, but, in addition to the above, in the possibility of the older waiter's sarcastic response to a man after all incapable of understanding either old man anyway. Perhaps he means also something like "of course, what could any man possibly despair over— he has plenty of money?" This possibility is underscored by his response later to the query, "What did he want to kill himself for?" with the abrupt "How should I know."

The older waiter manifests this kind of double vision repeatedly. He remarks that the old patron "might be better with a wife"; yet he clearly knows the transitory nature of such a comfort. He has just informed his colleague that, like the latter, the old man "had a wife once too," implying that she is dead, and later hints in jest that wives may be unfaithful.

As they close up the cafe, the older waiter states that the younger has "everything," meaning "youth, confidence, and a job"; yet such attributes are temporary and at best can counteract only the young man's "nothing," not the old man's "nothingness." With some justice does the former accuse the latter of "talking nonsense" after the remark, but without sensing its latent sardonic quality.

The strongest evidence of the older waiter's double awareness is of course the long paragraph of the two parodic prayers. *It* is used eleven times with references varying from the cafe, to the merely grammatical subject of the verb is, to the anguish he tries to define, to the world, to nothingness itself. The fragments of the two prayers follow naturally from the catechetical dialogues at the beginning of the story and from the repetitions of *it* and *nothing.* Like the world and man himself, religious form is hollow at the core, filled with "nothing," or, rather, "nothingness," in existential terms, the abyss. Though there is "nothing" to be gained, the older waiter does profit by thus saying his prayers. Such a vision—of lost "everything" and of realized "nothing"— does not send him into Byronic heroics. We read instead that "he smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine". He could smile and remain upright because he knew that the world and himself, even his prayer, were "nothing," and by that act of awareness could survive with dignity, could transcend "it."

This hyper-consciousness, of course, keeps him awake at night. Thus perhaps his definitive act of self-perspective is the observation, "After all, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it." Calling his condition "insomnia" is an act of humility eliminating the last possibility of error, of assuming himself, by his consciousness, to be more than "nothing." Even as an act of reassurance, a whistling in the dark, it forestalls the dangers of pride by an admission of uncertainty even about the existence of *"nada."* It is an act of merciless selfconsistency, thus liberating him from messianic responsibilities, and enabling him to continue to smile at himself and to keep that cafe open at night. The older waiter, then, can look at the world both Ways—as a man of deep religious sensibility he can see the Nothingness of existence, and as a man who "knew it all was nada" he can make jokes and, above all, smile.

Perhaps belatedly, but at least on the evidence of imagery and characterization, we may now discuss the theme of the story. Most readers take the latter to be *nada*, making "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," despite the title, a story about Nothingness and the pessimism and despair of the human response to it. This view ignores both the definition of *nada* inferable from the story and the nature of the old waiter's response to it.

Despite Hemingway's manipulation of the pronoun *it*, the reader must not confuse Nothingness with the responses it produces, nor the response of the older waiter with that of the old man. *Nada* is depicted primarily spatially, as an objective reality, out there beyond the light; it is a final hard fact of human existence, though "some lived in it and never felt it," e.g., the younger waiter. In addition, it becomes temporal with the older waiter's repetition of *"y pues nada"* before the prayer. Though Carlos Baker, with great sensitivity, calls it "a Something called Nothing which is so huge, terrible, overbearing, inevitable, and omnipresent that, once experienced it can never be forgotten," which

"bulks like a Jungian Shadow," its mythic qualities are perhaps not even that well defined.

More importantly, the response of the old patron— the search for oblivion through drunkenness or suicide—is not the only one, and certainly not the one of the older waiter. John Killinger observes that "the only entity truly capable of defying the encroachments of Nothingness is the individual," and Cleanth Brooks that "the order and the light are supplied by *him,"* the old waiter, the individual. Carrying this affirmation one step further, Wayne Booth notes "a mood of bitterness against darkness combined with a determination to fight the darkness with light—if only the clean, well-lighted place of art itself." But, as we have seen, all the positive imagery, including light, is ironically undercut by the presence of a shadow side, and the "darkness" is counteracted on more levels than that simply of "light."

The older waiter in fact acts in various ways against Nothingness. He expresses solidarity with the old patron, and would willingly keep the cafe open as long as anyone wants it; he is instrumental in keeping the lights on. But his acquaintance with *nada* is intimate enough to keep him awake all night, every night; yet this hyper-awareness leads him neither toward self-destruction nor toward egocentricity. He can fuse religious sensibility with existential anxiety into a parodic prayer, after which he can smile. Turning off the light in the cafe and going home to bed is a daily act of courage done silently, without complaint. His sensitivity to places which make dignity possible gives us the verbal clue that his life is one of survival with dignity.

Thematically, then, the older waiter actively demonstrates that life against *nada* is achieved by awareness, sensitivity, human solidarity, ritual (verbal and physical), humor, and courage. Together these qualities make dignity, or, to use Jamesian terms, style or form; we encounter them also in the good bullfighters in *Death in the Afternoon,* which may amplify the theme of that book as well as aesthetic relevance. Such attributes also lead to a double vision and a mode of expression which may be called irony, a potent antidote to both despair and pride. The older waiter, against the heaviest odds, is a man in control.

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is, without cheating, a totally affirmative story, one of the very few in our literature. It assumes a world without meaning, life on the edge of the abyss, but that is not what it is about. It assumes a protagonist of acute awareness and minor characters of lesser consciousness, but it is not about that difference. It is, rather, a dramatization of the possibility, given the above conditions, of man continuing to act, to feel even for others, to think even about metaphysics, to create (with a smile), to control and thereby to humanize both himself and his environment. The older waiter is neither a hero nor a saint, but, to borrow from Camus, that more ambitious being, a man.

Source: Annette Benert, "Survival through Irony: Hemingway's 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place,'" in *Studies In Short Fiction,* Vol. XI, No. 2, Spring, 1974, pp. 181-87.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay Bennett observes the dichotomy between confidence and despair and notes the irony that works throughout the story.

Interpretation of Hemingway's short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" has always been confronted with the illogical dialogue sequence between the two waiters. Since analysis probably became stalled on the question of which waiter knew about the old man's attempted suicide, interpretation has tended to center on either the older waiter's *nada* prayer or the problem of the illogical sequence itself. The result seems to be a partial misinterpretation of the character of the younger waiter, a failure to see the wide play of irony in the story, and the absence of any interpretation of the story's ironic resolution.

However, before these latter matters can be successfully dealt with, the story's troubled dialogue must still be preliminarily considered. Scribner's claims that the dialogue inconsistency occurred when a slug of type was evidently misplaced in the first printing of the story in *Scribner's* magazine in 1933, and since reprint plates were made from that printing and not from the original manuscript, which is no longer extant to anyone's knowledge, the error was perpetuated until 1965. At that time Scribner's issued a new edition of The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway and made an "editorial" correction in the illogical sequence because the dialogue dictated it.

All texts from 1933 to 1965:

"His niece looks after him.""I know. You said she cut him down."

The 1965 text and all subsequent printings:

"His niece looks after him. You said she cut him down.""I know."

This solved the problem of the illogical sequence, but because it gives the knowledge of the old man's attempted suicide to the older waiter instead of the younger waiter, it is contrary to some critical opinion and compatible with others. The correction, therefore, traded one kind of question for another kind: since Hemingway did not correct his own story during his lifetime, does that make the old text Hemingway's story and the new text his publisher's story? Should the critic use the old text or the new text?

In order to put my own interpretation on a firm footing, I hope to demonstrate, first of all, that even though no corrections were made in the story, it is still possible to determine that the older waiter is the one who knows about the old man's attempted suicide.

The structure of the story is based on a consistent polarity: "despair," characterized by depth of feeling and insight into the human condition, in opposition to "confidence," characterized by a lack of feeling and, therefore, a lack of insight. Each pole is seen as an attitude, or stance, in relation to Hemingway's *donnee,* which is a nihilistic concept of

life: nothingness or *nada*. The spark which ignites the conflict of stances is the deaf old man who has tried to commit suicide and needs a clean, welllighted cafe in which to stay late. The denouement is an irony of fate, presented by image and understatement, which will shatter "confidence" against the hard truth that "it [is] all a nothing and a man [is] nothing too."

The tension of the conflict is rendered almost exclusively through the dialogue of the two waiters, who are said to be of "two different kinds," and we can identify one waiter by tracing the use of the word "kill." When the younger waiter returns from taking the old man's brandy order, he says to the older waiter, "'I'm sleepy. I never get into bed before three o'clock. He should have *killed himself* last week'" (italics mine). Then when the younger waiter takes the brandy out to the old man, he says to him, "'You should have *killed yourself* last week'" (italics mine). Since there is no textual basis for transferring the younger waiter's mode of expression to the older waiter, the text clearly establishes that it is the younger waiter who asks for further information: "'What did he want to *kill himself* for?'" (italics mine). Consequently, it is the older waiter who knows the history of the old man and speaks the first line of dialogue in the story: "'Last week he tried to commit suicide.'"

This is supported by a structural pattern, utilizing verbal irony, which is repeated in three separate scenes&two formerly in question and one not in question. For the pattern to emerge clearly, it is necessary to look at the scenes in reverse order, beginning with the scene where the lines are not in question. The scene is the bodega where the older waiter stops for a drink.

"What's yours?" asked the barman. [Serious question.]"Nada." [Verbal irony: the older waiter.]"Otro loco mas," said the barman and turned away. [Dropping the subject.]"A little cup," said the waiter. [Serious reply.]

The bodega barman, of course, must be equated with the younger waiter because he has an "unpolished" bar, equivalent to the younger waiter pouring into the old man's brandy glass until it "slopped over and ran down the stem." Also, the barman calls the older waiter "another crazy one," as the younger waiter has accused the older waiter of "talking nonsense." But for our purposes, the important aspect is the pattern: serious question, verbal irony by the older waiter, a dropping of the subject, and then a serious reply. The significant factor in the pattern is the older waiter's use of verbal irony in response to a serious question.

The complete pattern appears earlier in the story, in that exchange concerned with why they cut the old man down.

"Why did they do it?" [Serious question.]"Fear for his soul." [Verbal irony: the older waiter.]"How much money has he got?" [Dropping the subject; serious question.]"He's got plenty." [Serious reply.]

The third scene is the first exchange between the two waiters, near the beginning of the story. The pattern here is abbreviated, repeating only the older waiter's use of verbal

irony in response to a serious question. One waiter says the old man was in despair, and the other waiter asks,

"What about?" [Serious question.]"Nothing." [Verbal irony: the older waiter.]"How do you know it was nothing?" [Serious question.]"He has plenty of money." [Verbal irony: the older waiter.]

In this last scene, the reply, "nothing," and the reply, "he has plenty of money," both carry an undertone of irony, regardless of which waiter speaks the lines. The irony is inherent in them as answers to the serious questions asked. For example, if the younger waiter answered that the old man was in despair about "nothing," the reply still carries the charge of double meaning, i.e., a serious meaning: there was, in fact, no apparent reason; *and* a malicious meaning: the reason seems ridiculous and unimportant to me: he was only feeling sorry for himself.

Since verbal irony is employed, we must look to the text for hard evidence of which waiter employs it as a mode of speaking, and that evidence is in the scene with the bodega barman. It is the *older* waiter who uses verbal irony; he even thinks ironically: "After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it." There is no definite evidence, anywhere in the story, that the younger waiter has mastered such a manner of speaking, or thinking. On the contrary, the younger waiter is consistently serious and changes his form of address only once, "speaking with that omission of syntax stupid people employ when talking to drunken people or foreigners.

Once it has been established that the older waiter is the one who knows about the old man, it is then possible to see the characters of the two waiters in correct perspective.

Essentially, the younger waiter is not a "materialist," as critics, explicitly or implicitly, have tried to make him. Expressing interest in money and sex does not automatically relegate one to the pigeonhole labeled "materialist," which critics like to use in a pejorative sense, although it should not be so used. Materialism denotes a complex set of ideas, and to the extent that the story is held to have philosophical import, the philosophical senses of "materialism" must be recognized.

Briefly, a materialist is one who affirms matter as the only reality, or one who gives it an effective priority. Looking at the two waiters in this light, it is the older waiter who holds the view which is most compatible with philosophic materialism, not the younger waiter.

It is better, undoubtedly, to avoid classifying the youngest waiter at all, than to misclassify him. The most we can do with the younger waiter is describe him, an effort which results in showing him to be something of a "type," the average individual, "in a hurry." He is self-interested and indulges himself with believing an hour is "'more to me than to him [the old man].'" He does not especially like work, and accuses the old man of having "'no regard for those who must work'"; nevertheless, he seems to accept it as economically necessary and is quite an efficient waiter, making sure the shutters are closed before he leaves. He is satisfied with his marriage and is eager to get home to his wife "waiting in bed" for him. He is a legalist in his attitude toward the soldier,

although even when refusing to serve the old man, he does not "wish to be unjust. He was only in a hurry." He is no Christian zealot but accepts the church with its transcendent values, illustrated by his changing the subject to money when told the niece cut the old man down because of "fear for his soul." In short, he is one of those who have "confidence," or faith, in the established system in which they live. He has "'youth, confidence, and a job . . . everything.'" His job gives him a sense of economic success within the community. The institution of marriage has provided him with a "waiting" wife who satisfies the biological drive and gives him a sense of male effectiveness. His youth gives him a sense of life as infinite continuum, and the institution of the church confirms such immortality for him. "'I have confidence,'" he says, "'I'm all confidence,'" and as long as he has this confident faith in the value and permanence of these cultural structures, he has "everything."

The older waiter, on the other hand, is unable to muster such faith or confidence. He is a materialist and beyond the material there is "nothing." "Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada." The individual "cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself." There is no a priori order or value system, either providential, natural, or social, on which man may intelligently depend and predict a future. "'No. I have never had confi- dence and I am not young.'" The material world, which includes the mental processes, is the only reality and has priority, but it is found lacking: life is a net of illusions. "'And what do you lack?'" asks the younger waiter. "'Everything but work,'" replies the older waiter. And even the ability to "work" has been taken from the old man, as it evidently was from Hemingway by July 2, 1961.

This profound, but masked "difference" between the two waiters is imbedded in the casualappearing conversation about the old man. When the younger waiter asks, "'How do you know [the old man's despair was about] nothing,'" the reply, "'He has plenty of money,'" is more philosophically precise than an entire chapter of discursive contortions. *Nada* can be described only in terms of an opposite because to make some-thing out of nothing is not only incomprehensible but impossible. And "plenty of money" provides the most nearly perfect polar opposite to "nothing." The holes in a fish net are perceptible because of the net. When a man has the power of money and the plenty which it makes possible, it also makes the "lack," *nada*, that much more apparent and unbearable. "Plenty" intensifies what is lacking to the psychological breaking point. The old man's severe despair, and the serious despair of the older waiter, are not caused by some-thing, and are not about *anything*. Despair is a negation, a lack. The lack of life after death, the lack of a moral order governing the universe, the lack of trustworthy interpersonal relations, the lack of an ordering principle in the individual consciousness, the lack of the ability to work, and the lack, therefore, of even self-respect and dignity. The old man lacks any-thing to live *for*. "'It was a nothing he [the older waiter] knew too well.'"

However, to quit the story on the philosophical level is to leave the primary question of "confi- dence" or "despair" artistically unanswered. The younger waiter would go confidently home to his "waiting wife" and live happily ever after: a winner who takes everything. The older waiter's *nada* is "probably only insomnia" and will pass with

daylight, which, if not a happy ending, is at least a very tolerable ending. This is essentially an uncommitted balance, which is where interpretation to date has left it.

But this is to understand only the "literal" ending of the story; that is, what happens to the older waiter after *he* leaves the cafe. It does not reveal what happens when the younger waiter arrives home. For this insight, which Hemingway refers to as the "real end," which may be "omitted" on the basis of his "new theory," it is necessary to go back into the story.

In the silence that takes place immediately following the older waiter's ironic "'He has plenty of money,'" A girl and a soldier went by in the street. The street light shone on the brass number on his collar. The girl wore no head covering and hurried beside him.

Y.W. "The guard will pick him up," one waiter said.O.W. "What does it matter if he gets what he's after?"Y.W. "He had better get off the street now. The guard will get him. They went by five minutes ago."

The younger waiter emphasizes the military guards because to him they represent guardians of a culture in which one may be confident of success. He is not concerned about the soldier. Individual needs, whether they are the need of a girl or the need of a drink for a lonely old man, must be sacrificed to the punctualities of the job, the ignorant securities of rule and routine. The younger waiter wants everyone off the street, as he wants the old man out of the cafe. He wants to be off the streets himself, and is, in fact, also a kind of guard. "'No more tonight. Close now,'" he says to the old man and begins "pulling down the metal shutters."

But the older waiter does understand that agonizing lack in an individual: "'What does it matter if he gets what he's after?'" Company punishment will be minor compared to the anguish of being alone. Everything is a temporary stay against despair: a light for the night, another drink, relations with a girl. "'You can't tell,'" even the old man "'might be better with a wife.'"

The soldier's kinship with the older waiter and the old man is illustrated by the metaphor of light and something clean or polished. "The street light shone on the brass number on his collar." They are all of a "kind," the soldier as disillusioned with the military machine as the older waiter and the old man are disillusioned with the machine of the world. The soldier is not concerned about curfew as the older waiter is not concerned about closing the cafe on time, and the old man is not concerned about letting the cafe close. The soldier needs the sexual intoxication of this girl as the older waiter and the old man need a drink. The soldier is no more concerned about military regulations than the old man is concerned about financial regulations, and "would leave without paying" if he became too drunk. "As Hemingway once put it, 'There is honor among pickpockets and honor among whores. It is simply that the standards differ.'"

The scene—a prostitute and a soldier—is the epitome of a meaningless and chaotic world full of loopholes: an interwoven fabric of ironies punctured by nothingness. Everything is possible through love or aggression, but paradoxically nothing is

permanent. There is a constant, desperate struggle against the coefficients of adversity. Living becomes a deadly affair, or conflict, essentially devoid of humor because everything is ultimately a "dirty trick."

This is the basis for the older waiter's not so funny "joke" later in the story. The younger waiter has just suggested that the old man could buy a bottle and drink at home, to which the older waiter replies, "'It's not the same.'"

"No, it is not," agreed the waiter with a wife.He did not wish to be unjust. He was only in a hurry."And you? You have no fear of going home before your usual hour?""Are you trying to insult me?""No, hombre, only to make a joke.""No," the waiter who was in a hurry said . . ."I have confidence. I am all confidence."

The joke is crucial and hinges directly on the scene with the girl and the soldier. Structurally and texturally they establish the love wound motif which is so dominant in Hemingway that it becomes the other side of the same psychic coin as the war wound. Through either the death of one of the partners or the inability of one partner to fulfill the promise of love—satisfy the other's needs—an individual is isolated and pushed to despair by the failure of the love alliance.

The complete working out of this motif is the "real end" which Hemingway omitted, and the phrase "waiter with a wife" preceding the joke, functions as a lens to bring into focus the catastrophe which the younger waiter will face. When the younger waiter goes home before his "usual time," his wife will be gone, or perhaps, though at home in bed, engaged in another desperate relationship. The girl and the soldier appear again like ghosts, only this time the girl without a "head covering," ironically "hurrying," is suggestive of the younger waiter's wife.

The story now becomes superbly charged with dramatic as well as verbal irony. The younger waiter's confidence dissolves into tragic hubris, and his statements, such as "'I'm not lonely,'" are imbued with an impending doom that is near classic. Situations become ironically transferred. The old man's despair and loneliness without a wife, the older waiter's insomnia and need of light, the soldier's risk for temporary sexual meaning—all are now the younger waiter's future. At the very moment that he is playing the heartless and uncompromising judge, he is also reality's dupe and victim. Whatever he has said about the others may soon be said about him. And with equal irony, he has "hurried" to his own undoing. His all-confident intentions will be reversed. His recognition of another truth is imminent. The radical contingencies of life will have taught him the absurdity of the human condition, and the twist of events will topple him from his pinnacle of confidence into the phantasmagoria where the older waiter and the old man cling despairingly to their clean, welllighted place. The younger waiter will become a new member of Hemingway's collection: *Winner Take Nothing.*

Source: Warren Bennett, "Character, Irony, and Resolution in 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place,'" in *American Literature,* Vol. XLII, No. 1, March, 1970, pp. 70-79.

Topics for Further Study

Research the famous U.S. brigade of the Spanish Civil War, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Which U.S. artists and writers fought or raised money for the Spanish Loyalists during this conflict?

Examine the rise of fascism in the 1930s in Europe. How do historians account for the popularity or power of Mussolini, or Hitler and/or Franco? Or, research what platforms and positions characterize fascism. Hitler's party, for example, was called the National Socialists. Why was it named this? What was "national" about it? What "socialist"?

Explore theories about the "folk" that were circulating amongst artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance (1919-1935). Alain Locke's 1925 essay "The New Negro," a manifesto for this social and artistic movement, is a good place to begin. A seminal precursor text of the movement, also dealing with issues relating to "folk," is W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk.*

Examine Hemingway's continued cultivation of Latin connections after his experiences in France and Spain. How was southern Florida and Cuba important to his life and development as a writer once he returned to the U.S.?

Compare and Contrast

1920s: WWI is a notorious war. There was no clear villainous enemy, as in the fascists of WWII. It was terribly inefficient. It was considered then how the Viet Nam war is considered today, a fight that used soldiers sorely and traumatically. It ate up young men with all the efficiency of a giant thresher. The term "shell shock" was invented to name the hysteria and psychosis that the war induced in so many of the soldiers.

1990s: Countries like the U.S. which have technologically sophisticated warheads are now able to conduct "limited" wars. In contrast to WWI, the recent U.S. and European fighting against Serbia was conducted entirely from the air. Things and not people were the primary targets.

1930s: The Spain of Hemingway's story suffered a great deal during the 1930s. The country, moving to more fully democratic rule, had elected a new government around the time Hemingway was writing "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." This latest election was ignored by the armies of Francisco Franco. Funded by fellow fascists Adolf Hitler of Germany and Benito Mussolini of Italy, Franco's troops overcame the legitimate government in a bloody Civil War which lasted from 1936-39. The Spanish Civil War was a popular cause internationally. The world reacted most anxiously to the growth of fascism, and the defending Spanish Loyalist armies drew to their ranks an international group of soldier-sympathizers, many of whom were American men and women ("The Abe Lincoln Brigade"). Hemingway went to Spain to cover the war for the U.S. press (and an attachment with the woman and fellow journalist who would become his third wife was consolidated at this place and time).

1990s: A strong memory of Franco has not yet faded from Spanish memory. His forces were not subdued, and he was a dictator of this country until 1975. Franco's death was, on the whole, exuberantly and widely welcomed, and the country became, fairly quickly, a typical continental nation. The European nations, on the whole, are prosperous in comparison to the rest of the world, despite persistent high levels of unemployment. The most pressing situation for Europe at present is the European Economic Union (EEU), in which the nations of Europe will share a single currency called the "Euro." The Euro has been brought into circulation, and will become the sole currency of this group of nations on January 1, 2001.

1920s: The 1920s in the U.S. are known as the Roaring Twenties. They roared because the U.S. emerged, somewhat to its own surprise even, as a new superpower after WWI. It had sold plenty of armaments to Europe, and most of war-torn Europe was in its financial debt. America was not only rich, it was also culturally vibrant. Women had just gotten the vote in England and the U.S., and the French fashion genius Coco Chanel revolutionized women's fashion. Flappers cut their hair and wore simple shifts that left them free to dance all night, and the new technology was awesome to contemplate: Phonographs, radios, planes, telephones and automobiles.

1990s: The U.S. is still a so-called superpower, but in a much tighter global context. Technology has now delivered the computer and the internet, the latter facilitating this aforementioned global interconnectedness. And this, perhaps, is what seems really new, politically and economically, technologically and communicationally: for all of the U.S.'s wealth and power, there is the sense now that transnational financial ties are such that what happens in remote global markets can substantially affect U.S. fortunes. In effect, the need to be apprised of these wide-ranging global connections and relations is now a requirement, and the internet and other advanced communications networks are delivering this information.

What Do I Read Next?

The Sun Also Rises (1926) is generally considered to be Hemingway's best and most enduring novel. The main character has been maimed in WWI, and he is desperately in love with a woman he cannot have. The story recounts his and his friends cynical and disillusioned experiences in Spain during a festival.

The Great War and Modern Memory (1975) by Paul Fussel examines the literature and culture of WWI, the Great War.

The Great Gatsby (1925) is a novel written by one of Hemingway's contemporaries, F. Scott Fitzgerald. It takes place in the U.S. northeast, and the wild and desperate Roaring Twenties are beautifully captured.

Winesburg, Ohio (1919) is a book of interconnected short stories by the U.S. writer who was Hemingway's first inspiration and mentor, Sherwood Anderson. The stories are interconnected, as each covers yet more terrain in small town Winesburg.

Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (1969), by Carlos Baker is a definitive and widely respected Hemingway biography.

Jacob's Room (1922) is one of Virginia Woolf's WWI novels, and it is about a young man who never returns from WWI. Jacob is evoked throughout this strange and haunting work more by virtue of his absence than by his presence.

Death in the Afternoon (1932) is a major nonfiction book by Ernest Hemingway about bullfighting in Spain.

Further Study

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel,* New York: Criterion Books, Inc., 1959.

This is a classic in American literary criticism, and it contains a well-known chapter on gender and sexuality in Hemingway.

Hemingway, Ernest. "The Nobel Prize Speech," in *Mark Twain Journal,* Vol. 11, Summer, 1962, p.10.

Hemingway's acceptance speech.

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An examination of Hemingway's Spanish connection.

Wagner-Martin, Linda W. *Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

This is a recent reference work (bibliography) which provides a welcome overview of Hemingway criticism. By flipping to the 1980s and 1990s, students can easily review the latest trends in Hemingway criticism.

Weeks, Robert P. , ed. *Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays,* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962.

A student of Hemingway will do well to look at this volume of early essay in order to get a sense of the history of Hemingway criticism.

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An influential and innovative biographical study of Hemingway.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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