

## EXISTENTIALISM ANALYSIS OF SARTRE IN THE SHORT STORY "A CLEAN WELL-LIGHTED PLACE" BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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### Abstract

This article presents an analysis of existentialism from Sartre's viewpoint as reflected in Ernest Hemingway's short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." The study investigates existential motifs such as solitude, void, the essence of existence, and internal struggles depicted through the personas of the youthful waiter, the aged waiter, and the isolated elderly individual. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research aims to dissect dialogues, character behaviors, and narrative construction to reveal the existentialist elements entwined within the narrative. By scrutinizing the existential themes interwoven in the storyline and juxtaposing them with Sartre's philosophical principles, the paper offers a profound exploration of the existentialist interpretation within Hemingway's literary creation.

**Keywords:** Sartre`s existentialism, ernest hemingway , short story”a clean-well lighted place”

### INTRODUCTION

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that focuses on existence, freedom, and individual experience as the primary basis in seeking the meaning of life. It challenges individuals to overcome their fears and anxieties by accepting the reality of life's uncertainties and choosing to act responsibly. This philosophy reminds us that we must struggle to find our own meaning in life and that only by facing the emptiness of life can we discover our true selves (aho, 2023).

Existentialism, derived from the combination of "ex" meaning "outside" and "sistence" referring to "standing" or "placing," emphasizes an individual's self-placement and understanding beyond their boundaries. The concept focuses on the search for meaning in one's existence in the world. Existentialism prioritizes contingency over essence, making humans free entities. Humans are confronted with uncertainty and strive

to become superior entities, trying to find their identity through their existence, with the freedom to choose their own path. Humans are responsible for their existence. (Tambunan, 2016)

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980): Sartre is one of the most important figures in 20th-century existentialism, stating that "existence precedes essence." This means that humans first exist in the world before determining their own essence through choices and actions. Sartre also introduced the concept of "meaninglessness" or "absurdity" into his existentialist thought, stating that human life is essentially without inherent meaning and we must create our own meaning through our actions and decisions (dagun, 1990). Sartre explains that existence precedes essence, giving humans the freedom to determine their path in life. Humans, destined on earth in situations that are not always ideal, always have hopes and goals towards a better life. They seek their identity by acting according to their life choices and accepting the consequences of those actions. Existence fundamentally refers to the "way of being" of humans. This concept specifically relates to humans as meaningful and active beings, not applying to non-thinking and inactive beings. Existence is the "way of being" of humans in the world, focusing on how humans exist in the world with their characteristics involving daily life activities and attachment to the reality of the world. (Tambunan, 2016)

The consciousness humans possess drives them to act in refusal. The meeting between the subjective consciousness and the object results in a mutual dialogue involving efforts to objectify each other. Others play a key role in the internal struggle of existence, being witnesses who observe and question the individual who becomes the subject "I." In concrete relations with others, the individual who becomes the object "I" can experience two things. First, the individual can submit and surrender to others, making them an object and others the subject, as in cases of love and masochism. Second, the individual does not surrender to others but remains independent, for example, with an indifferent attitude, sadism, and hatred.

The purpose of analyzing existentialism in the short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is to explore Sartre's existential and philosophical themes present in the story, emphasizing the importance of individual freedom, individual existence, and our responsibility in creating meaning in a life that may lack inherent meaning.

## What Are the Basic Concepts of Existentialism?

The basic concept of Sartre's existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and the meaning of life. Existentialism focuses on the subjective experience of individuals in facing the reality of life, including loneliness, decisions, choices, and suffering.

Here are some basic concepts of existentialism:

### **1. Existence Before Essence**

Existentialists argue that individuals are born without a predefined purpose. They believe that humans first exist, and then they determine the meaning and purpose of their lives through their actions and choices.

### **2. Freedom**

Existentialism emphasizes individual freedom. Individuals have absolute freedom to make choices and are responsible for their actions. However, with freedom comes moral responsibility and personal consequences.

### **3. Concern for Loneliness and Isolation**

Existentialism highlights the experience of loneliness and isolation. Each individual is considered unique and isolated in their existence. Human presence in the world is often faced with anxiety and concerns about fundamental loneliness.

### **4. Uncertainty and Ambiguity**

Existentialism acknowledges the existence of uncertainty and ambiguity in life. Humans do not have direct access to absolute truth or universal meaning. Instead, they are faced with a condition of uncertainty that requires them to make choices in an ambiguous context.

### **5. Suffering and Death**

Existentialism recognizes the existence of suffering and death as inseparable parts of human life. Both are seen as unavoidable realities that can significantly influence human understanding and experience.

## **6. Search for Meaning in Life**

Existentialism emphasizes the importance of personally seeking meaning in life. Individuals are tasked with determining their own meaning in life through choices and actions.

## **7. Personal Responsibility**

Existentialism emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility for choices and actions. Individuals are responsible for their choices and must face the moral consequences of their actions. These concepts reflect the existentialist view of humans as beings who are free, unique, and responsible for facing their existence in the world. Existentialism is often associated with experiences of suffering, anxiety, and solitude. This philosophy emphasizes the importance of individual subjective experiences and challenges objective views or universal truths. Existentialism tends to critique thinking that neglects human aspects in the pursuit of finding the meaning of life.

It is important to note that existentialism is a broad movement with various interpretations and variations. There are differences in approaches and emphases among existential thinkers, and there is no single existential view that can represent the entire movement.

## **METHOD**

This research will involve qualitative analysis to explore Sartre's existentialist perspective in the short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" by Ernest Hemingway. The primary data to be collected will be the text of the short story itself. Additionally, additional data to be gathered will include direct quotes from the story, character analysis, and existentialist themes contained within it. Additional data sources may also include articles or other texts referencing existentialism, Ernest Hemingway's work, and related philosophical themes.

## **Instrument of the Study:**

The main instruments used in this research will be the understanding of the short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and the understanding of existentialism concepts. Character analysis, dialogue, story setting, and the philosophical messages contained in the story will be the main focus of the research instruments. The use of existentialist philosophical terms will also be an important instrument in analyzing the emerging themes in the story.

### **Subject:**

The research subjects will focus on the characteristics of existentialism in Ernest Hemingway's short story, especially in relation to themes of loneliness, emptiness, the meaning of life, and the internal conflicts of the characters. The subjects may involve the analysis of the main characters in the story, namely the young waiter, the old waiter, and the old man drinking alone.

### **Data Analysis:**

Data analysis will be conducted using a qualitative approach to identify and explore the existentialist themes present in the short story. The data analysis will include the breakdown of dialogue, character actions revealing existential aspects, identification of internal conflicts and existential struggles of the characters, mapping of existential themes in the narrative and story development, and a comparison of existentialist concepts with characterizations and messages conveyed in the short story. By using research instruments that encompass an understanding of the short story text, existentialism concepts, character analysis, and philosophical themes, this research will provide deep insights into the existentialist perspective in the literary work of Ernest Hemingway.

## **FINDING DISCUSSION**

### ***A. EXISTENTIAL INFLUENCE ON ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S BACKGROUND***

"A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is one of Ernest Hemingway's short stories first published in 1933. In this story, Hemingway presents a glimpse into the daily lives of three characters interacting in a café late at night. Ernest Hemingway's background had a strong influence on the short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." Hemingway is known

for depicting his own life experiences in his works (Williams, 1981). Some factors that influenced the short story include: (1.) *War Experience and Loss*: Hemingway was a World War I veteran and had experienced significant war trauma and loss. His battlefield experience can be seen in his stories filled with depictions of violence and human suffering. In "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," there is a tendency to explore themes of loneliness, nihilism, and the loss of meaning in life, (2.) *Minimalist Writing Style*: Hemingway is known for his minimalist writing style characterized by the use of short sentences, simple words, and efficient dialogue. This style is reflected in the short story, where every word and sentence is carefully chosen to create the precision and clarity typical of Hemingway (3.) *Bohemian Lifestyle and Experience in Paris*: Hemingway lived in an artist and writer community in Paris in the early 20th century. This experience gave him a deep understanding of bohemian life and cultural upheavals at that time. In "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," there is a view of life depicted as somber, empty, and the struggle to find meaning that may reflect his experiences amidst that community, (4.) *Influence of the Modernist Literary Movement*: Hemingway was part of the modernist literary movement that sought to break traditional literary conventions. In this short story, Hemingway uses innovative narrative techniques such as changes in perspective, breaks in the story's flow, and the omission of unimportant details. This reflects the influence of modernism in Hemingway's writing (5.) *Hemingway's Personal Life*: Hemingway was known to escape from his emotions and internal conflicts through physical experiences and challenging activities. This is reflected in the characters in the short story who tend to find comfort in the mundane daily life. (Baker, 1969)

## ***B. SARTRE'S POINT OF VIEW OF EXISTENTIALISM IN SHORT STORIES***

The short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" by Ernest Hemingway contains strong elements of existentialism in its narrative. The story depicts the human struggle with emptiness and void in life, and their efforts to find meaning in their own existence. Ernest Hemingway portrays typical existential themes in his simple yet powerful writing style. Through the portrayal of three characters - a young waiter, an old waiter, and an elderly man drinking alone in a café, the story explores themes of loneliness, emptiness, and the meaning of life.

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In this short story, Hemingway introduces three main characters who symbolize aspects of existentialism. Research can be conducted from the perspective of different characters to understand how Hemingway portrays existentialism in the story:

### ***1. The Perspective of the Young Waiter:***

*"I hope he is gone. I never get to bed before three o'clock. What kind of hour is that to go to bed?"*

*"He stays up because he likes it."*

*"He is lonely. I am not lonely. I have a wife waiting for me in bed."*

*"No. I am not confident and I am not young."*

*"Come on. Don't talk nonsense and lock up."* (english, 2023)

Loneliness is one of the things Hemingway wants to focus on. The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling defines loneliness as "an unpleasant influence, combining sadness and anxiety, a perceived response to the lack of adequate relational contact. (hunter, 1990)

The young waiter in the story represents an earlier and idealistic form of existentialism, less affected by existential void. He seems less understanding of the needs of the older people and lacks sympathy for the suffering experienced by humanity. He is impressed by appearance and worldly pleasures, disregarding the loneliness and suffering that may exist in the world. He fails to grasp the human need for deeper meaning and values. His perspective reflects ignorance and a lack of understanding of life's difficulties.

Another focus related to the human experience in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is the issue of aging, closely related to the previous point of loneliness. Regarding old age, Lewis Sherill in *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* explains that:

The elderly face the loss of many important aspects of life -- status, home, possessions, physical health and agility, as well as significant relationships. This repeated loss over a relatively short period can lead to nearly chronic sadness reactions and test issues of faith in basic values and life philosophy. (hunter, 1990). The young waiter, who may experience the loneliness and aging issues mentioned above, states that he "does not want to be that old. It is not good to be old." However, he reacts insensitively to the old customer. When the old man wants another drink, the young waiter refuses to serve him because he wants to close quickly to go home to his wife. The old man then walks away "unsteadily but with dignity" after paying for his drink. (english, 2023)

## ***2. The Perspective of the Older Waiter:***

The older waiter represents a deeper and more experienced perception of existentialism. He has a deeper understanding of the difficulties of life and the human need for a meaningful existence. He seeks light in a dark and empty life, as reflected in his longing for a clean and well-lighted place. The older waiter also realizes that all life is threatened by loneliness and emptiness, but still seeks ways to find beauty and meaning in difficult situations. The old waiter, who shows sympathy for the old man, seems to regret the young waiter's attitude towards the old customer.

*"I am one of those who like to stay late at the cafe," said the older waiter.*

*"With all those who do not want to sleep. With all those who need light in the night."*

*"I want to go home and sleep."*

*"We are of two different kinds," said the older waiter. He had already changed his clothes and was ready to go home. (english, 2023)*

*"It is not only a question of age and confidence although both are very beautiful. Every night I am reluctant to close because there may be someone who needs this cafe."*

*"You do not understand. This cafe is clean and pleasant. The light is bright. The shadows of the leaves are good now too." (english, 2023)*



The reader sees the contrast between youth and old age. The young waiter is eager to go home because he has someone to go home to; he still has expectations and a future, unlike the elderly and the older waiter. Being old and losing "youth, confidence," this waiter understands the problems faced by elderly customers.

*What is the problem?*

It is the "Tone and despair," the "absence" in life, the "eternal confrontation of humans with emptiness." (Williams, page 102) The "nothingness" stretches out before the old people - there is no more future for them. As mentioned earlier, the word "nothing" is crucial in understanding the essence of A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.

*"What do you want?"*

The old man looked at him. *"Brandy again," he said.*

*"You will get drunk,"*

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

### ***3. The Perspective of the Old Man in the Café***

The old man represents an individual most affected by the existential void. He feels isolated and purposeless in his life, hence he tries to seek solace in drinking alone in a well-lit place. Alcohol becomes an escape from his loneliness and emptiness. This old man may be an example of a person struggling to accept the meaninglessness of existence and seeking ways to escape that emptiness, trapped in a meaningless and existential void. He leads a routine and monotonous life, without clear purpose or adequate meaning. He feels trapped in darkness, emptiness, and the lack of meaning in his life. He tries to overcome his frustration with consistency in his routines and habits, but still feels lonely and empty.

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by loneliness and emptiness but still looks for ways to find beauty and meaning in difficult situations.

Some aspects of existentialism reflected in this short story are:

### *I. Loneliness and Emptiness of Life*

The characters in this short story face deep loneliness. They feel isolated and find it difficult to find meaning in their lives. The bright and empty bar scene symbolizes the emptiness in human life. The characters in this short story experience emptiness and contemplate the meaning of life amidst darkness and confusion. A character experiencing loneliness is the old man who frequents the café. The old man drinking alone at the café appears to suffer from profound loneliness. He is trapped in an empty routine and seeks peace and comfort in the darkness of night. When the young waiter wants to close the café and drive the man away, the old waiter understands the human need for a comfortable and friendly place to spend time, expressing an existential understanding that human existence can be very lonely and meaningless without places that provide light and warmth. Hemingway depicts loneliness and emptiness with a simple yet powerful language style, aiding readers in understanding the emotions experienced by the characters.

### *II. Existential Uncertainty*

The characters in this short story also face uncertainty in their lives. They are unsure of what they should do or the meaning of their lives. A character experiencing uncertainty is the young waiter. He feels confused about what he should do in his life and lacks a clear purpose. Hemingway uses detailed and deep descriptions to portray the uncertainty and anxiety of humans through conversations between the characters. They discuss a man attempting suicide and attempt to find reasons or meanings behind that action. Uncertainty about human existence and destiny is an important aspect of existential thought.

### *III. Meaning of Life*

Despite facing loneliness and uncertainty, Hemingway provides hope to find meaning in life. The old man visiting the café. The café is a place where he can escape the emptiness and find some solace. Meanwhile, the older waiter demonstrates the awareness and freedom of individuals in living their lives. He realizes the emptiness and limitations of life but still strives to create a little light in that darkness. Hemingway shows that although life may feel meaningless, there is hope to find some meaning in simple moments.

#### *IV. Limitations and Death*

Death and awareness of life's limitations are also important existential elements in this story. The old man trying to commit suicide implies a feeling of despair in facing the limitations of his life and seeking comfort in a bright and clean place.

Despite the story being portrayed in a gloomy atmosphere, it also highlights the difference between generations and different perspectives on life. The old waiter understands the condition of the man who drinks alone because he has felt it himself. He realizes that meaningful life can be found in clean, bright, and comfortable places, such as the café itself. The young waiter, on the other hand, represents a younger generation that may not fully understand or experience the loneliness and emptiness felt by the man.

Overall, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" presents an existential picture of loneliness, emptiness, and the meaning of life. Ernest Hemingway uses a strong minimalist writing style to portray individuals trapped in loneliness and facing the meaninglessness of life. This short story raises existential questions inviting readers to reflect on human conditions and the search for meaning in life.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Sartre's existentialism is a philosophical movement that questions and expands our understanding of human life. By emphasizing individual freedom, existentialism teaches the importance of taking personal responsibility for our choices and actions. In this complex modern world, existentialism remains relevant in facing uncertainty and seeking authentic meaning. By understanding existentialism, we can reflect on and develop a deeper perspective on ourselves and human existence as a whole. (Tambunan, 2016)

Overall, through an existentialist perspective, Ernest Hemingway portrays the struggle of individuals to find meaning and solace in a seemingly meaningless world. Although there is no clear solution in this story, it invites readers to reflect on life, loneliness, and the search for meaning in human life.

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