

THE MULHERN STORY LIBRARY — SALON READING GUIDE

A Clean, Well-Lighted Place

Ernest Hemingway · Modernism · first published 1933

AUTHOR	Ernest Hemingway
PUBLISHED	1933
ERA	Modernism
THEMES	Despair, Aging, Meaning
READER PATHWAY	Advanced adult / college seminar

INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

Late at night in a Spanish cafe, two waiters discuss an old, deaf man who lingers over his drink. One waiter wants to close and go home; the older waiter understands the man's need for a clean, well-lit refuge against the nothingness of the night.

HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in Scribner's Magazine in 1933 and collected in *Winner Take Nothing*, the story is a key statement of Hemingway's existential concerns, culminating in the famous 'nada' meditation.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Existential theme of nada, minimalism, the parody of the Lord's Prayer, aging, sleeplessness, and ambiguity in dialogue attribution. Strong for mature discussion of dignity, despair, and restraint.

SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What kind of dignity does the clean, well-lighted place offer, and why is it insufficient?
- How does the older waiter's understanding of nada differ from mere pessimism?

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READ & RESEARCH

1. Full text in *Winner Take Nothing* at Project Gutenberg Canada — <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/hemingway-winnertakenothing/hemingway-winnertakenothing-00-h.html>
2. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Clean,_Well-Lighted_Place