

successively discarding ideas which would limit the one idea of Being, found a natural metaphor in night and darkness. It was a double-edged metaphor, since night expressed both the obliteration of self and all created things, and also the uncharacterized Reality which was the object of contemplation." The Art of T.S. Eliot (New York, 1959), 167. My point is that nada, in the same way as Eliot's "the way down," may be taken to represent a "method of arriving at experience of the One." The same difference obtains, however, between "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and The Old Man and the Sea as obtains between The Wasteland and The Four Quartets. Like the Fisher King, the old waiter is left only with awareness of the potentiality of living a full life.

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea (New York, 1952), 133.

COMMENTS ON MR. STOCK'S  
 "NADA IN HEMINGWAY'S 'A  
 CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE'"

Mr. Stock's argument is carefully developed and persuasive, but I think it fails at a crucial point. His whole case is based on the assumption that the proper translation of "nada" as it is used by the older waiter is not "nothing," the conventional English translation, but "The Soundless Sound" or "The Voice of the Silence," which would indicate a kind of mystical religious experience like that described in Section III of T.S. Eliot's Burnt Norton. But the reflections of the older waiter clearly indicate that he considers "nada" as a very oppressive "nothing"--"a nothing that he knew too well." Here are the most important of these reflections: "What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada." It is hard to see how "nada" is not to be translated as "nothing," when the word "nothing" appears three times just before "nada" begins, and there is no indication that the thought changes in the transition to "nada." When he says that "Some lived in it and never felt it," the "it" clearly refers to "nothing," and then in the same sentence he says that "he knew it [nothing] was nada. . . ." The older waiter makes two assertions about his knowledge

of what is troubling him: (1) "It was a nothing that he knew too well," and (2) ". . . he knew it [the same "it" of the first statement] was "nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada."

Mr. Stock says that "nada" and the "clean, well-lighted place" are not "antagonistic and mutually exclusive terms," but the sentence which might possibly support his argument that these two "may be taken as complementary ways" of asserting religious experience comes in the part where the English word "nothing" is still being used. This sentence says, "It was only that [nothing] and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order." Obviously, then, the "cleanness and order" of the "clean, well-lighted place" are useful as a deterrent of the oppressive "nothing."

The reference to Eliot is beside the point because the descent into "the world of perpetual solitude" in Burnt Norton brings the peace that passeth all understanding, but when the old waiter, after delaying as long as he can and even on his way home going to another bar, well-lighted but lacking order (as he noted), finally goes home and to bed, he does not find peace or rest. Trying to minimize his unhappiness, he says, "After all . . . it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it."

Mr. Stock interprets the waiter's asking for a "little cup" of "nada" on the way home as an indication of his awareness of religious experience "and his willingness to accept it in stoical terms." The other, and more plausible, interpretation, following from the translation of "nada" as "nothing," is that the old waiter considers drinking, which is an effective deterrent of "nada" (especially in the "clean, well-lighted place") to be helpful even in this less tidy bar at which he lingers on the way home. In his weary fancy he even imagines that the effects of "nada" may be overcome if he considers that he is drinking it.

This theme of "nothing" or "Nothingness" has been a familiar one in modern times, ever since Mallarmé, after recounting his "terrible struggle with that old and malignant plumage, fortunately crushed, God," found himself facing a new and very formidable enemy, "Nothingness." As W. H. Auden has said of twentieth century man: "The lion of Nothingness chases us about." And in Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man," the listener, "nothing himself, beholds/ Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." The philosophers, too, are disturbed by this problem. Says Jaspers, a prominent German existentialist: "Being and Nothingness are inseparable, each containing the other, yet each violently repelling the other." And Heidegger, another prominent German existentialist, says: "Does Nothing exist only because the Not, i.e., negation exists? Or is it the other way about? Does negation and the Not exist only because Nothing exists? Where shall we seek Nothing? . . . Only in the clear night of dread's Nothingness is what-is as such revealed in all its original overtness: that it 'is' and is not Nothing." These are only a few of many examples that could be given from modern belles lettres and philosophy to

indicate the importance of what Jacques Maritain, in referring to the surrealists, has called "that spiritual experience of the blind glitter of nothingness...." Furthermore (to return to Hemingway), if we consider this subject in its broader aspect--the pessimism of literary naturalism--his treatment of it in this story was far from being his first or his last. Indeed, both in art (where he has used it with tedious frequency) and in life (where he has yielded to it with tragic frequency), modern man has placed far too much emphasis on what Professor Carlos Baker (in writing about this story) has described as "Something--a Something called Nothing."

Since Mr. Stock's article is obviously "New Critical," it may be well, in conclusion, to comment briefly on the whole movement somewhat loosely called "New Criticism." Although this movement, as has been noted by others, is "new" mainly in the sense of reviving the close textual analysis that had fallen into neglect, it has at its best had a wholesome effect on modern literary criticism both in and out of the classroom and seminar. Its influence, however, has for some years been steadily declining, mainly because of the excessive refinements and ingenuity of its zealous followers, among whom perhaps the most zealous and ingenious have been those who have specialized in symbol-hunting. Within this division of the New Critics there have been some who have specialized still further in the diligent pursuit of religious symbols. Mr. Stock's analysis is certainly good enough to make him a junior member of this firm. His argument, like that of his mentors, is closely reasoned--after we get past some very shaky premises. Accordingly, Mr. Stock deserves a hearing--and an answer.

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