

The human connection of love and loneliness essay examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



In Short-Story Characters

Loneliness is a human condition that people almost universally wrestle with, at least during some point in their lives, which is why it is such a compelling subject for writers to depict with their characters. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “lonely” is defined as “being without company, cut off from others, not frequented by human beings, sad from being alone, and producing a feeling of bleakness or desolation” (n. d.). A person may feel lonely when all his friends are going away to college but he is still in his hometown working at the same job he has had through high school, when burdened with a secret that only he knows, or when other people make fun of him for some personal quality that he can do nothing about. The girl named Jig from Ernest Hemingway’s story, “Hills Like White Elephants,” Paul from D. H. Lawrence’s story, “The Rocking Horse Winner,” and Dee from Alice Walker’s story, “Everyday Use,” all feel loneliness for different reasons. The loneliness that these characters feel is because of either a lack of or a perceived lack of love in their lives.

In Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants,” Jig and an American man, whom she is in a relationship with, are waiting for a train to arrive in the town of Ebro, Spain. Her loneliness and the reason for it is never mentioned specifically in the text. Instead, much is revealed through the dialogue of the characters. As Jig and the American drink beers while waiting for the train’s arrival, she observes the hills in the distance and says, “They look like white elephants,” to which he responds, “I’ve never seen one,” and she replies, “No, you wouldn’t have” (167). These sentences they exchange reveal a lot about the character of their relationship. In a literal sense, Jig is commenting

fancifully on the landscape, and rather than join in her imaginings, the American says, “ I’ve never seen one,” which dismisses her observation as if it lacked connection to reality and is therefore not rational (167). When Jig replies, “ No, you wouldn’t have,” she implies, insultingly, that the American has a limited mind and experience, as well as acknowledges that he is unwilling to make a real connection with her. Additionally, the term “ white elephant” is an English language idiom meaning “ an expensive burden” (“ White elephant,” n. d.).

It is unlikely that Jig herself is conscious of the idiomatic meaning of “ white elephant,” and her observation comes from the rising of the literally white hills from the bleak landscape surrounding Ebro. However, Hemingway is certainly aware of the term and its use is no coincidence as it foreshadows another revelation in the story, when the American says, “ It’s really a simple operation, Jig” (168). Although subtle, it is obvious that one of the problems in the couple’s relationship is that Jig is pregnant, and the American wants her to have an abortion.

The couple’s relationship lacks love. It seems as if the American lacks love for Jig, and as a result she feels lonely. The pregnancy, he says, is “ the only thing that bothers us. It’s the only thing that’s made us unhappy” (168). Jig seems to be more aware that there is a greater problem with their relationship, the lack of love, when she says, “ But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you’ll like it?” (168). Through this query, she questions the idea that the connection caused by love can exist between them. Jig is at least unconsciously aware that if her relationship with the American had love, she would never need to ask the

question, “ But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you’ll like it?” (168). It is easy to imagine the difference it would have made from the beginning of the story if, instead of responding dismissively, “ I’ve never seen one,” the American had instead clapped his hands and said, “ Well, I’ll be! You’re right. They look like a whole pack of white elephants, a whole crowd over there!” (169). The two of them would have laughed, enjoyed the moment, the waiting for the train, their beers, and the observation that only the two of them noticed. Jig would not feel so lonely if she was surer that the father of her unborn child loved her.

In D. H. Lawrence’s “ The Rocking Horse Winner,” Paul is a young boy living in a household in which his parents value money over their children. They live in a fancy house, yet there was enough money to satisfy the parents. Even though the mother “ married for love, and the love turned to dust,” she is unable to find any place in her heart for her three children, and “ she herself knew that at the center of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody” (750). The values of the mother, to believe that luck is the source of money, and her lack of love, greatly influence Paul, who is a naturally curious child. It is impossible for a child who knows his mother does not love him not to try to find a reason why and a way to make himself lovable. He begins to equate being lucky and getting money with the thing that will bring him the love he needs in his life, so his mother will love him, and so that he will not feel this lack and so lonely. By the end of the story, Paul has acquired a great deal of money through his luck at betting on horses, but he dies from his exertions.

The lack of love in Paul’s life originates with his mother. She is incapable of

focusing on anything else but the acquiring of money, neglecting her children emotionally. The lack of love also comes from the father, who is apparently never present, and his Uncle Oscar, who is more interested in Paul as a curiosity and experiment rather than as the person he is. If just one person had taken the curious Paul under his or her wing and showed him love, his value to them as a human being, his own passion and love would not be misdirected in a single-minded frenzied quest to seek out the money that became a substitute for the nutrition his soul lacked. Paul is unable to steer away from his focus on luck and making money because he has no better example to show him that there is more to life than that.

In Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," Dee is the brilliant older daughter that the narrator, the mother, compares to her duller younger daughter, Maggie. The mother describes Dee as almost a perfect person, with "nicer hair and a fuller figure" than Maggie, "determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts," and as a person so put-together that "At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was" (719). Dee seems to be a person who knows who she is, what she wants, and has a bright future ahead of her because of it.

However, Dee lacks love. She hates the house she grew up in, is critical of her mother and Maggie's words and habits, and had few friends (719). Her focus is completely on herself and her appearance. It is some surprise to the mother when Dee comes to visit with her man, Hakim-a-barber, and is apparently friendly. "Oh, Mama! . . . O never knew how lovely these benches are," she observes, surprising her mother, who thought that Dee would probably hate the house and be critical of everything about it during her visit

(720). This is, however, not a reversal in attitude for Dee. When she finds out that some quilts she admires are going to go to Maggie when Maggie gets married, and that Maggie would use the quilts in the way quilts were designed to be used, she objects to it. Mama says, “ What would you do with them?” and Dee responds, “ Hang them” (721). When Mama rejects the idea of giving the quilts to Dee, Dee leaves. It is apparent that Dee has not changed, no matter how different she looks on the outside. Dee may not realize it because she is so selfish, but she is a very lonely character, without real admirers or anything of lasting value.

Dee fails to love anything in life other than her own self. If she had felt love for her family, for her heritage, or anything else, she would not be such a lonely character because everything in her life would have a real value, one that she could share with others. She is able to see the physical beauty of the quilt, but her lack of love fails to acknowledge or appreciate who made the quilt or why it was created. If she had love in her life for anything or anyone but herself, she could see the value of things beyond a pretty façade, and would not spend her life on an endless quest to find fulfillment by surrounding herself with pretty things whose origin she cannot understand. The characters in these stories, who suffer from loneliness, show the many ways that the value of love is important to having a fulfilling life. Love is a value that helps keep a community of people healthy, emotionally and even physically. In fellow students, love and a sense of community are often forgotten in exchange for a focus on rivalry and putting each other down. A student who receives the best grade in a paper receives jeers from other students. If love and the other things that accompany it, such as respect,

appreciation, and cooperation, replaced this rivalry, students would not put each other down for a job well done, but would ask the successful one how he or she did it in order to improve their own work. With love, all could attain more success, as well as a healthier, happier sense of community. With love, everyone would be less lonely.

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