



First Stage
Morning & Evening Classes
Lecturer: Farah A. Abo Al-Timen

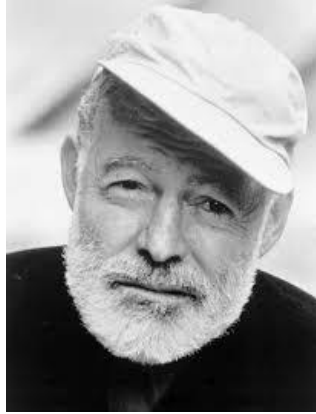
Translation Department
College of Arts
Al-Mustansiriya University

Chapter Two Short Stories

A short story is a brief work of literature, usually written in narrative prose. It focuses on a self-contained incident or series of linked incidents, with the intent of evoking a single effect or mood. The short story is one of the oldest types of literature and has existed in the form of legends, mythic tales, folk tales, fairy tales, fables and anecdotes in various ancient communities across the world. The modern short story developed in the early 19th century.

Short stories make use of plot, theme, and other components and authors generally draw them from a common pool of literary techniques. A classic definition of a short story is that one should be able to read it in one sitting, a point most notably made in Edgar Allan Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). According to William Faulkner, a short story is character driven and a writer's job is to "...trot along behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does." As William Boyd, the award-winning British author and short story writer has said:

short stories seem to answer something very deep in our nature as if, for the duration of its telling, something special has been created, some essence of our experience extrapolated, some temporary sense has been made of our common, turbulent journey towards the grave and oblivion.

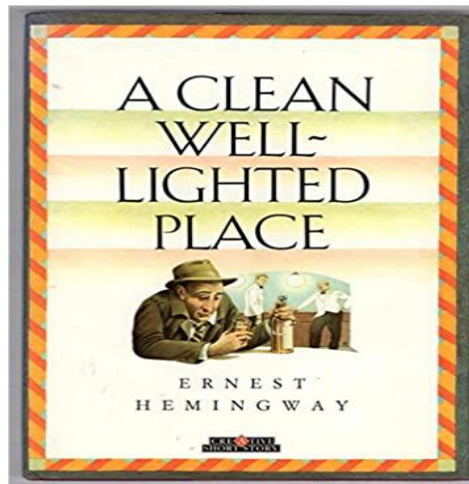


Ernest Hemingway
(July 21, 1899 – July 2, 1961)

He was an American novelist, short-story writer, journalist, and sportsman. His economical and understated style—which he termed the iceberg theory—had a strong influence on 20th-century fiction, while his adventurous lifestyle and his public image brought him admiration from later generations. Hemingway produced most of his work between the mid-1920s and the mid-1950s, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. He published seven novels, six short-story collections, and two nonfiction works. Three of his novels, four short-story collections, and three nonfiction works were published posthumously. Many of his works are considered classics of American literature.

Hemingway was raised in Oak Park, Illinois. After high school, he was a reporter for a few months for "The Kansas City Star" before leaving for the Italian Front to enlist as an ambulance driver in World War I. In 1918, he was seriously wounded and returned home. His wartime experiences formed the basis for his novel "A Farewell to Arms" (1929).

Hemingway maintained permanent residences in Key West, Florida (in the 1930s) and in Cuba (in the 1940s and 1950s). He almost died in 1954 after plane crashes on successive days, with injuries leaving him in pain and ill health for much of the rest of his life. In 1959 he bought a house in Ketchum, Idaho where, in mid-1961, he died by suicide with a shotgun.



A Clean Well-lighted Place

It was late and every one had left the cafe except an old man who sat in the shadow the leaves of the tree made against the electric light. In the daytime the street was dusty, but at night the dew settled the dust and the old man liked to sit late because he was deaf and now at night it was quiet and he felt the difference. The two waiters inside the cafe knew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he became too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.

"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."

They sat together at a table that was close against the wall near the door of the cafe and looked at the terrace where the tables were all empty except where the old man sat in the shadow of the leaves of the tree that moved slightly in the wind.

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.

"The guard will pick him up," one waiter said.

"What does it matter if he gets what he's after?"

"He had better get off the street now. The guard will get him. They went by five minutes ago."

The old man sitting in the shadow rapped on his saucer with his glass. The younger waiter went over to him.

"What do you want?" The old man looked at him.

"Another brandy," he said.

"You'll be drunk," the waiter said. The old man looked at him. The waiter went away.

"He'll stay all night," he said to his colleague. "I'm sleepy now. I never get into bed before three o'clock. He should have killed himself last week."

The waiter took the brandy bottle and another saucer from the counter inside the cafe and marched out to the old man's table. He put down the saucer and poured the glass full of brandy.

"You should have killed yourself last week," he said to the deaf man. The old man motioned with his finger. "A little more," he said. The waiter poured on into the glass so that the brandy slopped over and ran down the stem into the top saucer of the pile. "Thank you," the old man said. The waiter took the bottle back inside the cafe. He sat down at the table with his colleague again.

"He's drunk now," he said.

"He's drunk every night."

"What did he want to kill himself for?"

"How should I know?"

"How did he do it?"

"He hung himself with a rope."

"Who cut him down?"

"His niece."

"Why did they do it?"

"Fear for his soul."

"How much money has he got?"

"He's got plenty."

"He must be eighty years old."

"Anyway I should say he was eighty."

"I wish he would go home. I never get to bed before three o'clock. What kind of hour is that to go to bed?"

"He stays up because he likes it."

"He's lonely. I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me."

"He had a wife once too."

"A wife would be no good to him now."

"You can't tell. He might be better with a wife."

"His niece looks after him."

"I know. You said she cut him down."

"I wouldn't want to be that old. An old man is a nasty thing."

"Not always. This old man is clean. He drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk. Look at him."

"I don't want to look at him. I wish he would go home. He has no regard for those who must work."

The old man looked from his glass across the square, then over at the waiters.

"Another brandy," he said, pointing to his glass.

The waiter who was in a hurry came over.

"Finished," he said, speaking with that omission of syntax stupid people employ when talking to drunken people or foreigners.

"No more tonight. Close now." "Another," said the old man.

"No. Finished." The waiter wiped the edge of the table with a towel and shook his head.

The old man stood up, slowly counted the saucers, took a leather coin purse from his pocket and paid for the drinks, leaving half a peseta tip.

The waiter watched him go down the street, a very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity.

"Why didn't you let him stay and drink.?" the unhurried waiter asked. They were putting up the shutters. "It is not half-past two."

"I want to go home to bed."

"What is an hour?"

"More to me than to him."

"An hour is the same."

"You talk like an old man yourself. He can buy a bottle and drink at home."

"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; rising from pulling down the metal shutters. "I have confidence. I am all confidence."

"You have youth, confidence, and a job," the older waiter said. "You have everything."

"And what do you lack?"

"Everything but work."

"You have everything I have."

"No. I have never had confidence and I am not young."

"Come on. Stop talking nonsense and lock up."

"I am of those who like to stay late at the cafe," the older waiter said. "With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night."

"I want to go home and into bed."

"We are of two different kinds." the older waiter said. He was now dressed to go home. "It is not only a question of youth and confidence although those things are very beautiful. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be someone who needs the cafe."

"Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long."

"You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant cafe. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves."

"Good night," said the younger waiter.

"Good night," the other said. Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself. 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 although that is all that is provided for these hours. 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 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. 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.

"What's yours.?" asked the barman.

"Nada."

"Otro loco mas," said the barman and turned away.

"A Uttle cup," said the waiter.

The barman poured it for him.

"The light is very bright and pleasant but the bar is unpolished," the waiter said.

The barman looked at him but did not answer. It was too late at night for conversation.

"You want another copita.?" The barman asked.

"No, thank you," said the waiter and went out. He disliked bars and bodegas. A clean, well-lighted cafe was a very different thing. Now, without thinking further, he would go 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.

Summary

Two waiters in a Spanish café are waiting late one night for their last customer, an old man, to leave. As they wait, they talk about the old man's recent suicide attempt. The younger waiter is impatient to leave and tells the deaf old man he wishes the suicide attempt had been successful. The young waiter has a wife waiting in bed for him and is unsympathetic when the older waiter says that the old man once also had a wife. The old man finally leaves when the younger waiter refuses to serve him further.

The older waiter argues that they should have allowed their customer to stay, that being in the café is not the same as drinking at home. He explains that he is also one of those "who like to stay late at the café. . . . With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night." He is reluctant to close because there may be someone who needs the café. When the young waiter says there are bodegas open all night, the other points out that the bright atmosphere of the café makes it different.

After the younger waiter goes home, the older one asks himself why he needs a clean, pleasant, quiet, well-lighted place. The answer is that he requires some such semblance of order because of "a nothing that he knew too well." He begins a mocking 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." He then finds himself at a bodega that is a poor substitute for a clean, well-lighted café. He goes home to lie awake until daylight may finally bring him some sleep: "After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it."

Study Guides on A Clean Well-lighted Place

- 1- "We are of two different kinds." How does Ernest Hemingway present the two waiters in his story "A Clean Well-lighted Place"?
- 2- What are the problems of old age?

- 3- What is the attitude of the young waiter from staying late at the café?
- 4- What is the attitude of the old waiter from the old man?
- 5- What is the attitude of the young waiter from the old man?
- 6- What is the significance of the title?
- 7- Why the old waiter feels sympathy for the old man?
- 8- Why the young waiter does not feel much sympathy for the old man?
- 9- The old waiter engages in a dialogue with himself, by praying about nothingness. Elaborate.
- 10- What are the theme(s) in the story?
- 11- Are the two waiters consistent in their actions? Are they static or dynamic? How much do we learn from them about the old man?
- 12- Which character in the story is more likable to you? Why?
- 13- Does Hemingway appear to draw on personal experience in the way he presents his characters in the story?
- 14- What function does the old man serve in the story?
- 15- Comment on the following lines:
 - "He's lonely, I'm not lonely. I have a wife waiting in bed for me."
 - "I have confidence, I am all confidence." "I have never had confidence, and I'm not young."
 - "I am of those who like to stay late at the café... with all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night."
 - "You don't understand.. this is a clean and pleasant café. It is well lighted. The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves."
 - "It was all a nothing and a man was a nothing too."
 - "A clean, well-lighted café was a very different thing."
 - "It was the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant."