



A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

The basic situation is that of two waiters--one older, one younger--sitting in a bar late at night, waiting for their last customer, a deaf old man, to leave. Most of the action consists of the dialogue between the two waiters in which the older waiter is sympathetic with the old man, while the younger one is impatient to get home to his wife.

The subject of the dialogue revolves around the knowledge one of the waiters has that the old man tried to commit suicide the previous week.

When the old man finally leaves, the older waiter, identifying with the old man, engages in a conversation with himself. He knows that the old man wanted to stay in the bar because it was clean and well-lighted, and that what the old man feared was not anything particular but rather a nothing. The old waiter emphasizes his own nihilism by reciting the Lord's Prayer, in which for certain words he substitutes the Spanish word for nothing--nada: "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name...."

The story is difficult, not only because the dialogue is confusing and the plot minimal, but also because the philosophic idea that underlies the story is a complex existential one. The old waiter knows that nothingness--the sense that there is no God or external value in the world--is the only ultimate reality. The clean, well-lighted cafe is a little island of order in the midst of the nothingness of reality; such concrete actualities constitute the only meaning that remains.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/clean-well-lighted-place-salem>