

Hills are like white elephants and shooting an elephant essay



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Even though the short stories Hills are Like White Elephants by Ernest Hemingway and Shooting an Elephant by George Orwell are not related, in the formal sense of this word, both of the mentioned works of literature nevertheless explore essentially the same theme.

This theme can be formulated as follows: One of the reasons why there is much more misery in the world than there could have been being that the world's unofficial 'rulers' (rationally minded White men, obsessed with trying to impose their dominance upon everybody else) are much too intellectually arrogant. In this paper, I will explore the validity of the above-stated at length.

Ernest Hemingway (1899 -1961) is considered one of America's most prominent literary figures. Throughout his life, Hemingway never ceased adopting a strong stance on the issues of socio-political importance, while going as far as taking part in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Spanish legitimate government, which at the time was opposed by the fascist rebels. Through the final years of the WW2, Hemingway worked as a journalist in London and Paris.

Hemingway's literary legacy is rather extensive - it accounts for seven novels and six collections of short stories, which are being marked by the author's adherence to the ideals of progress and tolerance. As of today, Hemingway's literary masterpieces are being commonly referred to, as such that contain several in-depth insights into what account for the qualitative aspects of the relationship between men and women.

In this respect, the short story *Hills are Like White Elephants* appears especially exemplary. After all, it is specifically the idea that, as compared to what it happened to be the case with women, men are differently ‘brain-wired,’ which represents the novel’s focal point. The validity of this suggestion can be well illustrated, in regards to the fact that, throughout his conversation with Jig, the American never ceased exhibiting the signs of being thoroughly arrogant.

For example, while trying to convince Jig that she should decide in favor of abortion, the American believed that the best way for him to address the task would be concerned with trying to appeal to his girlfriend’s sense of rationale: “ You don’t have to be afraid. I’ve known lots of people that have done it” (Hemingway 476).

It never occurred to him that it was not the prospect of facing any physical danger, which Jig considered the most upsetting thing about the suggested surgery, but the fact that it would result in killing her unborn child. In its turn, this implies that there is indeed much of a difference between how men and women address life-challenges.

Whereas, while reflecting upon the surrounding social reality and their place in it, men are innately driven to establish the dialectical links between causes and effects, women prefer to rely on their acute sense of intuition, in this respect. As Jig noted: “ I just know things” (Hemingway 477). Therefore, it can hardly be considered appropriate that, during the conversation, the American continued to insist that he knew how Jig should have handled the situation – solely by virtue of having been a man.

Essentially the same can be said about the existential attitude, on the part of the American, reflected by this character's tendency to avoid addressing life-challenges, as opposed to facing them directly. The allegory of the 'white elephants,' contained in Hemingway's story, substantiates the validity of this suggestion: " Jig: I said the mountains looked like white elephants" (Hemingway 475).

Given the fact that the American disregarded this Jig's remark, this can be well seen as such that that provides us with an insight into the workings of his psyche. The American tended to think that the unfamiliar things are, by definition posing a certain danger. In its turn, this betrays him as a typical egocentric White male, who was naturally tempted to objectify women as somewhat inferior beings, quite incapable of thinking rationally (Anderson 1350).

Therefore, it does not come as a particular surprise that there are many unmistakably tragic overtones to Hemingway's story - after having been exposed to it; readers inevitably conclude that it was only the matter of time before the American would leave Jig.

George Orwell (1903 - 1950) is considered one of the 20th century's most influential British writers. Throughout his life, Orwell continued to travel extensively around the world, which in turn prompted him to come to the idea that, when implemented practically, many of the otherwise well-meaning political ideologies (such as Communism) tend to backfire.

As of today, Orwell is mainly remembered for his world-famous anti-utopias 1984 and Animal Farm, in which the author showed what happens when a particular totalitarian ideology attains the dominant status within the society.

Nevertheless, the author's literary legacy contains several short stories, as well. Many of these stories are concerned with criticizing the notion of a 'white man's burden,' as has been reflective of the White people's mental fixation on the idea of domination (Kovel 60).

Orwell's short story Shooting an Elephant, stands out as a perfect example, in this respect. In it, the author has gone to a great length, while expounding on what used to be his colonial experiences in Burma. Having been stationed there as a police officer, Orwell was expected to act as a well-respected authority figure, in charge of maintaining law and order among the dark-skinned locals.

In its turn, this required the author to be willing to exercise a 'naked' physical force continuously, as the mean of ensuring that the thought of disobeying their British masters would never get into the heads of the people in question. Therefore, even though Orwell did not want to be sent on an errand of killing the unruly elephant, he nevertheless could not refuse.

The reason for this is that, had he done otherwise, the Burmese would begin to doubt his professional adequateness, as a 'natural-born' master: "And suddenly I realized that I had to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly" (Orwell 3).

This, of course, implies that, contrary to the conventions of the early 20th century's colonial discourse, the fact that Britain was able to build a vast empire, had very little to do with the country's claim that, by colonizing the 'savages', it was allowing the latter to enjoy the 'light of civilization' (Pennycook 25). Rather, the colonial success of Britain reflected the British colonizers' emotional comfortableness with coercing the colonial subjects to obey under the fear of punishment.

To make this fear particularly acute, the British did not have any other choice but to inflict pain and suffering upon others, just for the sake of doing it. This highlights the symbolic significance of the novel's scene that describes the death of an elephant: "I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last strength from his legs.

But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree" (Orwell 4). Apparently, besides aiming to disturb readers emotionally, the above-quoted also implies that the price of Britain's colonial prosperity was causing others to suffer, as something that had a value of a 'thing in itself.' And, as psychologists are aware of, only the extremely arrogant individuals do not have any moral objections against indulging in this specific activity.

I believe that the earlier provided line of argumentation, in defense of the idea that the novel *Hills are Like White Elephants and Shooting an Elephant* is concerned with exploring the motif of arrogance, is fully consistent with the paper's initial thesis.

It is indeed the case, which is why both of these novels are considered intellectually enlightening - they do provide readers with insight into what brings negativity into the lives of a great many people - namely, the fact that, as Hemingway and Orwell illustrated, some individuals cannot help acting arrogantly. Thus, it is thoroughly explainable why even today; the discussed novels appear to be just as actual, as it was the case back in the thirties.

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