

FICTIONAL FILM ADAPTATION

“A Clean Well Lighted Place” (1927)

Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

from *Follywood* (2005)

Faint strums of a Spanish guitar are heard, then clinking like a glass tapping on a saucer, dissolving to a small cafe at night. The cafe stands out like a lamp in a vast darkness. It has a striped awning and a tree outside, where an old man played by Walter Huston sits at a table on the terrace with a glass. He sits in the shadow the leaves of the tree are making as they stir in a breeze. He cocks his head and moves his eyes with mannerisms of the deaf.

Two waiters in white aprons sit inside the cafe at a table near the door. Bogart is the older waiter, hair slicked down with a thin mustache and a black bow tie. The young waiter is an actor who looks like Bobby Blake or Nick Adams in his twenties.

“That old drunk tried to kill himself.”

“Why?” asks Bogart.

“It was nothing.”

“How do you know it was nothing?”

The young waiter shrugs, “He has plenty of money.”

Bacall and a young soldier walk by along the street.

They stop near a streetlight and the soldier pulls her into his arms and kisses her. Then they hurry on. Bogart watches them sadly. He expresses concern that the police will get the soldier for being out after curfew. The young waiter asks what does it matter so long as he gets what he is after.

The deaf old man raps on his saucer with his glass. Annoyed and sleepy, the young waiter goes outside and asks him what he wants. The old man points at his glass. The young waiter goes back inside and complains to Bogart that he is tired and his last customer is going to stay all night. Then he takes a brandy bottle and another saucer from the counter and marches outside to the old man.

“You should have killed yourself last week!”

The young waiter pours into the glass until brandy slops over and runs down into the top saucer of the pile. The old man thanks him. The waiter takes the bottle back inside the cafe, sits down again with Bogart and complains that the old man has no respect for others. He wishes the old man would leave so that he can go home. His wife is waiting for him. Bogart remarks that the old man once had a wife too. The young waiter says a wife would be no good to the old man now. Bogart replies that he might be better with a wife.

Outside, the old man raps on his saucer.

The young waiter comes out with his head lowered like a bull, without reference to the corrido. He tells the old man he is finished. They are closing now. He wipes the edge of the table with a towel and shakes his head. The old man rises in the shadows of the leaves. He takes a coin purse from his pocket and pays for his drinks on the table. Then, leaning forward like an old matador plunging the sword, he adds a small tip. The young waiter stands there, watching him go off down the street, a very old man unsteady but dignified.

The two waiters put up the shutters on the cafe.

Bogart asks why he made the old man leave, it is just past two. While they talk, the young man is in a hurry and sounding more American than Spanish. Bogart tells him that he has youth, confidence and a job. He has everything. As for himself, he is different. He is one of those who likes to stay up late at the cafe, those who do not want to go to bed, those who need a light. Each night he is reluctant to close because there may be someone who needs the cafe.

“Hombre,” says the young waiter in contempt, “there are bodegas open all night long!”

Cut to a dark bodega where the crowd is drunk and the music is loud--then cut back quickly to the cafe.

“You do not understand,” says Bogart. “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.”

“Good night!” the young waiter cuts him off.

The shadows of the leaves are moving on the terrace where the old man sat, with the bright light behind them and a blackness all around, the shadows forming vague shapes, teardrop whorls of light and dark, each part containing its opposite.

Bogart turns off the electric light.

He comes out wearing a black beret and locks up. Then he lights a cigarette and stands looking down the street after the young waiter going the opposite direction from the way the old man went. Closeup of his face under the tilted beret with his thin mustache as he continues the conversation with himself in a voiceover that sounds weary.

What did he fear? It was not fear or dread, it was a nothing. 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. Bogart took a drag from his cigarette, looking after the young waiter. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada as it is in nada. His head nods on through a mock liturgy of nada. Then he tosses away his stub. He walks on in the direction of the old man. Huston had to persuade the industry censor that this passage does not satirize a religion, it mocks hypocrites.

The camera stays at the cafe and watches Bogart from behind as he walks alone into the darkness, saying to himself, “After all, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it.”

Michael Hollister
from Chapter 10, *Follywood* (2005)



Follywood dramatizes the 1940s and 50s, with deep focus on directors, writers and politics. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the young 20th Century Fox director Ryan Eislely films a documentary on women working in a defense plant, where he meets Sarah. They marry and settle down on a ranch in the San Fernando Valley with their two kids and their dog Boffo.

The Eisleys go on to make independent films adapting American classics, while Sarah tries to overcome Ryan's infidelities with scripts and actresses. Just after their film *Women in Hemingway* is released, the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities resumes investigating Communist influence in Hollywood, provoking their stars John Huston, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall to fight back by joining a delegation of stars who fly to the hearings in an airplane named Star of the Red Sea. Some suspect the Eisleys are Communists and the hearings could end their careers. They hope to clear themselves by producing the anti-Communist film *Blithedale*, starring Tracy and Hepburn.

The Eisleys become involved on both sides of the Blacklist scandal, as Sarah resists the Communists who control the Screen Writers Guild and Ryan fights the conservatives who try to impose a blacklist on the Screen Directors Guild. Like the nation, their marriage is threatened by disloyalty and the prospect of war. Orson Welles takes over their *Pierre*, then Josef Stalin courts Judy Garland in their *Flowering Judas*. Their lives interwoven with their films, the Eisleys dramatize the dominant political and aesthetic conflicts in Hollywood.