

Analyzing a clean, well-lighted place by ernest hemingway assignment

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Analyzing a Clean, Well-Lighted Place by Ernest Hemingway Analyzing “ A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemingway 28 years prior to his own death by committing suicide Ernest Hemingway wrote a short story named A Clean, Well-Lighted Place posing as an excerpt from the life of a presumably middle-aged waiter, who has to deal with an elder customer and the reactions to this man from a younger colleague. Born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1899 Hemingway first attended college before becoming a reporter for a short period of time.

He then enlisted with the Red Cross to serve as a paramedic in World War I, as which he visited Italy amongst others. After getting wounded while serving as an infantryman, Hemingway continued working as a reporter for a newspaper in Toronto. In the 1920s he and his first wife moved to Paris, France where he firstly came in contact with Gertrude Stein, an American writer of German descent. Together they formed a group of writers which became the organ for the Lost Generation, a term that Hemingway created for those then young people whose lives were being corrupted by the war.

Despite his former war experiences he spent some formative time in Spain during the local civil war as a war correspondent and got involved with the resistance against Generalissimo Franco. He continued this job during World War II in France and Germany, although being a correspondent soon became of minor importance for him, since he formed group of rebel fighters and led them into battle himself. Later on, while living on Cuba, he suffered several injuries on different occasions from which he never fully recovered and which caused deep depressions.

After moving to Ketchum, Idaho he could not bear his medical and psychological condition and the loneliness caused by it anymore and committed suicide, like his father did before him, by shooting himself in the head. (MacGowan 91-95) In *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* Hemingway leads the reader to a *caf???*, which presumably is in a village in Spain, considering Hemingway's time spent in Spain and some Spanish words used in the story, as well as the streets of the place being described as "dusty in the daytime" (Hemingway 31 1), which indicates it is not a big, modern city.

Nonetheless the *caf???* has external electric lights, so the story should be settled some when in the 20th century. On one occasion a soldier passes by and the two waiters of the *caf???* talk about him probably being arrested by a guard, so one could assume the story plays in a *caf???* in a Spanish village closely before the Spanish Civil War. It is already night, about 2: 20 a. m. , and the waiters are about to close up only hindered by an old, deaf man, who is still sitting on the terrace drinking brandy.

Obviously this particular old man comes there often, since the narrator tells the reader about the old man's bad habit of not paying for his drinks once he is drunk. Hemingway keeps emphasizing the "shadows of the leaves of a tree" (Hemingway 11) apparently standing either on or nearby the terrace. By doing that he separates the *caf???* even more from its surrounding, thus highlighting it as some kind of illuminated haven within the darkness of the night. Since darkness and night always in a world of sinister and menacing loneliness.

This picture is aided by the description of “ the tree that moved slightly in the wind” (Hemingway 311) and thus creates a feeling of desperation. In this scenery the two waiters talk a bit while waiting for the old man to finish his drink and leave. At first they talk about the man himself. One waiter tells the other one about the suicide attempt of the old man from the week before. Cleverly Hemingway writes this first part of his story in a way that the reader will never know which waiter is the one telling and which is the one listening.

Up to the point at which the old man changes the setting by calling for a waiter Hemingway lets the waiters appear to be equal and most of all equally unknown and plain in character. Then he distinguishes them by identifying one as younger than the other, creating a gap between them and establishing some kind of hierarchy between all three protagonists. All of a sudden there seems to be a constellation emerging to be depicting a conflict of generations.

Despite the feeling from the beginning of the story that the old man is the main character, Hemingway now starts to deepen the characters of the waiters by switching from descriptive narration to descriptive dialogues leaving out the old man. Now the reader gets an impression of the younger waiter as being full of life, married, impatient and not emphatic, while the older waiter appears to be more demure and empathizing. As their dialogue goes on one could suspect that the older waiter told the younger one about the attempted suicide of the old man, whom they consider to be eighty something years old.

By recognizing this, the older waiter becomes sort of a mediator between the old man with his experiences and feelings on the one hand and the younger waiter with his lack of comprehension for other people, especially elder ones, on the other hand by trying to explain the behavior of the old man to his colleague. Once the old man has left and the younger waiter has gone home too, the older waiter heads for a bar to fight his apparently chronic insomnia and starts thinking about the old man.

Hemingway illustrates that by switching again, this time from the descriptive dialogues to a stream of consciousness in which the older waiter contemplates the reasons of the old man to attempt suicide. He comes to the conclusion, that this man had nothing in his life anymore, just a great, big, chaotic nothing, so the cafe has become a place of life with a good lighting and tidiness as symbols of the order the old man misses so much in his personal life. Cynically the waiter begins to recite the Lord's Prayer in his mind exchanging some words with the Spanish word nada which means nothing.

Interestingly he also uses the term "pues nada" (Hemingway 313) which translates as well then indicating he is accepting the loneliness and nothingness he already feels in his own life just as part of growing old. In the bar the barman asks for the waiter's order which he answers with "nada" (Hemingway 313) as well, obviously messing around with his own thoughts. The barman, seemingly annoyed, responds with "otro loco mas" (Hemingway 313) meaning and another insane. The complete behavior of the barman even in response to the statement of the waiter about the

unpolished bar aids the impression of the bar as a symbol of the despair of the world.

In the end the waiter reflects the usual progress of his night convincing himself that the symptoms of loneliness in his own life are just simple insomnia, ergo a disease pattern, which connects him with other into his story or is it just a story? In fact I am convinced that Hemingway processed his own traumata and feelings of loneliness and despair in this short story. When he published it he had already been in one war including being wounded, got divorced, learned about his father's suicide and suffered from a disease in Africa.

So the old man in the story might be an allegory for Hemingway's father while the story itself portrays his introversion and thus might be an early sign for his lethal depressions. Works Cited Bennett, Warren. "Character, Irony, and Resolution in 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *American Literature*. Vol.. 42. Durham: Duke UP, 1970. 70-79. Print. "The Manuscript and the Dialogue of 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *American Literature*. vol.. 50. Durham: Duke up, 1979. 613-24. print. Colburn, William E. "Confusion 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *College English*. Vol.. 20. Millwood: Klaus Reprint, 1973. 241-42. print. Gabriel, Joseph F. "The Logic of Confusion in Hemingway's 'A Clean, Well-Lighted Place'." *College English*. Vol.. 22. Millwood: Klaus Reprint, 1973. 539-46. Print. Hemingway, Ernest. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." *The First Forty-Nine Stories*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1968. 311-14. Print. MacGowan, Christopher. "Ernest Hemingway (1899-

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