



## Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway

E. A. Gamini Fonseka

Professor, Department of English & Linguistics, University of Ruhua, Sri Lanka  
drgamini@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) wrote “Hills like White Elephants” in 1927. The short story showcases most of his originality as a writer in the use of imagery, symbolism, irony, rhythmic language, dialogue, implicature, etc. Considering his genius as noticed in the narrative of less than 1,500 words in length that covers a period less than forty-minutes of the association between the two central characters, an American and his girlfriend, this paper analyses the style of Hemingway along with his treatment of the burning social issue emerging from pregnancy resulted in by love-making and the ways in which the two parties concerned reflect on it from their respective domains. The conflict over the foetus the girl is carrying within herself, for which the American is partly responsible, is temporarily interrupted by the affairs of daily life but is likely to remerge whenever they are to meet in peace. The implication is that they have no peace until the foetus is aborted or the child is born. The title suggests that the American’s attempt to dissuade the girl from having a child tends to increase her determination to have it as a result of the resilience she cultivates in her attempt to resist it. The story continues with a paradox growing from the contradictory exchanges the two make from their respective domains. Yet it remains a question whether the girl’s resilience will last until she becomes a mother. Hemingway leaves it in the air for the sake of the aesthetic quality of his short story. In a ten-part analysis of the story text carried out underten sub-topics coherently knitted together, are demonstrated Hemingway’s achievements in imagery, symbolism, and rhythmic language that are crucial for him as a thought-provoking storyteller.

**Keywords:** imagery, symbolism, paradox, rhythmic language, implicature

### INTRODUCTION

#### Objectives, Research Problem, and Significance

Based on the short story “Hills like White Elephants”, this study analyses Ernest Hemingway’s creativity as a storyteller in his approach to revealing burning issues in society in an aesthetic style. It draws attention to his remarkable use of imagery in generating powerful symbols to interpret the two characters in their respective roles as the protagonist and the antagonist defined by their favourable and unfavourable attitudes to the issue in question, their behaviours, the identities they carry, the concepts they deal with, and the situation they create as a whole. Moreover, it focuses on the paradox that is nurtured by the dialogue between them, structured in rhythmic phrasing as if that in an aria composed to be recited vocally or instrumentally by two artists, revealing what is realised by Milan Kundera (1993) as *melodic truth*. Generally, a conflict between two lovers over an issue of pregnancy is too sensitive to convey in the form of a dialogue, but Hemingway manages it here comfortably, because of his tremendous command on the phrasing that helps to foreground the truth about the opinion clash between the two, where each time the man (who has a low risk of the issue) tries to dissuade the girl (who has a high risk) it ends in enhancing her determination to go ahead with it. The paradox that develops from this scenario is a major aesthetic achievement in the short story. The exposure to Hemingway’s style one acquires thus by reading his short pieces, will no doubt become a source of inspiration in perceiving his

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway**

---

major works. The paper takes a practical approach to the study of Hemingway’s style of discussing social issues, by fragmentarily presenting how the story continues step by step, symbolically revealing the psychological workings of the two characters, for the benefit of those who learn to read fiction critically.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In developing an approach to the reading of this short story, the main technique used here was fragmentation. First the storyline was fragmented into meaningful sections and the trajectory of the story and the conceptual configurations particular to every move the two characters make were identified. Then those conceptual configurations were dismantled one by one to perceive the symbolic exposition of every element connected with the issue of pregnancy which is the focal problem in the story. That is meant to familiarize the reader with Hemingway’s style where imagery and symbolism are the means of narration that help to generate a paradox as the overarching aesthetic achievement in the story. The paradox is viewed in the positions the characters naturally hold in relation to the crisis they are involved in, the attitudes they maintain in relation to their commitment towards it, and the outcome of the conflicting dialogue they have on it, in search of a solution. Moreover, the stylistic analysis sheds light on Hemingway’s use of imagery in generating implicatures rather than carrying out explicit narrative descriptions.

### **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

In this study of the short story carried out in terms of a coherent string of fragments, the findings appear in ten independent subsections: 1) Symbolism of Transition; 2) Frozen Feelings in Hot Weather; 3) Hallucinations of White Elephants; 4) Frustration Leading to Banality; 5) Fun Ending in Intolerance, Irritation, Regret, and Protest; 6) Simple Solutions and Tough Prices; 7) Temporary Surrender after a Long Dispute; 8) Paternal Disregard of Maternal Instincts; 9) Hypocrisy Exposed; and 10) Triumph over Intimidation. All the subheadings developed for them couch figures and tropes that concretize through the combinations of the environmental conditions, the actions, and psychological and emotional developments particular to the moments they focus on, and help to compartmentalise the knowledge pertaining to each relevant section with a high degree of precision.

#### **Symbolism of Transition**

At the onset, Hemingway provides a symbolic background for the short story, in order to foreground the conflicting state, in which the two characters, the American and the girl, interact with each other. Very importantly, the spatiotemporal relationship of the story is suggested in the indication that “the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes”, stop “at this junction for two minutes” and go to Madrid. A forty-minute period of monotonous waiting for the express is supposed to end in a two-minute period of struggle to board it. This is an ideal device to portray the helpless situation of the girl who is currently pregnant by a noncommittal lover. In her opinion, all her worries are to disappear at the delivery of the baby, the time which would take is not as long as that the pregnancy does. The element of transition in their current mood, while waiting for the train, reflects the fundamental conflict in their relationship. Their journey seems to have reached a turning point where they are posed with the question whether they would stick together or break away from each other. On the basis of their attitudes towards the unborn baby, the American who rejects it can be considered the antagonist while the girl who accepts it can be considered the protagonist.

The “long and white” hills across the Spanish landscape featured by the river Ebro dominate the drop scene. When the conversation between the two starts, they tend to inspire the imagination of the girl. She compares them to white elephants which do not exist on earth or not real. “A white elephant” is a cliché in English to describe “an expensive and often rare or valuable possession whose upkeep is a considerable financial burden” or “something with a questionable or at least very limited value”. So the physical look of the hills in the hot sun has a logical relationship with the girl’s comment on them. But they mainly help to elicit the American’s nonchalant attitude to her pregnancy. He considers the unborn baby is a “white elephant” as he believes that

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway**

---

it has no crucial role to play in sustaining their relationship and that it would only absorb their energy for its growth and become a burden on them for the rest of their lives.

The thermal imagery of the sunny atmosphere is supported by the monotonous location of the station between the two lines of rail shining in the blazing sun, in the absence of any shade or trees around. The two railway lines continue to the end parallel to each other but without getting connected at all, symbolising the disharmony that prevails right now in the relationship between the two.

The restaurant in the vicinity of the station is the location where the two wait for the train. Hemingway extends the thermal metaphor even further by describing the shadow of the building as warm. The bamboo-bead curtain that hangs across the open door into the bar suggests Spanish art or handicraft, adding an element of Spanishness to the atmosphere. It seems this isolated remote railway station has its own problems of health. The function of the bamboo-bead curtain is "to keep out flies". Hemingway sees reality as reality. Flies, attracted to garbage, are suggestive of the contaminated surroundings. Images of dullness, discomfort, ugliness, insecurity, dirt, and sterility help to foreground the conflict between the American and the girl who are in a mood of transition. The dominant appearance of the hills influences the function of all signifiers in the story.

### **Frozen Feelings in Hot Weather**

The American and the girl appear at the restaurant to drink something. It is the girl who raises the question about drinks. "What should we drink?" Her forwardness and initiative in all things they do is clear in her adaptation to the restaurant atmosphere by removing her hat and placing it on a table. The man seems only to follow her commands and suggestions. Throughout the ordering of drinks the man just makes one passing comment on the atmosphere. "It's pretty hot." Other than that, he only communicates with the restaurant woman, in order to accommodate the girl's desire to drink a large mug of beer. The restaurant woman operates just at the commands given to her. No feelings are being exchanged between them. The man and the girl look frozen in their minds although the weather is hot.

### **Hallucinations of White Elephants**

As Hemingway portrays the atmosphere, thirst, heat and fatigue together cause the girl to develop hallucinations out of the entities present in the surroundings. The "line of hills" in the "brown and dry" landscape looks "white in the sun". The girl's exclamation "They look like white elephants," is basically influenced by the oppressive physical setting and the weary psychological condition she has developed during the journey. The man's deliberate irresponsiveness to the girl's feelings appears in his remark, "I've never seen one"; but the girl's resentment of his behaviour juts out of her sarcasm, "No, you wouldn't have." "The man cannot be so naïve to believe that she compares the hill to "white elephants" on the basis of having seen some of them in the past. So maybe the white elephant metaphor has come from the man himself in a previous conversation about the foetus, and the girl's allusion to it right now irritates him. However, the man's defensive reply to this suggests that he is not a person to leave his stance for the sake of others. This perhaps adds to the frustration the girl is burdened with.

### **Frustration Leading to Banality**

Hemingway with a deep understanding of the human psyche draws attention to how Jig's mind operates at this moment. As she is irritated by the man's noncommittal countenance, her eyes are focused on the trivialities in the surroundings in a mood of woolgathering. That is how she gets interested in the *Anis del Toro* advertisement on the bead curtain. When the man explains that it is a drink, she wants to try it. By this want Jig means only that she is looking for a way-out for her anguish. The man however accommodates whatever she desires outside her pregnancy. He immediately orders two drinks of *Anis del Toro* and checks with Jig's preference for a blend. As she does not know about the possibility of blending it with water, and he knows its appropriateness, he

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway**

---

goes for water. When the drinks are served she comments, "It tastes like liquorice." The man, sounding positive about the things that have happened so far, adds, "That's the way with everything." Liquorice is sweet and his comparison of it to all adventures in life suggests how lightly and positively he thinks about everything or condones with what she is ailing from. Jig points out the contradictoriness in his comment on it by comparing what she has been looking forward to, to absinthe, (a highly alcoholic liqueur tasting of aniseed and made from wormwood and herbs now banned in many countries because of its toxicity). It is the foetus she is carrying inside her she means by "all the things you've waited so long for". Here she ejects her anguish that she has been suppressing all the time. But the man simply suggests, "Oh, cut it out." For the first time a conflict emerges in the communication between them. This opening leads to a heated argument between them.

### **Fun Ending in Intolerance, Irritation, Regret, and Protest**

Jig charges the man for his intolerance of her comments on the surroundings. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time." As if trying to please him, she claims to be enjoying the scenery. The man still tries to address the issue of abortion lightly and instil hope in her about being further happy. "Well, let's try and have a fine time." What does he want to try? What does he base their happiness on? In her agony the girl deviates from the actual topic. She wants to be calm as much as possible but finds it too depressing. As if to prevent an argument, she says, "I said the mountains looked like white elephants." Yet her claim about the mountains has several implications: taken literally, the dark brown mountains shine "brightly" in the hot sun, suggesting white elephants through their physical look; the mountains that look like white elephants are suggestive of her desire to have the baby she is pregnant for; to the girl at this point, as Dr William Tarvin claims "elephants would probably be a symbol of fecundity"; and as the phrase "white elephants" in English means idiomatically "a property requiring much care and expense and yielding little profit" or "an object no longer of value to its owner but of value to others", it applies to the man's noncommittal response to her pregnancy. The man's irritated response to her simile at this juncture shows that he is not inclined to consider any outlook which deals with having the baby. The girl continues to play with words. This time she gets hold of "try" in the man's suggestion to "try and have a fine time." She uses the word "try" to mean "test" instead of "endeavour" and reduces the entire scheme of work they do in their relationship to "trying new drinks". This time the man is compelled to agree with her, "I guess so." As if to leave out all innuendos that are likely to appear from her comparison of the hills to white elephants she comments on their brightness and praises their loveliness. "It's lovely..." She acknowledges the drink, as if to reconcile with the man.

### **Simple Solutions and Tough Prices**

By and by, approaches the inciting moment, or the point, at which the problem of the story appears for the first time. The man, whose name is never given, mentions the abortion operation: "It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig." It is the first time we get to know the girl's name or rather nickname. "It's not really an operation at all. ... It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in." At this point, the reader asks not just whether the girl will agree to the operation, but also what she is learning about her relationship with the man. In her response to the man's entreaty, her eyes fixed on the floor, the girl remains silent. Hemingway's musicality plays a vital role in presenting the conflict between them over the issue of the girl's pregnancy. Going by what Milan Kundera (1993) calls the *melodic truth* of the sentences, the exchanges that occur in their dialogue are very much similar to the interactive exchanges carried out by two instrumentalists in a concert. The man wants to get rid of the foetus. The girl wants to nurture it, looking forward to becoming a mother. The man is torn between his love for the girl and his dislike of rearing a child. The girl considers the man's love should culminate in parenting a child and, when the man does not accommodate it, she finds his love to be suspicious. The more he talks the more he adds to the girl's agony as she is determined to keep the foetus and become a mother one day. Within their relationship there occurs a conflict between sexuality and motherhood.

### **Temporary Surrender after a Long Dispute**

The man offers to take care of the girl during the operation, which he repeatedly calls "simple" and tries to assure that she will be "perfectly natural" after it. The girl contradicts the feeling of security the man tries to inculcate in her. The question she poses to this effect sounds sarcastic; "Then what will we do afterwards?" The man betrays his naïveté in his answer to this very tricky question; "We'll be fine afterwards." Instead of confidence it causes concern or rather suspicion in her. "What makes you think so?" She elicits from him how he regards her in a social context as well as protests against the type of negligence or lack of commitment to her aspirations for motherhood in a psychological context. While she takes the foetus as a blessing he takes it as a hindrance to their happiness. He emphasises that it is a cause of bother and unhappiness.

The girl continues her silent protest this time, fiddling with a couple of strings from the bead curtain. From now on she does not elicit the man's opinion or views but attacks him, repeating his own words with effective tonal variations. "And you think then we'll be all right and be happy." The man again surrenders to her cynicism and attempts at assuring her of personal happiness, medical safety, and social acceptance on the basis of his knowledge of the world view. "And afterwards they were all so happy." The girl ridicules the man's simplistic generalization of the result of abortion. Hemingway gets the girl to gradually explore the man's reaction to her pregnancy. When their dispute reaches a point of maturity the man reluctantly presents the girl an option for the operation but still fails to control his interference with the girl's decision about it. His indirect influencing leads the girl to ask him emphatically, "And you really want to?" This again forces him to reveal his true feelings about it. A paradox emerges from his strong recommendation of an abortion and his accommodation of the girl's wish to keep the foetus.

The rhetorical failures the man makes repeatedly leads a defiant spirit of independence to develop in the girl. "And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?" This question embarrasses him so much that he helplessly attempts to convince her of his love. "I love you now. You know I love you." These words are frantically uttered just to cover up his embarrassment. At this juncture, in what the girl utters, the title of the short story with or without its idiomatic meaning emerges as if to tease the man. "I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?" The girl conveys that the man's revulsion against her prattling about strange things like "white elephants" is caused by her obstinacy over the issue of pregnancy. The implication is that without a baby whatever the girl says and does is normally tolerable to the man, but right now, with the warning of a baby on the way, he gets irritated by her words that turn out to be innuendos expressed at him. The man gets confused as to how he should articulate his feelings. The short utterances imply that the man is simply groping for words as if a henpecked husband would do while struggling with a guilty conscience. The girl utters an insinuation to the man as if she casts a fishing line with a sharp hook to catch a big fish. "If I do it you won't ever worry?" As a victim of his fun, the man gets hooked up by it and repeats his old comments on the operation claiming it to be "perfectly simple". In reaction to his insistence on her taking the operation, the girl distinguishes the man's meaning of their relationship from her expectations for it. "Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me." These words enter his ears so cynically and torturously as shrapnel from a missile. The ironical repetition of the girl's utterance, "I don't care about me," sheds light on another dimension of their relationship. He wants only to have a sexual partner for himself but does not want to make any sacrifice for it. She means by it simply that he does not care about her. Although the man responds "Well, I care about you," it retains no significance as the girl creates a powerful paradox out of her defence rhetoric. She singles out the man's wishful attitude and exposes him as an egocentric.

The man ultimately utters, "I don't want you to do it if you feel that way". These words are just sounds only. There is no substance in what he utters. Hemingway ends here one part of the duet. The dominant crescendo of the girl's expressions is met by a pathetic diminuendo of the man's. The tug of war over the foetus remains dormant for a while waiting to resume at an appropriate moment. Hemingway provides a great irony through

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway**

---

the girl's surrender to the man in this abortion matter. Although it is against her will she does not want to lose the man. She does not care about herself because she wants the man. The girl's helplessness in this type of issue is a social reality.

### **Disillusionment after Defeat and Deprivation**

The spectacle of fertility composed of "Ebro" and the "fields of grain" and the "trees" on the river bank that she observes in the far, from the end of the ugly and monotonous railway station, suggests that, at least in her imagination, she is right now surrounded by elements of unpleasantness and sterility. "The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees." Hemingway uses imagery of natural phenomena to highlight the girl's newly gained insight into herself. It is time for her to take charge of her. The river becoming clear after the departure of the cloud may symbolize her potentialities gradually manifesting to herself while her myth about the man disappears with his arbitrary behaviour at this crucial moment. "And we could have all this ... And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible." She thinks aloud in sarcastic terms, recalling the man's noncommittal suggestions. She feels that maternity is her legacy and the biological changes that abortion would cause in her are to deprive her of it. The man's curiosity about her feelings starts another conflicting duet. Again the man and the girl take their places as crescendos and diminuendos. The stretch of discourse composed of short exchanges sounds a bit absurdist. The abrupt "No we can't" she repeatedly utters in response to his promises of a joyous and complete life together sound powerful *sforzandos* that are abrupt, fierce accents on a single chord. The man's reflections of detachment on the baby and the girl's reflections of attachment on it further the conflicting atmosphere but the last words he says end the conversation with a warning of non-cooperation, "We'll wait and see."

The girl is still standing and does not care about the man's request to join him in the shade. This implies that she is convinced that her aspirations are no more secure in the company of the man. She puns with "feel" the word the man uses to suggest not to think about the matter in the way she has been doing. Her disillusionment with the man is explicit in the way she uses the same word in her claim, "I don't feel any way ... I just know things." She means numbness by it. Her trust in him has already expired. She does not get convinced by the words she has already heard several times, "I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do." She reacts to it, saying, "No, that isn't good for me". Words are no more of any concrete value to her. She wants action. In order to get rid of her stress, she looks for a distraction through a beer. The irritation she suffers from the man's speaking is conveyed in her protest, "Can't we maybe stop talking?" Although the girl sounds somewhat energetic she expresses her disillusionment with herself, considering her agreement to undergo abortion a great defeat as it deprives her of her opportunity of becoming a mother and putting an end to her bohemian lifestyle.

### **Paternal Disregard for Maternal Instincts**

When they sit down at the table again they behave like two strangers for a moment. The girl's eyes are on the dry side of the valley and the man's are on the table. They look away from each other. As if to resume the fight, the man repeats his contradictory suggestion, but this time with a new phrasing. "I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you." By considering that the foetus does not mean anything to her, he hypocritically takes her maternal instincts for granted. At the same time he reveals indirectly that it does not mean anything to him. "Doesn't it mean anything to you?" By questioning so, the girl seems to get confirmed as to how he considers the relationship between them in its entirety. The man once again contradicts what he says by claiming, "Of course it does", and by describing the operation as "perfectly simple". In the meantime he articulates his selfish love of her flesh and rejects the idea of having a child, "I don't want anyone else". He even emphasizes that he knows how the operation goes. This implies that he has prior experiences of getting women to undergo similar operation. Fed up with the repetition of the term "simple" as a qualifier of the operation, the girl asks for a favour and the man makes a commonplace offer to do anything for her. Then the girl presents her request in the form of a great protest, "Would you please please please please please please please stop

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway**

---

talking?" Here, by repeating "please" seven times she vehemently expresses that she has no trust in the man at all and is determined not to surrender herself to him. William Tarvin points out that some critics interpret her seven-time repeated "please" as seven more months she has to go in the pregnancy. The parental connection the man and the girl hold respectively for the foetus vary in their unfavourable and favourable attitudes to it, precipitating a persistent conflict between them.

### **Hypocrisy Exposed**

The man becomes conscious that his true nature has already been exposed and the girl has no more faith in him. As if he has nothing else to do he looks at the bags against the wall of the station. The labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent the nights revive his memories of lovemaking. As if instigated by them, he starts adding more lines to his protest that he really wants only what she wants. The contradictory statements he makes to this effect have developed into a cacophonous song of hypocrisy: "I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to"; "I don't want you to do it if you think that way"; "I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do"; "I don't have you to do it if you don't have to"; "I don't want you to"; "I don't care anything about it". The girl is meant to line them up and examine how weird he sounds and how grotesque he feels. Hemingway marks the girl's revulsion for it in her threatening to "scream" that powerfully shows her recognition of her helplessness in this one-sided relationship.

### **Triumph over Intimidation**

The American, as scholars have noted, clearly wants Jig to say she wants the operation in order to absolve himself of blame, and Jig clearly refuses to give her partner that satisfaction. If she has the operation, she maintains wordlessly, it will be because he has forced her to. That, at least, is her attitude throughout the story. Whether an inner struggle will produce a different attitude later on remains unclear. However, at the end of the story, Jig seems to have gotten the upper hand. Jig all of a sudden begins smiling at the barmaid and at the American; she seems to have a new confidence and serenity about her, and the American gives up the argument to take the bags to the other side of the tracks. It seems that he realizes he has lost the argument and he takes a few minutes away from her to drink another liqueur in the bar before returning to their table. Once he is back there, he asks if she feels better and she smiles serenely at him, telling him she is fine and betraying no anxiety of any kind.

Although it is not mentioned anywhere, it is understood that, in the course of pondering on her plight in her relationship with the man, she realizes that his concern for her is totally concentrated on her flesh. Having gone through his baseless complaint made in contradictory terms, she perceives his hypocrisy. His constant rejection of the unborn baby appears to her as an upshot of his jealousy. By and by she starts feeling a psychological loneliness in her world with him. The wisdom she achieves in this manner fortifies her personality and intensifies her spirit. She notices the trap the man has set for her to get her tricked to claim that the abortion is needed by her and is not encouraged for or forced on her by him. In a newly gained spirit of independence, she suddenly changes her mood. She takes full control of her and responds to the surroundings as an independent person. When the barmaid warns about the train coming in five minutes, implying she has to know things by herself, she asks the man, "What did she say?" Her bright smile of gratitude at the barmaid means she is acknowledging the latter's dutifulness as an independent person. She smiles at the American just to acknowledge his initiative to take the bags to the platform. She invites the man to come back and finish the beer, in order to celebrate her triumph over his intimidation.

The man looks defeated in his behaviour during his walk to the platform and return. The presence of many people drinking at the bar heightens his shame of being exposed to the world. Maybe he helps himself to an Anis all by himself because he is somewhat insecure within himself. The girl's confident smile at him seems to cause him irritation. "Do you feel better?" The question he asks to her makes him a laughing stock before the girl with a bright smile, as her pregnancy has so far caused any pain or agony to him but not to her. "I feel fine ...

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway**

---

There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.” The girl’s paradoxical response with a sarcastic repetition of “I feel fine” makes the man give up the argument. It is not stated what would happen after that but it is clear that the girl has equipped herself emotionally to face life herself with or without the man. What Jig clearly understands finally is that not even an abortion can put things right. The past is gone. One abortion will not put an end to her biological condition associated with womanhood. If an abortion could bring back the past, then she would choose it. Because the abortion cannot achieve that end, she sees no point in choosing to have that done.

### **Hemingway’s Achievements**

Hemingway’s absorption of Ezra Pound’s ideas of imagism is evident in the treatment of the background description. (See Tarvin, 2014) His adoption of Pound’s recommendation that symbolism should not be imposed rather than arise from the natural object is clear in the development of his imagery. He does not make a single comment but displays dispassionately what is present. The orchestration of his imagery succeeds in imposing symbols direct, articulate, and original in the development of an atmosphere tinted with physical and psychological elements of transition. The simplicity of his language is evidence of his adoption of Pound’s recommendation of direct treatment of the events of a story, without evasion or cliché. As the text is free of irrelevances or aberration it is clear that Hemingway follows Pound’s ban on words that fail to contribute to the overall design of the story. As ninety percent of the story is in dialogue it is clear that Hemingway indulges in Pound’s emphasis on the employment of natural-speech rhythms. These qualities make the short story an effective comment on modern society where people daringly violate the process of nature for the sake of their selfish motives to the extent that their fellow men and women become victims of their moves.

### **CONCLUSION**

This is basically a microstudy of Hemingway’s style as a storyteller. His narration is full of suspense. In fact, in order to achieve suspense, he does not seek help in fantasy. As a keen observer of the reality, he has plenty of physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioral elements from the life world to exploit, while producing imagery appealing to all senses. Thus he presents his readers with a consummate experience of the settings where his characters are involved in various types of crises and conflicts. In this context, “The Hills like White Elephants” is a showpiece of Hemingway’s style. The focus here is centered upon his application of paradox as the pivotal element in developing the theme of commitment to parenthood that varies on the basis of commitment to love and mutuality in a romantic relationship. Hemingway conveys that, in a relationship, love and mutuality transcend sexual pleasure through the reactions his two characters make to the crisis they are involved in. The ten subsections in this paper that form a critical portrayal of the story divided into ten sections generate sufficient inspiration for the readers to continue their engagement with it. The symbolism of transition formed by the two rails in the first section supported by images of dullness, discomfort, ugliness, insecurity, dirt, and sterility merge with the psychological paralysis of the characters depicted through their frozen behaviour that contrasts with the scorching heat in the second section.

The conversation between the two characters in their protagonist and antagonist statuses in relation to the crisis they have starts with the girl’s hallucinating of white elephants before the hills on the horizon in the third section. The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh sections convey the dispute between the the girl and the American over the foetus that appears to either of them in two contrast fashions – as a blessing to the girl and as a burden to the American. Going by Kundera’s (1993) observation, when the dialogue is translated into a piece of music, the girl’s voice starts softly at the level of a pianissimo and develops through a range of fortissimos in response to the American’s sforzandos that convey his nonchalance, each time he opens his mouth, and ends in a diminuendo to mark her temporary surrender. After a short break, section eight opens and continues steadily to section ten, with the girl speaking with a dose of freshly gained energy. Her voice gets gradually elevated in a series of sforzandos in response to the American’s reiterated proposition for an abortion presented in a series of pianissimos, exposing his disregard for her aspiration for motherhood and his hypocrisy as a sexual

## **Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway**

partner. Her triumph over intimidation is marked with her repetition of “please” in section ten that ends with the phrasing, ‘I feel fine. ... There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.’ This is an indication of the girl’s resilience. The ten-part analysis of the story is followed by a survey of Hemingway’s style in terms of his achievement as a storyteller. All in all the paper is designed with an emphasis on his artistry, to help amateur readers of Hemingway.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Hemingway, Ernest (1927). “Hills Like White Elephants.” In Charters, Ann Ed (2003). *The Story and Its Writer*. (6<sup>th</sup>ed.) Boston: Bedford.
2. Kundera, Milan (1993). *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine parts*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.
3. Lost Sheep Productions and El Draw Studios. Hills like White Elephants. [www.lostsheepproductions.com](http://www.lostsheepproductions.com). [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=hills+like+white+elephants+lost+sheep](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=hills+like+white+elephants+lost+sheep)(Accessed March 20th, 2018)
4. The European Graduate School. “Ernest Hemingway Biography”. <http://www.egs.edu/library/ernest-hemingway/biography/> (Accessed June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014)
5. Tarvin, William. (Classroom Handout) Hemingway, Ernest - “Hills Like White Elephants” <http://tarvinlit.com/wordpress/?s=hills+like+white+elephants> (Accessed June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014)

**Citation:** E. A. Gamini Fonseka, “Dissuasion Resulting in Determination: Paradox in “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway” *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, vol 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-9.

**Copyright © 2018 E. A. Gamini Fonseka**, This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.