



**GERIATRIC SYNDROME IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S
*A CLEAN WELL LIGHTED PLACE***

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Abstract

This study is attempted to analyze geriatric syndrome found in the Ernest Hemingway's short story entitled A Clean Well Lighted Place. The problems of the study are 1) How does Ernest see geriatric syndrome as reflected in A Clean Well Lighted Place? 2) How does Ernest Hemingway life relate to A Clean Well Lighted Place short story? To achieve the objectives of the study, I used qualitative descriptive research and biographical approach. The primary source of the data is the short story A Clean Well Lighted Place. The data in this research are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, implicit meaning found in the short story, and other relevant source. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that main theme of the story was a problem occurred in elder called geriatric syndrome. In addition, the story was a biography of Ernest Hemingway as it reflected Hemingway's life.

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INTRODUCTION

The life itself cannot be separated from the process of aging. It began from youth, middle-aged and finally to old people. All of the aging periods will have great effects in someone's life and will influence the psychological aspect in the development of age. However the mental and psychological processes of becoming old remain unstoppable. As the function of the body decreased causes the problem in enormous scale. They are lack of visibility, the decrease of strength and also the limitation of memory. That many problems will surely rise up, harming the mind and mental as the process of aging invade.

Criticism towards problem of aging can be found in some literary works. It happens because literary work is the reflection of phenomena that happens in real life. According to Wellek (1956: 94) literary work represents phenomenon of life in society. There is an interesting story about an old age and how exactly the process of aging in Ernest Hemingway's short story *A Clean, Well Lighted Place*.

Robert (1993: 50) insists that to deal with the most obvious cause of a work of art that is its creator or the author. The discussion about the problem of aging is interesting to be conducted. In this study I will analyze the geriatric syndrome and how biography of Ernest related to the story towards elderly which is illustrated in his work *A Clean, well lighted place*.

I try to search the connection of real life-experience of the author to sequence of events of the story in terms of Cuddon (1998: 83) defines that biography is an account of a person's life, and a branch of a history. It provides any forms of material which is germane to the biographer's purpose: the subject's own writings (especially diaries and letter), his laundry bills, official archives, memoirs of contemporaries, the memories of living witnesses, personal knowledge, other books on the subject, photographs

Not so far different from Cuddon, Wellek (1985: 75) emphasizes the same notion, he further say that:

In the view of biographer, the poet (read: the novelist) is simply another man whose moral and intellectual development, external career, and emotional life, can be constructed and can be evaluated by reference to standards, usually drawn from some ethical system or code of manners. His writings may appear as mere facts of publications, as events like those in the life of any active man.

According to the explanation above, I am interested to analyze *A Clean Well Lighted Place*. This is because *A Clean Well Lighted Place* can be used to study of old aging through the autobiography of Ernest Hemingway. There are similarities between characters in the story with Ernest personal experience in life.

Theory and Approach

M.H. Abrams in his *Orientations of Critical Theory* (1953) develops a scheme for literary criticism. One of the theories is expressive criticism. Expressive criticism focused on the author, his emotions and his expression of emotion to the reader. Expressive Criticism led to an interest in the author's biography and (later) psychology: to understand the poem, one must psychoanalyze the author and know all the secrets of his biography.

Wellek and Warren (1956:75) claim that the most obvious cause of a work of art is its creator, the author, and hence an explanation in terms of the personality and the life of the writer has been one of the oldest and best established methods of literary study. Wellek (1985:75) clarifies that biography can be judge in relation to the light it throws on the actual production of literary work, but we can, of course, defend it and justify it as a study of the man of genius, of his moral, intellectual and emotional development. What Wellek wants to say is simply the through study of a

person through his biography. If it is supposed to be a literary work, the person is the author. So, the author has at least got involved in the process of writing through making up the minds of the characters in his work.

The basic assumption underlying theory of psychology is that the literary work can reveal something about its author. The term id-psychology (Instinct-psychology) centers on the role of the sexual instincts as the determining force of an individual's life (Wright 1984:37). Analysts and literary critics psychoanalyze the author by focusing on his literary works as products of his psyche.

The study of an artist's life to explain his works, or the study of his work to explain his mind was already an established mode to make a various attempts to relate genius to madness (Wright 1984:38). Cesare Lombroso, an Italian professor of legal medicine argued that creative genius was a by-product of psychosis, in that the advance of this condition can turn someone with an average mind into genius (Lombroso 1891). This statement provoked a controversy as to who was sick or whose state of health does not in any case reflect on his work.

Hemingway's Point of View towards Geriatric Syndrome

a. Despair

Many elders have been struggling in finding self-confidence and purpose in life, running away from deep depression which is parts of geriatric syndrome. It is very common to hear from some elders who begin to complain that they're living too long and life no longer has meaning as the years pass. We can see despair here faced by the elders. What elder should do is to find happiness, love, comfort and purpose to have a meaningful and fulfilled life, and have peace at the time he will be facing his departure rather than complaining about life.

In the early scene of Ernest Hemingway's *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, we

are introduced to an unfolding scene of an elderly man, holding up two waiters at a Spanish café until the late hours of the night as he orders drink after drink. The reader is invited into the conversation of the two waiters, one young and full of life, and one older and wiser, as the story of this old, deaf man begins to unfold. They shared personal opinion and insight into the old, drunk, deaf man's life. See the following situation and dialogues between two waiters:

The two waiters inside the cafeknew that the old man was a little drunk, and while he was a good client they knew that if he become too drunk he would leave without paying, so they kept watch on him.

Older waiter : "Last week he tried to commit suicide," one waiter said.

Younger waiter : "Why?"

Older waiter : "He was in despair."

Younger waiter : "What about?"

Older waiter : "Nothing."

Younger waiter : "How do you know it was nothing?"

Older waiter : "He has plenty of money."
(Line 5-14 ; Page 1)

The above situation portrays the condition of an elder in facing his despair as a part of geriatric syndrome occurred in elderly time. Elders do not need to be wealthy and have much money, but love from the people around them. Being alone for the elders is hard for passing through which causes so much depression then leads to the decision to commit suicide.

Deeper in this short story, the problematic concept of despair as parts of geriatric syndrome discussed from the very beginning and almost in the whole story. When the two waiters are having conversation, the old waiter tells the young waiter that the deaf man had tried to commit suicide recently. When asked why, the old waiter simply replied with empathy that the deaf-old man was in despair about nothing as if that were a most suitable and complete justification to try to end one's life. As human beings, we cannot describe the idea

of nothing as everything is made of something. There is always something happening and even when there is nothing happening, it's still something. The thought of true nothingness, simply and absolutely illustrated which is startling and frightening because we cannot understand it.

The following is another dialogue which shows the despair of an elder who tried to commit suicide:

Younger waiter : "He's drunk now," he said.

Older waiter : "He's drunk every night."

Younger waiter : "What did he want to kill himself for?"

Older waiter : "How should I know?"

Younger waiter : "How did he do it?"

Older waiter : "He hung himself with a rope."

(Line 40-44 ; Page 2)

Moreover, Hemingway talks much about the response towards elderly by many of younger generation, when one of the characters refers to the old sad man. Unfortunately, many elders feel more in despair as there is some rejection from younger generation as presented by the old man character of the story. Let us see the following dialogues which illustrate the above statement:

Younger waiter : "What do you want?"

The deaf-old man: The old man looked at him. "Another brandy," he said.

Younger waiter : "You'll be drunk," the waiter said.

The old man looked at him. The waiter went away.

Younger waiter : "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 café and marched out to the old man's table. He put down the saucer and poured the glass full of brandy.

Younger waiter : "You should have killed yourself last week," he said to the deaf man. (Line 26-34 ; Page 1-2)

Analogically, Hemingway shows that the character of the old man is trying to find a clean and well-lighted place to run from the darkness of his isolation and despair.

b. Loneliness

Geriatric syndrome as portrayed by Ernest Hemingway in his short-story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* illustrated by an old deaf man prefers to be alone drinking late at night in a clean bar, so he could be away from his emptiness and everything that a day light can remind him what he is missing from life.

Furthermore, loneliness may lead to the bitterness drawn by the younger generation rejection to their existence. Many times elders are misunderstood because of their bitterness by younger generation. All sourness is consequence of their frustration and isolation. The elders are needy of love and attention, as a child. They need a support of family in a delicate period of their life that they are realizing that their 'time to go' is close. However, most all of them are forgotten in asylums and nurseries.

Moreover in the story, the feeling of loneliness and not confidence is also illustrated by the older waiter as he is entering the advanced ages himself. Let us see the following conversation between two waiters:

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

Younger waiter: "And what do you lack?"

Older waiter: "Everything but work."

Younger waiter: "You have everything I have."

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

Younger waiter: "Come on. Stop talking nonsense and lock up."

Older waiter: "I am of those who like to stay late at the café," 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."

Younger waiter: "I want to go home and into

bed."

Older waiter: "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."

Younger waiter: "Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long."

Older waiter: "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."

(Line 93-108 ; Page 4)

From all the above conversation, it is found that so many real sad conditions of getting into golden ages are resulted from non-acceptance from the person itself at first, and after from surrounding people. It was proven that is not money and not healthy that will bring joy to an elder, even though they could be extremely beneficial. Few simple things become more valuable at the aged years come. Conversations, friends, family and home are more appreciated than never. The comfort of being accepted and respected for who you are; taste good as a hot coffee in a cold morning. The most important achievement of life is when a person lives a happy life. The one will die happier and in peace, knowing that his life was fulfilled.

c. Insomnia

Insomnia is a common geriatric syndrome in elder adults. Chronic sleep difficulties affect older people more than younger adults. Factors that contribute to insomnia in elder people may include medical illness and medication use, both of which are more common in older adults. Elder people also have too little physical activity and reduced exposure to bright light.

One of the lines that show insomnia in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" comes at the end when the old waiter talks to himself:

Older waiter: After all, he said to himself, it's probably only insomnia. Many must have it. (Line 137-138 ; Page 5)

Here Hemingway was referring to anxiety which every elder has which causes insomnia. Anxiety that he may never find the eternal peace called heaven that he is searching for when the time has come. In this case, depression which is experienced by the deaf old man goes along with anxiety, and both can be debilitating, reducing overall health and quality of life includes the quality of sleep.

d. Failure of Vision and Hearing

It's very common to see the failure or loss of hearing and vision experienced by the elders. Failure of vision and hearing is a very common sign of geriatric syndrome. In Hemingway's *A Clean Well Lighted Place*, failure of vision and hearing as a part of geriatric syndrome portrays by the deaf old man. Let us see the following quotation:

"..... In the day time 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 quite and he felt difference."(Line 2-4 ; Page 1)

The deafness is used as a metaphor of his emotional distance from the world. The character reflects the feelings of many elders nowadays, such as so much melancholy and sorrow to the point of lead him to attempt suicide. These condition of the old man is clearly different with young generation.

e. Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, or "thinning bones," is a condition that makes the bones of older adults more fragile and easy to break. A diet that doesn't have enough calcium and vitamin D, too little exercise, smoking, too much alcohol, certain medications, and certain medical conditions such as thyroid problems, can increase the risk of osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is also more common in people over age 65 for women and men age 70 and older.

Ernest Hemingway described in *A Clean Well Lighted Place* about osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a part of geriatric syndrome which gave occasion to people who suffered osteoporosis has a problem in his bone. The problem cause difficult walk, they could not walk steady.

The old-deaf man character in the story shows that he experienced osteoporosis as part of geriatric syndrome he endured. See the following quotation:

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 (Line 75-78 ; Page 3)

The quotation above shows that the old man character is suffering osteoporosis. Ernest Hemingway described the old man is walking unsteady. The way the old man walking indicates that there is something wrong in his bone. In such case suffered by older age is thinning of bone or commonly called as osteoporosis where the people suffer from osteoporosis has a difficult in walk. This cause the older people could not walk steady.

The Relation of Ernest Hemingway's Life with *A Clean Well Lighted Place*

a. Bad Habbit of Hemingway

Hemingway was a kind of a an who was a part of liquor. He considered liquor as everything which could make him enjoy his life. For him drinking was the only way to kill the unpleasent memories and the fear of death that he wanted to forget.

Hemingway's life style who always liked liquor is true. He illustrated his characters as people who are always close to liquor. Hemingway believed that there was no better taste than that of liquor. Liquor according to Hemingway was the only thing taht could kill bad memories and tears of death. Malcolm Cowley in, *Hemingway, A Collection of Critical Essay*, confirms:

"Nevertheless he finds that a cup of absinthe took the place of evening papers, of all of the old evenings in cafes, of all the chesnut trees that would be in bloom now in this month ...of all the things he had enjoyed and forgotten and that came back to him when he tasted that opaque, bitter, tongue-numbing, brain warming, idea changing liquid alchemy. There is much that he wants to remember, but also the fear of death that he wants to forget, and personifies liquor as the giant killer."(Weeks, 1992:43)

In *A Clean Well Lighted Place* story, the old man characters is illustrated by a person who close to liquour. The old man stays at cafe untill late and drink alcohol. We could see from the quotation below.

"The old man sitting in the shadow rapped on his saucer with his glass. The younger waiter went over 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 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. He sat down at the table with his colleague again.

"He's drunk now," he said.

"He's drunk every night."(Line 24-39; Page 1-2)

Hemingway admitted that he could not leave liquor, it clear that there is a connection between writers's background and his work.

b. Leisure activities of Hemingway

Hemingway who involved in World War I tried to write everything he saw and experienced frankly.

"I only know what I have seen," was a statement which came often to his lips and pen. What he personally done, or what he knew unforgettable by having gone through one version of it, was what he was interested in telling about. This is not to say that he refused to invent freely. But he always made it sacrosanct point to invent in terms of what he actually knew from having been there." (Baker. 1962:48)

Hemingway's story *A Clean Well Lighted Place* which is studied, illustrated some of the experiences from Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway other experience which shows that there is a relationship between his life and his work is when he liked to attend a cafe to see a expatriates (soldiers or former soldiers) in his leisure time. This can be seen in the book of Charle Baker entitled *Hemingway, the Writer as An Artist*.

In *A Clean Well Lighted* story shows the setting was in cafe, during the stay of the characters in the cafe, Hemingway write about the expatriat or soldier with his girl who went by the cafe. It can be seen from the following quotation:

"They sat together at the 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." (Line 15-19; Page 1)

c. Hemingway Spiritual Experience

If we take a look deeper to *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, this short story offered a

brief look into the underside of Hemingway's spiritual world. The nothingness haunted Hemingway's old age. Hemingway began to suffer from hypertension and insomnia and complained about his wife's expenses. The "clean" and "well-lit" cafe became the symbolic retreat for his characters, those who had lost meaning in life.

Contrast from the social dislocation and emotional loss in the wake of the First World War, Hemingway's short story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* which was published in 1926 captures the physical loneliness and spiritual disillusionment of old age. The writer expresses his existential nihilism, a feeling that that life has no intrinsic meaning or value through the old man and the old Spanish waiter, two characters who against the positive realism of the young waiter. Both the aged characters tell us in their different ways that we cannot place an order on life.

In *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, Hemingway gives clues to the readers that he is on this spiritual journey of searching for answers and meaning in the embracement of the concept of eternity, though doubt and lack of faith plagues his intellect. The idea of eternity is directly opposite of nothingness. One might argue that eternal nothingness exists, but that would be to admit an existence and beginning to nothing.

Moreover in the story, the deaf man and the old waiter represent Hemingway's searching and yearning for spiritual awakening and understanding of eternity and one's place in it. However, you can also see that in one passage the 'older waiter' puts a series of *nadas* into a prayer. See the following quotation:

Older waiter: "..... 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. (Line 118-124; Page 4-5)

The content of the prayers mean nothing to him anymore. It is understood that he is talking about the 'old man', that this man's life is empty mainly because he has lost his wife, that the 'old man' has nothing and that the only way out of this nothingness is death.

At this time in Spain, where this story takes place, most people were of the Catholic faith, which states that the souls of those who commit suicide are put to eternity in the fires of hell. If he were a good Catholic, he would not have turned away from his beliefs by trying to end his own life. It is known that at the end of his life, Hemingway committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun in Ketchum on July 2, 1961 as the climax of his accumulated life problems which is clearly illustrated in *A Clean Well Lighted Place*.

CONCLUSION

Firstly, Hemingway shows common geriatric syndrome which are found in the short story and categorize into two parts, first is psychological degradation, the second is physical degradation. In this study, I discussed osteoporosis and loss of hearing in terms of physical degradation. Then, in terms of psychological degradation includes despair, loneliness, and insomnia.

Secondly, the story also portrayed biography of Hemingway that shows activity of Hemingway's old life such as Ernest Hemingway's bad habits, his leisure time activities and the spiritual life of Hemingway. The story reflects Hemingway life. As a result, I can conclude that this short story actually Hemingway's biography.

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