

Feminist interpretation of hemingway's "hills like white elephants"

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Hemingway's works have largely covered the subject of feminism, and his short story "Hills like white elephants" perfectly portrays a woman who breaks the norms of a society dominated by men and masculinity. As we all know, feminism is a social movement, an ideology which focuses on achieving rights for women. Women should be equal to men in each and every way.

In Hemingway's short story we have two important characters: The American and The Girl. It should be noted that we can acknowledge only from the nicknames the author gives us that "The American" seems to be superior from a plain old "Girl". Is the girl American too? Is she of another nationality? We aren't told this, but this makes us wonder just how important women were in the 20th century, how much they depended on men, how they didn't matter in society, how their feelings or opinions were pretty much non-existent.

This simple question gives a major clue on who is superior and who is inferior in the couple's relationship. Even from the beginning, when the Girl asks her partner about what they should drink, we can pretty much realise just how much she cares for her boyfriend's opinions and thoughts. It may seem just as a simple question, but if we analyze the whole text we surely get to the conclusion that the Girl really has suppressed feelings, frustrations, her own thoughts only get voice at the end of the short story, when she finally sees just how her relationship really is.

The girl is clearly submissive to her dominant boyfriend, and she wants to do the things that please him. She is inferior in this case as she doesn't know

the Spanish language, she can't order by herself, she depends on her boyfriend. I think that there are many females who depend on their partner, but that it is much better to be an independent woman. Women shouldn't feel inferior to men, they should consider themselves as men's equals. The woman is clearly used to pleasing her boyfriend and doing whatever he wants.

"Although " Hills Like White Elephants" is primarily a conversation between the American man and his girlfriend, neither of the speakers truly communicates with the other, highlighting the rift between the two. Both talk, but neither listens or understands the other's point of view. Frustrated and placating, the American man will say almost anything to convince his girlfriend to have the operation, which, although never mentioned by name, is understood to be an abortion."

The American man's girlfriend is a girl who doesn't speak up when talking about the abortion. It is clear that she doesn't want to have it, and even though she doesn't argue with her boyfriend their conversation is really tense. She is the typical American girl in the 20th century, a girl that would do anything for the man she loves, not caring about the consequences.

I would now like to talk about Jig's (the nickname the Girl is given by her boyfriend, we don't know her actual name) feminist journey throughout the really short story. At the beginning, she really seems to be willing to do anything she can to save her relationship, even have an operation, an abortion. I truly believe she wakes up at one point in the conversation and

realises there is nothing to save , that an abortion can't fix what's already damaged in the relationship .

The American is clearly oblivious to his girlfriend's or, better said, the mother of his unborn child's needs and true wishes, and he really pressures her to do something that mainly affects her, she should be the one taking the decision about having a child or not , not anyone else. One quote of the text regarding the feminist awakening in the Girl's soul is particularly important and worth mentioning : " Then I'll do it, I don't care about me."(Source : "Hills like white elephants, by Ernest Hemingway from Charters, Ann, Ed. The Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction. 6th Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003).

This quote is especially relevant from a feminist point of view. Even though, at first, I actually thought that the woman wants to please her boyfriend and do as he wants her to do, I think that this is the moment she actually realises that everything she's done so far was only for him, she was careless when it came to her needs, her wishes and she is now actually waking up. She seems to realise just how much her dominant boyfriend is asking of her and she seems to have had enough.

If we think about reporting this quote to real life we may say that women, even today, care about their partner's feeling more than they care about their own person. In today's relationships men try to dominate women and try to have the upper hand, and women are unfortunately are usually inferior

to their partner and get to a point where they feel helpless, with low self-esteem and unhappy.

Another quote that gives a glimpse of the Girl's realization that she does in fact want to keep the baby and doesn't want to have any operation at all is "But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?" (Source : "Hills like white elephants, by Ernest Hemingway from Charters, Ann, Ed. *The Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*. 6th Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003)

"By this point, midway through the story, the girl has already retracted her previous comment that the surrounding hills look like white elephants, hinting that she wants to keep the baby instead of having an abortion. The man had been upset at this, feigning indifference but pushing for the abortion because he doesn't want the child.

Still hoping to save their broken relationship, the girl asks her boyfriend whether things between them will return to the way they used to be if she goes through with the abortion. Her indecision and desire to placate the man demonstrate her dependence on him. At the same time, however, the mere fact that she asks the question may imply that she believes that nothing can save their relationship." (Source : SparkNotes Editors. "SparkNote on Hills Like White Elephants." SparkNotes. com. SparkNotes LLC. 2007. Web. 19 May 2017)

This quote unveils, once again, Jig's awakening. She subtly hints at the fact that she doesn't want to have the operation, but wants the relationship

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between her and the American to be a happy and successful one, as it once was. She asks this question knowing that things may never be as they once were, she slowly realizes that the relationship has reached its finish, and that no operation can fix what made the couple grow apart.

I feel like the Girl's feelings are finally surfacing, and that the American is at this point as clueless as he can be. The not so long conversation between the two is a real game changer for the relationship. The two aren't arguing or shouting, but the dialogue is really tense, it truly shows that there are a lot of things on the deeper level. The Girl is no longer just a plain girl, she has a voice, she has feelings and she is not afraid to speak up anymore, even though the one she is talking to doesn't understand much at all.

In the end, I am completely sure that she is coming out of her submissive girlfriend shell and that she realizes she can be an independent woman, taking care of a child without the help of its father. Hemingway doesn't actually tell us if the woman decides to have the abortion or not, but from all the subtle hints in the Girl's dialogue I think it is safe to assume that she is keeping the baby and getting out of the toxic relationship with her overly dominant boyfriend.

To conclude my essay, I would like to state the fact that this short story is truly a story of a woman who has her feminist awakening, a woman who gets out of the cage she's been kept in by her dominant partner, a woman who finally speaks up her mind. Hemingway ingeniously brings to life an independent, strong woman, and a real life situation common to our days.