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In Ernest Hemingway's short story, "A Clean Well-Lighted Place", the concept of nada is the central and most important theme. As described by Carlos Baker, Nada is "a Something called Nothing which is so huge, terrible, overbearing, inevitable, and omnipresent that, once experienced, it can never be forgotten" (Baker 124). It is a metaphysical state that symbolizes the chaos in everyone's lives. Some people have it more than others and some deal with this idea differently than others. Either way, nada is an uncontrollable force that should never be forgotten.

Steven Hoffman, believes that "the only 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" (Hoffman 176). This cafe is a warrior against this nothingness. The place is clean, pleasant, and orderly. There is no music. It is a plain and simple refuge against the lonely, dark world that awaits outside (Hemingway 256). However, this cafe must close at some time or another thus proving that the cafe isn't enough to combat the nada. It is not even a place but an artificial, man-made building that tries to fight against this real idea of nada. If one has the internal qualities, cleanliness and inner vision, they can cope with the nothingness even outside of the cafe. The old waiter is a prime example. At times the old man lacks these qualities thus not being able to cope with the darkness. On the other hand, the young waiter has no concept of this idea thus making him not even realize how powerful it can be.

The old waiter is the most important character in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." The old waiter has completely grasped the concept of nada and is able to deal with it. Hemingway says, "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 a nothing too...Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all..." (258). It was him that recognizes the old man's problem from the beginning. He realizes that this man is dealing with the most difficult part of his life, the end. Also, the old man's parody of the Lord's prayer clearly shows that he has

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grasped this concept of nada. No one else could use the term this way and not know what it means. Also, Even though the old waiter has plenty of money, he realizes that this is not all he needs to escape the darkness. Nothing can escape it.

Unlike the old man, the waiter deals with this darkness in a more positive way.

Hoffman says, "...this character displays true metaphysical courage in raising the concept of nada..." (Hoffman 185). The old waiter says, "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....Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be some one who needs the cafe" (Hemingway 258). The light, order, and pleasant atmosphere is provided by him. The escape from nothing is provided by him. Without him, the old man would be lost in the darkness. This makes the old waiter is the true hero of the story.

The character that has been in contact with the nada for quite some time and has not yet learned how to deal with it the right way is the old man. He is said to be eighty years old, virtually death, and recently widowed (257). The very wealthy man is depressed, thus showing the reader why he had tried to kill himself. In his case he has the light and realizes that there is a destructive force out there called nada. However, unlike the waiter, he has not yet learned to face this force and often tries to escape it through drinking or attempted suicide. The old man realizes the importance of this cafe in his life.

This is the pleasant place where he goes to escape the reality of his own life. Even though the old man believes that this place is an escape, Hoffman says, "...darkness has indeed invaded this character's place, for he sits 'in the shadows the leaves of the trees made against the electric light'" (181).

The old man's dignity and style are all that he has to fight this void. Hemingway believed "that an ordered personal style is one of the few sources of value in an otherwise meaningless universe" (181). Also, Anthony Burgess once said, "Life is too short for anything but the one thing that can outface death - human dignity" (Burgess 61).

Even Snow 3 though the young waiter says that "an old man is a nasty thing (Hemingway 257)", the old man is personalized as a well-cut individual. The old waiter says that the man is clean and no matter how drunk he gets, he will never spill his drink (Hoffman 181). The old man keeps his dignity even when facing the dark chaos of nada.

An exact opposite of the old man is the young waiter. The inexperienced waiter has not yet grasped the idea of nothingness. He can't see the light and does not have the vision. Therefore he can not deal with it when he is face to face with it. Hoffman believes that, "...youth and the illusory confidence...are clearly inadequate tools with which to combat the darkness" (184). Nothing to him means not having something, a personal

item. Hoffman calls the young waiter's idea "the absence of those objects capable of providing material satisfaction" (178). To add to his ignorance, the young waiter violates the principle of cleanliness and spill the old man's brandy on the table (258). He believes his life is fine and that this nada is nowhere present. However, when the old waiter jokingly accuses the young waiter's wife of infidelity, the young waiter snaps back at him with anger (258). Therefore, he is not even sure about what his wife is doing. He is so confident that there is no darkness in his life that he totally ignores the idea of his wife cheating on him. Hoffman sums up this character's roll when he says, "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 and physical gratification" (189).

Nada is the most overwhelming idea presented in this story. It is pictured as a fate that everyone must come to deal with at sometime or another. However, some people deal with it better than others. "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 precious perch" (191). The "precious perch" refers to life itself. Hoffman believes that everyone must learn to deal with this nothingness in order to survive it in their own lives. If a person is overtaken by nada, they end up in despair and loneliness. Some attempt suicide and others commit suicide like the late Ernest Hemingway.

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Works Cited

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