

American Modern Society and Young Generation with Reference to "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"

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Abstract— In "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", Earnest Hemingway (1899-1961) presents the story of a common day in a restaurant where two waiters are involved in a regular conversation. But under this usual day life a complex and harsh reality is hidden. Like his other stories Hemingway shows his mastery on his iceberg theory. The main focus of this article is what the story truly is about. There are many different opinion about this story given by many critics. Most of the critics appreciate the fact that the story is about nothingness. Some also claim that it is about the loneliness of old people. According to some scholars the story is about the importance of women in men's life. The article argues that the story is about the American modern society and its effect on people, especially on younger generation which make them more materialistic and for that reason ability to understand others' feelings, especially their feelings for the old people has been lost.

Index Terms— Youngers, American modern society, elders, iceberg theory, materialistic, feelings.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1933), one of the many short stories that Ernest Hemingway wrote in his life which is one of the most favorite and debated story among the readers. The setting of the story is in a café where discussion between two waiters about an old man can be known.

At the beginning of the story it can be found that the old man kept staying in a café in late night and kept drinking. The days before, he tried to commit suicide without any reason. The two waiters kept talking about him and the younger waiter between them hoped him to leave the café. Then the old man asked for more brandy but the young waiter rejected it and asked him to come back next day.

After the old man left, the waiters turned into small conflict because the older waiter wanted to open the café longer where the young one wanted the opposite and it continued until they finally closed the café. After that the old waiter went to the bodegas where he discriminated the place with the café he worked on and did not like that place. So he left the place and go home when it's already dawn and laid to his bed he thought that it was only insomnia and many people had that.

In this story there is no well-developed plot rather it is just a description of situation. The way Hemingway represents the story, it seems like the story is only a representation of a part of everyday happening. But under the picture of daily life there are many hidden meaning which are described in different ways by many scholars and it is shown in the next part of this article.

The using technique in the story presents his expertise on his iceberg theory. Hemingway is the founder of the new writing style called the Iceberg Theory which is also known as the theory of omission. He developed the style as a result of being a journalist. The theory is named as iceberg because, the way only a small part of an iceberg is visible above water, his stories presented a small part of what is actually happening. Hemingway believed that the application of the iceberg theory created the perfect short story. About Hemingway's theory a linguist named Leech stated that "The important information in Hemingway's text lies in the implied, but unstated parts. He wanted the reader to feel something beyond their understanding" (Leech & Short 183).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many researches about the actual fact in this story. Most of the scholars agree that the story is about nothingness. Example can be given of a scholar of Jönköping University in Sweden, named Hietanen, who says that nothingness, and the word "nada" is the key word in this story (Hietanen 15). I think this is the basic idea of this story because the whole story is about nothing and meaninglessness. Another researcher states that " 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place' tells about the loneliness of old people characters in the story" (Purnama 5). But he shows that this loneliness is different from usual loneliness. He says this loneliness is connected with the old age. However, I have found one interesting comment given by a writer, named Petersen who says " 'A Clean Well-lighted Place', was actually a metaphoric celebration of femininity, in praise of womanhood, an explanation of the clean illumination of our lives (places), without whom, we are dark and dull, and lifeless, much like the iconic short story" (Petersen 21). I appreciate that this is a unique idea that he has given. However, in the next section I will show that the story is about American modern society and its effect on young generation.

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3 YOUNG GENERATION AND AMERICAN MODERN SOCIETY

The story represents the society of 20th century, a society after First World War. From the earlier discussion it can be understood that the story is about the feeling, disparity and effect of society on the old people. But I believe that this story is about American modern society and its effect on people, especially on young generation. American modern society mainly began in the duration between World War I and World War II. After the WWI there was a rapid change in the American society as well as in the lifestyle of American people because of technological advancement, loss of traditional values and ideals. The more people adopted with the modern society, the more they became materialistic and the result was they became more concern about worldly achievements and as a result they lost their feelings for others'. For example,

"Why did he do it?"

"For his soul."

"How much money has he got?"

"He's got plenty." (Hemingway 7)

These are two lines from the story. It shows the conversation between the older and younger waiter about the old man. The main issue behind this conversation is mainly about the incident of suicide that the old man was trying to do a day before. But according to the younger waiter the old man tried to suicide for nothing because he has plenty of money. So the younger waiter believes that money is the only source of happiness. But he is unable to understand that money can't bring happiness. Moreover, when the old man asks for more brandy, the younger waiter misbehaves with him.

... "No more tonight. Close now."

"Another," said the old man.

"No, finished"..... (Hemingway 8)

So we can see, how the modern society makes the young generation more materialistic which decreases their feeling and modesty towards other, especially for old generation. This situation is continuing in our present time. Today people are more busy with their works and also busy with running after money. People are becoming more self-centered and seeking more for personal satisfaction.

4 CONCLUSION

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is one of the best examples of Hemingway's proficiency on his talent and on his iceberg theory where he represents the hard reality after WWI. The story is started in a clean and well lighted café and ended with the statement about insomnia which represent a harsh reality of elders' lives. According to the scholars the story is the representation of nothingness, loneliness, importance of woman in a man's life. However, I believe, the story is truly about American modern society and its effect on people, especially on young generation. The social change effects on the

feelings and morality of the young generation that's why they fail to understand others' emotions. They become so materialistic that they believe only money can bring happiness which is not true because money is not everything.

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