
“Hills Like White Elephants” By Hemingway Analysis

Hemingway’s short story “Hills Like White Elephants,” depicts a crucial moment in a couple’s relationship. When the woman discovers that she is pregnant, the couple is torn between getting an abortion and keeping the baby. Throughout the story they fail to come to a decision as they cannot properly express how they feel and have an indirect and meaningless conversation to avoid the elephant in the room. Through this dialogue, the author is able demonstrate how when communication is misused, the importance of it fades away. The author uses a carefully selected setting to enrich this theme.

For instance, Hemingway chooses to have the couple’s encounter at a train station waiting to get to their next destination: “The station was between two lines of rails in the sun” (4, emphasis added). This crossroads is symbolic of the couple’s inability to reach a conclusion. As the couple themselves are at a crossroads in their relationship and cannot decide in which direction to go. The author’s choice to place the couple in between two opposing railroads enhances this effect as it creates tension in their conversation and further guides their resolution in two opposing directions, never reaching a conclusion. Furthermore, the hills described at the begging of the story can be representative of a woman’s pregnant belly: “The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white” (4). Although this symbolic landscape surrounds them, they are incapable of talking about the issue at hand, the abortion is only ever directly mentioned once, and the man merely refers to it as “an awfully simple operation” (5).

The girl even makes a remark about the hills and their resemblance to white elephants; however, the man seems disinterested by his response. This is yet again, another example of how the couple fails to communicate even when the issue is right in front of them. Hemingway also uses dialogue to highlight their lack of communication. Even when they are speaking to each other, the conversation is meaningless. By the end of the story, the girl no longer even wants to speak to the man as a result of how futile their exchange became. She says, “Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?” (7). The effect of this line is that even plain silence would be as good as speaking untruthfully ... (finish at home) To conclude, the author makes use of several clever details in the setting as well as dialogue to further convey his message of miscommunication and how a conversation can become pointless without properly communicating.