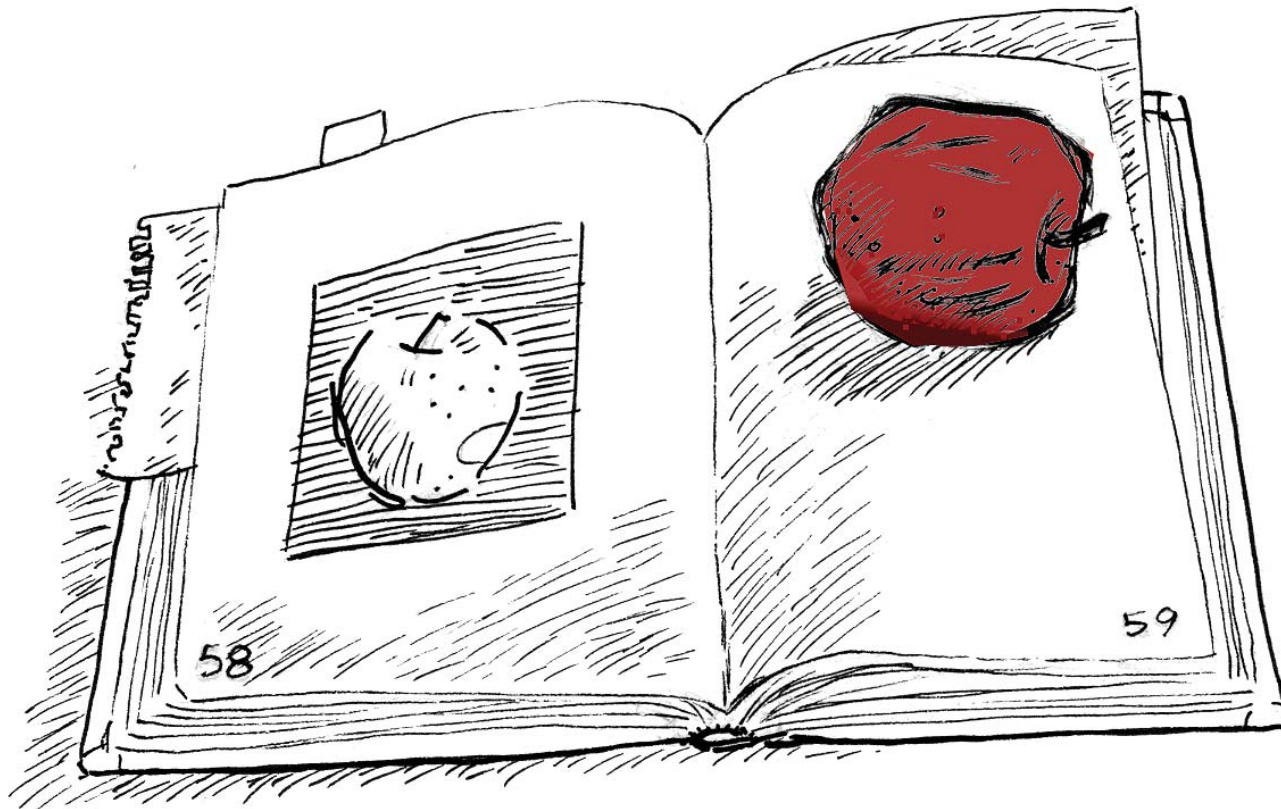


Ernest Hemingway



Ernest Hemingway

Quick facts:

- Served as an ambulance driver in WW I.
- Utilizes a frank masculine drive in his work: a man's man. His personality and strengths towards understatement characterize much of his writing. He is a major influence on the development of twentieth century writers.
- He is considered a part of the group of artists known as the Lost Generation. The group consists of a collection of authors and other creative artists who felt disillusioned by the American politics and the war effort overseas.
- The story "Hills Like White Elephants" was written while he lived in Key West, Florida.

Hills Like White Elephants

- This story is shown mostly in dialogue. Most of the conversation at first appears casual, trivial, and not relevant to the plot's progression.

However, despite the lack of background details and a lack of concrete plot details, the story does show the psychological developments of the two main characters as they attempt to connect with one another.

- Like Poe in the “The Tell-Tale Heart,” the year is not mentioned.

Full names of characters are not shown.

We do discover the woman's nickname is “Jig” but beyond that, no exposition exists.

- The male character represents the modern American male; he represents the mentality of the average man of the period. Only known as “the American.”

By leaving him nameless, what does this do to his characterization?

Hills Like White Elephants

- Ultimately, he is seen as aloof, even to the reader.

What other characteristic personality traits does he portray?

How does Hemingway describe him physically?

Hills Like White Elephants

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Critics have called him unemotional, irritable, controlling, literal minded.

He remains without physical descriptions because Hemingway wants you to picture an average male figure in your mind's eye; he is a typical U.S. citizen.

- The female figure on the other hand represents an average European female.

How is her personality characterized?

Why does Hemingway refer to her as a girl the whole time?

Hills Like White Elephants

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Why does Hemingway refer to her as a girl the whole time?

She comes across as slightly naive, youngish, and inexperienced.

She is more emotional and sensitive—yet, *not* a sexist stereotype.

She does seem to have a sense of identity and inner strength.

Hills Like White Elephants

One way Jig shows her inexperience is through the drink, *Anis del Toro*.

- It contains a high level of alcohol; if taken “straight”, it produces an irritation in the throat. In mixed drinks however it contains a sweet taste.

Gender Politics

- Despite the story’s sparse details, the theme is heavy with elements showing the couple’s disconnection with one another.
- The nature of their conversation indicates a history of prolonged bickering and resentment.
- Some critics have noted that the dialogue reinforces dated concepts concerning male/female roles in a casual relationship. An example, at one point Jig asks permission to order a drink. Jig seems distant; the American overly-rational.
- Likewise, it is important to point out he seems to be ordering many drinks in a manner to get her defenses down, make her more agreeable and under his control.

Hills Like White Elephants

Symbol of the White Elephant

- Critic Kenneth Johnson points out that Jig’s reference to the white elephants could be her response to the fact she is pregnant.
- Also the American can view the baby as a “white elephant,” not wanting to raise it because of the cost: financial and emotional. The child would interfere with his “jet-set” lifestyle.
- Whereas Jig sees the baby as an opportunity to settle down, to escape the life of endless travelling and drinking. At one point she will question:
 “That’s all we do, isn’t it—look at things and try new drinks” (¶33, 612).
The child would help transform her from a state of naive inexperience to that of a full adult: *mother* and *wife*, not just a *travelling companion*.
- The baby would give her stronger purpose in life.
- Finally, the elephant can represent Jig’s love for the American.
She values it more than he does. He feels it is a more casual arrangement.
She views it as the beginnings of something serious.

Hills Like White Elephants

Main Setting:

- The story takes place at a railroad junction in between two major cities:
Barcelona and Madrid.

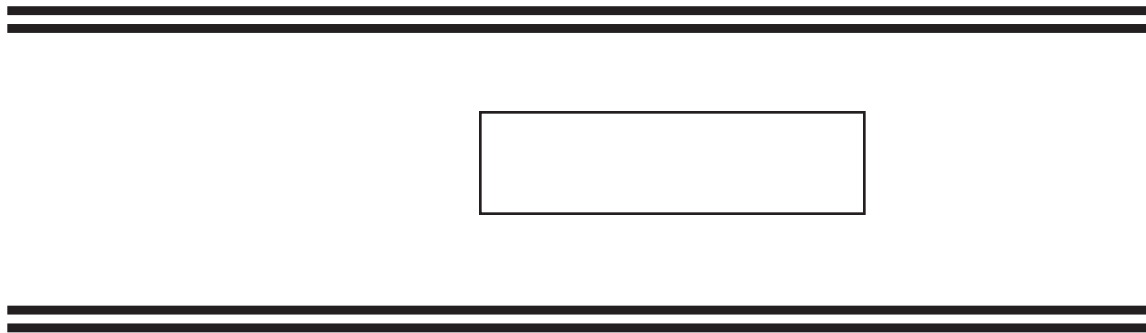
Why is this crucial to the story?

Hills Like White Elephants

Main Setting:

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Why is this crucial to the story?



- The couple are shown in limbo, at a point between two choices. The tracks may run parallel but they never connect. Like their own two lives.

Hills Like White Elephants

- One side of the tracks is shown sterile and dry.
The other shows a fertile field.
The tracks form a division between the two extremes.
- Notice in their conversation it appears that Jig looks only at the field ahead of her, or at the table legs, never in the American's eyes.
- The setting furthermore complicates the couple's current reality:
Are they midway travelling to get the abortion and have second thoughts?
Or are they leaving the town which she intended to get an abortion?
- They are caught between acceptance and denial.

Hills Like White Elephants

- The changing positions of the suitcases by the American also presents a false sense of resolution to their discussion.
- This act can *possibly* confirm the male figure's sense of control in making the final decision for Jig, betraying his true intentions towards the pregnancy.
- The more he insists the decision is in her hands, the more the reader sees his true passive-aggressive behavior.

- *Hemingway never offers Jig's resolution— he does not want to moralize. However, his intention is to spark discussions on the heavy topic which has no real compromise for either character. The realism in this drama reflects the fact there is no possible compromise.*

- *Modern life does not allow dramatic transformations, nor compromises.*