

A theme of lack of communication within a relationship in hemingway's hills like ...



Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants' dramatizes a perennial issue we have all more than likely encountered: a lack of communication within a relationship. Hemingway narrates this short story through a continuous conversation between the story's two main characters, the American and Jig. The conflict at hand is inferred through both context clues and dialogue, and seems to be what most readers concur to be an unforeseen pregnancy. The overall issue throughout the piece is the couple's inability to express their thoughts on the matter, specifically their differing opinions. A clear absence of communication is essentially what creates a rift between the couple, and further drives Hemingway's take-home message of how we as individuals do not fully communicate our feelings, either to protect others or to protect ourselves. We can commence by considering the American's point of view. From superficial assumptions, he is clearly a younger and carefree man, and makes it quite evident that he is extremely fond of his current lifestyle, specifically his ability to travel and explore new horizons as he pleases. Thus, he would not be too enthusiastic about becoming a father in the near future.

The American makes it obvious that he'd like for Jig to undergo the abortion procedure, yet his dialogue does not express this opinion to the degree it should. He interjects his opinions by stating, "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig. It's not really an operation at all... I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig". This brief statement speaks volumes of the American's character. In an attempt to define the reality of the situation, and draw a conclusion for the both of them, he reiterates what the operation "really" entails, twice. By suggesting how simple the abortion is, he radically minimizes the severity of

the operation. Clearly his comment is false, and the hastened mentioning of the procedure cheapens said comment entirely. It ultimately makes the American out to seem deceptive with regard to the matter, since he brings the topic up in a blunt manner. If the operation had truly been as minor as he implies it to be, he would have no need to exaggerate its simplicity, nor would Jig have the emotional response she does to his suggestions.

The American's stance on the matter shines through repeatedly in the story. In one instance, he replies to Jig's hesitation by stating, " Well, if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple". The American frequently makes passive-aggressive comments towards Jig, perhaps to protect her feelings, or to protect his own image. His communication to her can, without a doubt, be interpreted as manipulative. Whilst he's admitting that the decision rests with Jig, he still manages to find a way to promote the safety and simplicity of the operation. In spite of the fact that he never lucidly states what he wants to happen, he does not stop bringing the idea up, in hopes to persuade her. Rather than showing his true colors, he treads lightly when discussing the topic, and leaves the decision-making entirely up to Jig. The American's statements throughout the piece illuminates the theme of miscommunication, and how it plays out within the story.

Conversely, we can devise an assumption that Jig was contemplating keeping the child, but was hesitant out of fear of what the American would think of her. She specifically states, " And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?". With this statement, it becomes apparent that Jig is extremely concerned about keeping her relationship  
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intact throughout this time. At one point in their conversation, her fear is apparent with her claim “-we could have all this”, implying a happy and nonchalant life with one another, “-we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible”. Jig is aware that having the child could very well take away that opportunity.

Thus, she feels a need to protect her relationship from this “ hiccup”, for lack of a better term. When the operation begins to be brought up more than once in their conversation, with credit to the American’s persistence, Jig cuts him off by saying, “ Can’t we maybe stop talking?”. Despite her becoming uncomfortable, the American resumes speaking, even after she pleads him to stop repeatedly afterwards. This clear disregard for her wishes, shows that even though the American believes the conversation needs to be had, they both are not listening to one another or communicating in the way that a couple should. All in all, Jig’s opinion throughout the story seems to be neglected, and as readers, this assumption is confirmed when she states, “ I feel fine. There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine” (Hemingway 206). We are not made aware of whether she’s “ fine” with the abortion, or with remaining pregnant.

It’s clearly a defining moment in the story, yet the audience is still left with an inconclusive ending. Jig has come to a decision by the story’s end, and it most likely is not a choice she made with her own wellbeing in mind, but rather for the relationship. Unmistakingly, and indirectly, literary components, such as narration, setting and symbolism, also contribute to the development of the overall issue of miscommunication in this story. “ Hills

Like White Elephants” is written in the third-person objective point of view, <https://assignbuster.com/a-theme-of-lack-of-communication-within-a-relationship-in-hemingways-hills-like-white-elephants/>

meaning that the story offers no insight into the thoughts of characters; the plot is told mainly through observations. Having the narration in this fashion does not allow the audience access to exactly what each of the characters are thinking with regard to the surgery. We, as the audience, are forced to work off of their dialogue and body language in order to get a sense of where the character's heads are at, with regard to the idea of aborting their child.

I believe Hemingway used this narrative point-of-view to additionally make his audience feel uncomfortable, as well as to mimic the sense of being an eye-witness to the event; further placing his audience into the shoes of the couple. Moreover, the setting of "Hills Like White Elephants" serves as a symbolic contribution to the piece's theme of communication. The train station is representative of the fact that the couple's relationship is at a crossroads. The station is a stopping point between Barcelona and Madrid, and the main characters must decide where to go. In their situation, it's a choice of whether to go to the place of the operation or to stay; thus, deciding to keep the child. Furthermore, the contrast between the white hills and barren valley described can highlight the difference between fertility and sterility, alluding to the choice Jig faces. The story explains Jig's appreciation of the landscapes, as she states, "They look like white elephants. They're lovely hills. They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees". Further into the story, she admires the landscape on the opposite side of the station, "The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. On the other side, were field of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro". Jig seems to be torn between the two landscapes, just as she is with regard to the operation.

An additional note, the waitress at the train station speaks solely in Spanish, and the narrator acts as a translator for the audience; likewise, the American translates for Jig during the story. This serves as an ironic, playful jab to the matter of miscommunication in "Hills Like White Elephants". In sum, Ernest Hemingway depicts an apparent lapse in an individual's capability to always communicate to their full potential. In the piece, the couple experiences a difficulty in letting their opinions be known on the topic of an issue they're facing. By not being able to express themselves, mostly out of fear for their own separate reasons, the couple creates a fault in their relationship.

Doubly, the story ending on a note in which readers are forced to devise their own conclusions as to what the couple has decided, is representative of a theme of miscommunication. Ernest Hemingway does not communicate to his audience what is to come next for this couple, if they decide to take the train for the procedure or keep the unborn child, just as the American and Jig were not entirely verbal about their feelings to one another. Perhaps this was done as a way to replicate the true confusion the couple faced during this time, and their inability to communicate efficiently, much like many people do in any relationship, not just romantically.