

# My impressions from hills like white elephants



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Hills Like White Elephants, by Ernest Hemingway, is a short story that takes place in a train station surrounded by hills, fields, and trees in a valley in Spain. In this story, there's a young couple, a girl named Jig and an American man. They are dealing with the debate of an abortion.

Although the relationship between the two is unsure of and they aren't married, yet they have continued a relationship which resulted in Jig becoming pregnant. It seems that the couple are travelers who stop in different cities before moving onto the next. However, to the reader, their relationship could play out as being shallow. They have a conversation which gives hints of many clues about them and their relationship. Based on the story, we get a sense of what the characters are like, through what they say, and also through the things they don't say.

First, in the story, we understand that the American man has money and he is an adult because he seems to know what he is doing and doesn't want to have a child. Therefore, he is asking his girlfriend to risk her life by having an abortion. The death rate for the surgery was higher than its survival rate at the time, so that made him seem very selfish. Throughout the story it seems as if he doesn't care about her, despite the fact that he says well, I care about you. (Hemingway, 255), yet, he doesn't even listen to her. When she speaks to him, he says unrelated things back. We can assume that he likes to go drinking and doesn't care because he wants to get her drunk, which could possibly lead to a miscarriage. Also, from his comment I've known lots of people that have done it, (Hemingway, 255) we can assume that her's been in this situation before in many relationships with other teenage girls, and her's comfortable with what her's asking for.

Secondly, the woman who is called Jig in the story, barely has an identity. There's no absolute answer to know where she is from or if she has a family around. We can tell that she is a teenager depending on a careless man, who she thinks she is deeply in love with. Although, it's clear from her words, and "if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?" (Hemingway, 255), that she is lonely and a desperate girl who's still searching for love and happiness. Although, she knows she will never have it. That's why it's obvious from her reply, "I don't care about me," (Hemingway, 255), that she is depressed, and even ready to give up by agreeing to the abortion.

However, the word abortion isn't found in the story. It is understood by the use of Hemingway's choice of literary elements, which were setting and imagery/symbolism. The entire focus of this story is Jig being pregnant, and the topic of abortion being brought up throughout the different scenes and images Hemingway introduces. Hemingway's purpose in creating the character of Jig was probably reflective on his feelings on abortion to an extent. However, it can also seem like a look at human nature, about how we go against ourselves and do something undesired just to please someone else. The man known as, "The American", is the only logical antagonist in the story. Hemingway's portrayal of him is not good at all versus his portrayal of Jig. He comes off as being insensitive to Jig's feelings, despite his kind words. As the reader, different opinions that Hemingway portrayed the man as, leads us to believe that he is someone who is putting his own needs first. He didn't even get a proper first name in the story, while Jig does.

From the first paragraph, the setting immediately introduces the tense atmosphere that will reflect the rest of the story. The story takes place in Spain and although the time period is never stated, it can be assumed to be around 1927. The first use of imagery is in Hemingway's introduction of the setting of the story, " The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went to Madrid." Just like the two rail lines that passed by the station, there were only two choices and two directions in which the couple had to decide as they seemed to be in the middle of making a desperate decision. She seemed to care highly about the man, to the point where she as a character, is torn between two decisions. The landscapes and surroundings of the station play a fundamental role in the story through its broad symbolism. When the girl sees the long and white hills she says that they " look like white elephants". A white elephant is a metaphor for an expensive possession that is a financial burden to maintain. It comes to the conclusion that the color white symbolizes the purity and innocence of her child that is not born yet.

She also thinks highly of the rest of the scenery, " The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the bank of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees" It seems that the fields of grains and trees

represent fertility and fruitfulness. The Ebro River could also represent life, as it develops the fields. As the girl appreciates the scenery and it's "connection" to her unborn child the "shadow of a cloud," which represents the thought of the abortion, overcomes her happiness. The man is obviously in favor of the abortion, as everything he says is persuading her into it. "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," he said. "It's not really an operation at all, (Hemingway, 255). "I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural (Hemingway, 255). As Jig thinks about her point of view, she looks at the dry side of the valley, which is infertile and unproductive, which could symbolize her body after the abortion. The man and woman argue and soon stop when she says, "Would you please please please please please please please stop talking? (Hemingway, 257). He said nothing, but looked at the bags against the wall at the train station. There were labels on them from all of the hotels the two had spent their long nights at.

The American apparently wants this abortion because he is not mentally ready for a child and he wants to still live his life as carefree as possible until he actually decides it's time to grow up. It's safe to say that he doesn't want to give up the lifestyle he's now living. His uplifting spirit is shown through the bags with all the hotel labels on them. He realizes that he would have to settle down and be ready to raise a baby along with having a healthy relationship, which would mean putting an end to seeing the fun-world and going out drinking. Their lifestyle would not be possible with a baby, or at least it would be difficult during this time, with their state of mind..

Therefore, the man thinks an abortion is the best solution. This is very much

clear due to his general affirmations of an abortion or operation being an “easy” and “simple” process, and that things will be as they were after it is carried out. His comments of “I don’t want anyone but you” and “I don’t want anyone else” illustrate his desire to keep their relationship at it is by not introducing a child into their life. Jig has obvious doubts, but she goes along with it for the sake of continuing their lifestyle that they are accustomed to.

As the story ends with the couple expecting their train’s arrival, there is no decision addressed regarding the abortion. Hemingway’s combination of the two literacy elements, setting and imagery helps him provide the reader with plenty details in each sentence. It seems like Hemingway intentionally wanted to leave off in a matter that the readers could come to an conclusion of what will go on next.

“Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway was by far one of the best stories that I enjoyed reading. Looking beyond the text in this story required critical thinking that was quite interesting. The use of images throughout the story reflects on the couple’s situation in every aspect. The author employs images that required the reader to think beyond the text and realize what some young couples went through in the 1920’s. Although the couple’s relationship played out as being shallow throughout the story, I feel that the abortion did take place because of his selfish and immature mindset. Since he wants to live his best life at the moment, Jig will most likely want to join him and do what pleases him.