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Symbolism in *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* by Ernest Hemingway

*A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* is a short story written by Ernest Hemingway and published in 1933. Like all Hemingway's works, this story about different attitudes towards life is full of deep symbolic meaning. The most significant symbols of the short story are the café where the action takes place and its illumination: they are both connected with the main topic which is meaninglessness of life.

The short story begins with the description of the café lighting: the light of electric lamps and the foliage of a tree create an unusual play of light and shadow. The author manages to create the atmosphere of the café using only one sentence. *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* is probably Hemingway's favorite short story (Deepa 19). He uses his main technic – symbols and subtext – in this work. The first character that the reader meets in the text is a small café where the action takes place. It is open late at night, there are practically no visitors, but from the author's point of view, it can reflect the whole world. The example of a young and an old waiter shows two generations with opposite attitudes towards life. Many human destinies pass by them: a bartender, bystanders and an elderly man. The café functions as a separate society, on the example of which different human characters, compassion for people and indifference to them, are shown.

The next important symbol in this story is light, both solar and artificial. One of the characters emphasizes a significant point: this café is different from bars and pubs. The reason why Hemingway chooses a small café as an example of a safe place for a lonely person at night is in its main characteristics: illumination and cleanness. The light is the leading motive

of the story because it is directly related to the main topic. The man comes to the café and sits under the shadow because he is seeking light. Moreover, the old waiter does not hurry home and goes to bed in dawn, because he also needs light. Hemingway tries to show that in the eternal darkness of meaningless human existence, only light can sustain life. The example of a small cafe reveals something common with all the humanity (McParland 174). That is why light is the main symbol of this story. In the darkest hour before dawn, when the streets are practically empty, a lonely person especially needs to find a clean and, what is more important, a well-lighted place.

The symbol that lies in the subtext of this story is associated with its existential meaning. Most researches agree that it is a story about 'nothingness' (Maliha 376). The old waiter talks about the meaninglessness of human existence. His youth has passed, he has no hopes, but he knows exactly what he lives for. His purpose is to keep the cafe open until the early hours, so that everyone has the opportunity to find a spark of light and hope on the dark night street. In this way, the main theme of this story may be defined as the concept of nothing (Koseman 29). An all-consuming existential 'nothingness' surrounds every character of this story, including the lonely old man, both waiters dissatisfied with their lives and even random people walking down the street. The only way to deal with 'nothingness', according to the old waiter, is finding the light and helping others find it.

In conclusion, it is important to notice that symbolism is one of the distinguishing features of Hemingway's writing style. The main symbols of *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* are a small cafe representing humanity, light in all its manifestations and the search for the meaning of existence. Using these symbols, the author shows on the example of a small café the only way of confronting the darkness and meaninglessness of human existence.

Works Cited

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