MOVING TO THE GIRL'S SIDE OF "HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS"

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ALTHOUGH MOST OF the features of "Hills Like White Elephants" have been well discussed and understood, so that Paul Smith, in his 1989 survey of opinion on the story, can wonder if there is anything left to say about it (209), what has not been satisfactorily resolved is the question of the ending. In view of the fact that Hemingway leaves virtually everything, even what is at issue between the girl and the American, for the reader to "figure" out, meanwhile unobtrusively supplying what is needed to understand the story's structure and conflict, it seems logical to assume that he also expected the reader to be able to answer the question left by the story's ending: What are the couple going to do about the girl's pregnancy? Yet the ending has seemed stubbornly indeterminate. A majority of commentators, by my count, assume that the girl will have the abortion in order to please and thus keep her lover. But a considerable minority find these arguments unconvincing and conclude that the story leaves the question open.

Giving a new twist to the majority opinion, Howard L. Hannum has recently argued that the girl will indeed have the abortion but then, the relationship irreparably ruptured, will leave her American companion.[1] Hannum is right, I believe, to argue that published commentary has not looked closely enough at the development of the female character through the story and "has underestimated Jig's character considerably" (53). But a study of Hemingway's characterization of the pregnant girl as she struggles with the American's wishes and her own feelings points, in my view, toward the conclusion that she decides not to have an abortion, and her companion, though not without strong misgivings, acquiesces in her decision.[2] Close analysis of the girl's utterances and movements in the context of the story's carefully constructed setting reveals that she first discovers and then decides to follow her own true feelings about not only what to do about the child she is carrying but also what will be the most fully rewarding direction to take in life.

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To follow the girl's development in "Hills Like White Elephants," it is essential to have a clear sense of the setting in which her development takes place. As the story opens, the girl and her companion are sitting at a table outside a bar in a railroad station in Spain trying to decide what to do about her pregnancy. Although it is never stated, they are trying to agree on whether or not she should have an abortion; and it becomes clear that the girl is reluctant to accede to her companion's determined urging that an abortion would be an easy solution to their problem. The station where this drama takes place sits "between two lines of rails in the sun" (*MWW* 39). Here setting neatly reinforces conflict: the two lines of rails, presumably going in opposite directions, represent figuratively the decision point at which the couple find themselves. They must choose which way to go, to have the abortion or the child. The rail lines run through a river valley with, naturally enough, a line of hills rising up on either side. The hills on one side of the valley are dry and barren; those on the other side are described with imagery of living, growing things. Thus in choosing whether to abort or to have the child, the couple are choosing between two ways of life. The choice of abortion is associated with the arid sterility of the hills on the barren side of the valley and by extension with the aimless, hedonistic life they have been leading. The choice of having the child is associated with the living, growing things on the other side of the valley, the "fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro," the river as archetypal symbol of the stream of life.

In this setting, then, Hemingway works out the story's conflict, which revolves around the development of his female character. Viewed analytically, the drama may be seen to take place in four movements. In the first movement we are shown the stereotypical passive female, not even knowing her own mind, accustomed to following a masterful male for her direction in life. In movement two she comes to a dramatic realization of her own mind—her own welfare, dreams, and values. In movement three she asserts herself for the first time. And in the final movement we see the result of her development toward self-realization: the reluctant and still somewhat resentful capitulation of her male companion.

The first three-fifths of the story sketch in a classic portrait of the deferential female, without a strong identity, an accessory to the male, to whom she has been accustomed to look, although now with growing reluctance, for support and direction. Clearly the American is the leader in their relationship: he knows Spanish, the language of the country in which they are traveling, he is

knowledgeable about drinks, and he is in charge of their luggage and thus, presumably, of the destination of their travels. There can be little doubt that the couple's life together as the story opens has been conducted along lines that suit the American's desires: their travels looking at things and trying new drinks revolve around "all the hotels where they had spent nights." This is a male's sexual playhouse, which, not surprisingly, the American is loath to give up. Ironically underscoring his assumption of leadership in the relationship, Hemingway makes him the expert even on abortion, a uniquely female issue. *He* knows what the operation consists of, how simple and "natural" it is, "'lots of people that have done it,'" and that it will make them happy again, as they were before the girl got pregnant. By making the American so cavalier about a procedure he knows nothing about, one that would be an ordeal not for him but for the girl, fraught not only with physical trauma and danger but also with significant mental, moral, and perhaps religious conflict, Hemingway shows a sensitive understanding of what abortion means to the woman involved.

As in the opening movement the couple resume their discussion of what to do about the girl's pregnancy, the focus is on developing the conflicting viewpoints of the two parties involved. The American argues single-mindedly for the abortion. The girl's mind, however, appears to be divided. She is accustomed to following the lead of her male companion, but in this situation she finds herself uncomfortable with the direction he wants to take. Conditioned to be led by others, she does not know her own mind and therefore cannot articulate it to her male leader. The real drama of the opening movement of "Hills Like White Elephants," constructed with surprising insight by its still youthful male writer, shows the girl struggling to break out of her conditioned deference and assert her own feelings, although at this stage she doesn't even know what they are.

After the opening paragraph, setting the scene, the first movement of "Hills Like White Elephants" settles into a dialogue between the American, who wants to perpetuate the status quo of the couple's relationship, and the girl, who, in the habit of doing what he wants, has not yet developed the mechanism to know what she wants, much less to articulate it. Thus she cannot forthrightly contest her companion's urging, but neither, because of what is at stake in this case, can she stifle her own feelings, which express themselves involuntarily in the form of sarcasm and figurative language. Hemingway accomplishes a great deal through suggesting tone of voice, obviating the necessity of authorial commentary. He has obviously listened well to voices engaged in argument and has captured with remarkable precision the games people play.

But readers must pay attention not only to what is said but also to where the characters are when they say it. In the first movement they are on one side of the station next to the bar sitting "at a table in the shade, outside the building" (39). This side of the station, facing out toward the hills on the same side of the valley, where "there was no shade and no trees," has been widely associated with the barrenness and sterility both of the implications of going through with an abortion and of the current state of the couple's relationship. Understandably, it is when she looks "off at the line of hills" on this side of the station—hills "white in the sun" in country that "was brown and dry"—that she utters her memorable simile: "'They look like white elephants.'" Although various explanations have been offered of what this observation might mean, the telling point is, surely, that for the girl the child growing within her is a white elephant in the proverbial sense: something she cannot just throw away but for which, in her present circumstances, she has no use; something that is awkwardly, burdensomely in the way. Thus Hemingway finds a poignant way to suggest the girl's true feelings about her predicament, which she remains unable to communicate forthrightly to her companion. The simile also reveals at least some sensitivity on Hemingway's part to the dilemma of a girl pregnant and unmarried, which is more than can be said about the American in the story. His inability to put himself in her place is precisely the point behind his reply to her musing about white elephants—"'I've never seen one'"—and her sarcastic response "'No, you *wouldn't* have'" (the emphasis I have added should be obvious). The American would have had no experience with white elephants like the ones troubling the girl because, obviously, he would never have been pregnant with a partner urging him to get an abortion.

Throughout the first movement of the story, while the girl cannot state her feelings directly, they nevertheless express themselves indirectly through sarcasm and also silence. When, for example, the American, the expert on abortion, describes the procedure—"'It's just to let the air in'" (41)—"The girl did not say anything." As a female she surely knows something about her own anatomy and about what happens in an abortion—a surgical procedure in which, in that time and place, dilation is followed by curettage. But in the first movement she does not dignify his self-serving ignorance with a response. If this may be called sarcasm through silence, she continues throughout this movement to employ vocal sarcasm, as in her rejoinder that she too has known lots of people who have had abortions "'And afterward they were all *so* happy'" (41, again obvious emphasis added). The first movement ends in a crescendo as

the girl, her inner conflict becoming increasingly intense, throws the American's urgings back at him with a bitter sarcasm that exposes their self-serving hollowness. The movement climaxes in her exasperated outburst: "'Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me'" (41).

It is curious that for some readers this is the end of the story. The girl repeats "'And I'll do it and then everything will be fine'" (42), and the decision is made. She will have the abortion because she wants to keep the American happy, placing his worry over the complications that her pregnancy will create for him above what the abortion will mean for her. But we are only three-fifths of the way through the story, and the remaining two-fifths are a good deal more than anticlimax. Even at this point the decision remains unsettled. If readers have misheard the girl's exasperation as acquiescence, the American has not. In fact, her statement that she will have the abortion because she does not care about herself is really an ironic attack on his own stubborn selfishness. This movement ends with a repetition of his acknowledgement that it is, after all, *her* decision: she should have the child if she really feels strongly about it. And at this point the American is beginning to realize that she does feel strongly about it, strongly enough to lash back at his selfish insistence that she abort the pregnancy. Thus when the girl seems to give in to the American's urging, "The literal sense of her remark," as Hannum points out, "is 'Since you force me to do this, you don't care about me'" (50). The heavy sarcasm of the statement shows how she really feels: that an abortion would be dangerous for her, that in having one she would have to give up herself, and that in insisting on the abortion the American cares only about himself. It is clear from his response that, unlike many readers, he hears what she is really saying: he says "'I don't want you to do it if you feel *that* way'" (42, emphasis added but clearly indicated in the dialogue).

It is just at this point, with both the girl and the American beginning to realize not only what her feelings are but how strong they are, that the story takes a pivotal turn, in terms of both structure and character development:

> 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 banks 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. (42)

For one thing, as has been widely recognized, these lines, beginning the second movement of the story, contain the definitive clue to the structural incorporation of theme into setting. The sentence "Across, on the other side, were fields

of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro" stands in pointed contrast to the story's second sentence: "On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun." Thus are setting and conflict intertwined. "On this side" are all the values associated with abortion: sterility, aridity, the taste of licorice, and the pregnancy as a white elephant on the girl's hands. "Across, on the other side," are the values associated with having the child: fertility, the water of life, fruitfulness—in short, pregnancy as a precious, even sacred, manifestation of the living power of nature.

But more significantly, in terms of the dramatic conflict, the beginning of the second movement of "Hills Like White Elephants" represents a decisive turning point in the development of the female character. When "The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station," she effectively distances herself from the influence of her male companion and enables herself, evidently for the first time, to realize what is in her own mind. In choosing to write his story from the dramatic point of view, Hemingway set himself the problem of how to show, not tell, what is going on in the minds of his characters. Now he uses the physical movement of his character within a carefully defined setting to represent a pivotal movement of mind. Thus, figuratively speaking, the girl's movement to a point where she can look out to the other side of the station shows the freeing of her mind from the control of the American and her development toward discovering her own feelings, represented figuratively by the other side of the valley she now sees for the first time. The living things that now appear to her view—the trees, the "fields of grain" that suggest the cycle of life in nature, the river as the stream and water of life—all show that she is powerfully drawn to the full involvement in the life process that having a child signifies.

It has long been recognized that the two sides of the valley of the Ebro represent two ways of life, one a sterile perpetuation of the aimless hedonism the couple have been pursuing, the other a participation in life in its full natural sense. Hemingway signals this opposition by the paired phrases that introduce the description of the two sides: "On this side" are all the values associated with abortion; "Across, on the other side," are all the values associated with having the child. Equally clearly, however, the two sides of the setting are identified with the two characters involved in the conflict. *This* side, the side of the abortion, is the American's side. *The other* side, with its imagery of life and fertility, is the girl's side.

Throughout this movement of "Hills Like White Elephants" the girl keeps her distance from the American, remaining in a position to maintain her own

viewpoint. Now she begins, although still obliquely, to express her own wishes. Her musing "'And we could have all this'" implies her sense that her side, her view of their future, would result in a fuller life than his. A debate over the point ensues, and as the first movement ended with the American's dawning awareness that she does indeed feel "'that way,'" so the second movement ends as he tries to persuade her that she "'mustn't feel that way'" and, as Hannum notes, calls her "'back in the shade'" of his side of the issue and "struggles to regain control" of her (51).

The third movement begins, as do all four movements of the story, with a descriptive paragraph that positions the characters pointedly within the highly symbolic setting. The girl rejoins the American at the table outside the bar on his side of the station where again what she faces is "the hills on the dry side of the valley," and he resumes his double talk, assuring her that he will go along with what she wants while stubbornly pressuring her to do what he wants. She is again physically on his side of the station and the decision, but her mind remains on her side, to which she tries to persuade him by implying that her pregnancy could mean something to him and allaying his fear that they would not be able to "'get along'" with the added burden of a child. But their dialogue in this movement lapses again into his hypocritical protestations of disinterest and her sarcastic rejoinders until, exasperated to the breaking point, the girl at last explodes with real feeling. Even though she still does not state in direct terms her feeling that there can be more to life than their aimless hedonism, she nevertheless does, evidently for the first time, assert herself openly against the American. The point behind the seven repetitions of "please" with which she tells him, though still indirectly, to shut up, is to show, not tell, the real intensity of her resistance both to what he wants for their relationship and to the hypocrisy of his efforts to persuade her. That hypocrisy is precisely what Hemingway underlines when, just at this point, the American looks at their suitcases and the "labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights" and then claims yet again that he has no selfish interest in the abortion decision—doesn't "'care anything about it'" (43). Readers surely know what a young man and woman do when, on a pleasure trip, they spend nights together in hotels and surely also recognize that it is the unencumbered sexual playhouse the American has been enjoying that he stubbornly tries to preserve throughout the struggle over the abortion decision. Presumably the girl too sees what the reader sees and draws a similar conclusion; thus when her companion claims, while looking at the labels on the luggage, that he has no selfish

interest in the decision, the glaring hypocrisy pushes her to the limit of her self control: "'I'll scream,' the girl said."

This is the climactic turning point in "Hills Like White Elephants." What the girl's outbursts have made clear to the American is just how strong her resistance to having an abortion is. She does not say, of course, when pressed to the breaking point, "I can't, can't, can't, can't, can't, can't, can't go through with an abortion." She says "'Would you please, please, please, please, please, please, please stop talking.'" But it is clear from his response—"'But I don't want you to'"—that he understands what her words really mean: in the strongest terms of which she is capable she has told him that she does not want to have an abortion and will listen to no more of his self-serving pleading for her to do so. Six times throughout the episode he has declared that the decision is ultimately up to her. Now he knows unequivocally how she feels and can press her no further. Not quite the utter Hemingway cad he is sometimes taken to be, he accedes to the girl's overpowering reluctance, proposes to "'take the bags over to the other side of the station'"—*her* side—and gets an approving smile from the girl.

Of course, this analysis of the climax of "Hills Like White Elephants" puts heavy stress on the word "other." Indeed, when several years ago Mary Dell Fletcher called attention to the possibly pivotal significance of the phrase "the other side," she could not bring herself to draw the logical conclusion from her own insight and left the question of the ending open (18). But the design of the story amply justifies putting decisive weight on the opposition between "this side" and "the other side." It is no overstatement to say that the whole story is structured around the two contrasting sides of the valley. Unmistakably, this division translates into an opposition between the American's values on this side and the girl's on the other. It seems pointless to worry, as Fletcher does, whether or not the actual facts of the setting will support such a reading. Perhaps, indeed, at the actual station in Spain, "'this side' is a switch line (or siding) and 'the other side' a main line and boarding place for trains going either direction" (18). Equally irrelevant to an understanding of "Hills Like White Elephants" is the knowledge, reported by an observer of the actual landscape on which the story was apparently based, "that both the fertile fields and the dry hills are on the same side (northeast) of the tracks" (Hannum n. 7). Artists routinely rearrange the actual details on which their works are based.

In truth, the precise facts of the trains and tracks are left vague in the story, very likely because the real significance of these elements lies not in their literal but in their figurative implications. The train the girl and the American appear

to be waiting for, the one that is coming "in five minutes" near the end of the story, is presumably "the express from Barcelona" that "stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid" (39). If the story is read as ending with the girl, against her own compelling reluctance, giving in to the American's urging, then the train is headed to Madrid for an abortion. Pamela Smiley, however, studies the couple's language "in the context of a train ride to the Barcelona abortion clinic" (290).[3] If the place of the abortion is Barcelona, then the train headed in that direction could not be the one they are about to board at the story's end; and if indeed the trains running on the two lines of rails do run in opposite directions, then the train to the abortion clinic would logically run on *the American's* side of the station, a logic that neatly supports my argument that they are headed in the direction of the girl's side of things. All that speculation about the literal facts of place and direction, however, enticing as it may be, yields place to the figurative use Hemingway makes of the setting: the station as the decision point for the couple, a "junction" (39) of their opposing viewpoints; the two lines of rails representing the opposite choices available to them; and the two sides of the valley representing two opposing directions in life, this side the way the American wants to go and the other side the way the girl wants to go. When the American carries their luggage to the *other* side, the whole weight of the story's figurative logic comes down on the conclusion that he is accepting her side of the issue.

The remaining details of the story, although they have been read quite comfortably from the viewpoint that the girl is going to have an abortion, work even better when it is understood that she has decided to have the child. Her surprising smile, for example, mentioned twice near the end of the third movement and again in the fourth and final movement, indicates a decisive change in mood that simply does not square with how she would feel if she were really facing an abortion. The girl, unable to bear any more of her companion's self-serving persuasive tactics, has just told him she will scream if he does not shut up. The waitress appears with the second round of beers and reports that the train—presumably, since it is the only one mentioned, the express from Barcelona to Madrid—"'comes in five minutes'"; and "the girl smile[s] brightly at the woman, to thank her" (43). It might be argued that the smile, mere politeness to the waitress, has nothing to do with her feelings about having an abortion. But in this story everything has to do with her feelings about having an abortion. Moreover, she has been unable throughout the story to keep her feelings about it out of anything she has said or done. How could she now, a

moment later, smile "brightly" at the news that the train that will carry her to the dilation and curettage procedure is nearing the station? The significance of this point to the story's logic is underscored by the fact that the adverb "brightly," *telling* the reader how the girl smiles, is the story's only authorial intrusion into the dramatic point of view of "Hills Like White Elephants," an understandable lapse, to be sure, because a smile does not have a tone of voice, Hemingway's usual method of showing how the girl is feeling in the story. It must have taken a compelling sense that telling the reader precisely how the girl is smiling at her decision point is crucial to his design to cause such a notorious taker-outer to put something in. How, one might well ask, in view of the girl's near-hysterical aversion to the idea of abortion, would she be smiling if she were really about to board a train taking her to have the operation? If she were able to smile at all, would she not be smiling bitterly, ironically—out of the same sarcastic exasperation with which she has characteristically responded to the American's pleading? Nor does this logic change if she has decided to have the abortion only to leave her companion, except, perhaps, that in this case she might smile with something of a "you may think you've won but you'll see" attitude, hard to put in one adverb. The logic of the story's design enjoins the conclusion that she smiles brightly at the waitress's announcement of the train because she is no longer headed in the direction of having the abortion that she has contemplated only with intense distress. When, now, the American proposes to "'take the bags over to the other side of the station,'" she smiles at him because, since he has stopped pressing her and is going her way, she will not have to scream.

In the brief concluding movement, which again begins with a narrative passage noting position and movement, the American carries the couple's luggage to the other side of the station, stopping to have an Anis on the way back, a detail perhaps indicating that he is accepting the medicinal flavor of the prospect he is facing. As his attitude toward her pregnancy left a licorice taste in the girl's mouth, so the prospect of going her way, he fears, will lead to bad-tasting consequences for him. On the other hand, it occurs to him, other people survive the experience he is facing. He looks at the other people drinking around him and observes that "They were all waiting reasonably for the train" (44). These are people taking the same train as he and his pregnant companion: they are going in the girl's direction toward the fullness of life signified by its natural cycle—a direction, by the way, in this sense much more fittingly called "'all perfectly natural'" than the operation to abort the child that the American had de-

scribed in those terms. If so many people go this way "reasonably," he muses, maybe his fears are unreasonable. Although he still "could not see the train"—that is, cannot visualize the future that going in the girl's direction will bring—he uneasily accepts his fate.

But not without one last flare-up of his own feelings. Returning to the girl, still sitting at their table, he turns her sarcasm back on her. How tempting it is, after losing a contest, to get at least something back. Suppose that you have just given in in a dispute. Still not fully convinced by your opponent's side of the issue and smarting at being beaten down, what you say or imply, with self-justifying sarcasm, is something like "O. K. You've got your way—I hope you're satisfied" or "I hope you feel better now" or, as the American says, "'Do you feel better?'"—getting in a final dig. But the girl is not having any of the recrimination he wants her to feel for getting her own way. In perhaps the only point at which the story's sympathy for the girl wavers, there may be just a hint of smug triumph in her reply "'I feel fine, . . . There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine'" (44).

In "Hills Like White Elephants," it is instructive to note, Hemingway shows his female character undergoing essentially the same kind of struggle as Clara Middleton in George Meredith's novel *The Egoist*: first to discover her own mind in a contest with the male will and then to assert her own interests.[4] (The fact that *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* turns up in "The Three-Day Blow" establishes that Hemingway knew something about Meredith and his preoccupation with female and male cross purposes.) In *The Egoist* Clara Middleton, accustomed to following along in the tow of her patriarchal father, has drifted into an engagement with the imperious Willoughby Patterne, whom, when her own mind finally rouses itself and makes her true feelings known to her, she discovers she cannot stand. At length she is able to understand how she allowed herself to get into such a predicament: "'I have learnt,'" she explains, "'that the ideal of conduct for women is to subject their minds to the part of an accompaniment'" (84). This is precisely the state in which we encounter the girl in "Hills Like White Elephants": accompanying her male companion here and there around Spain, in bed, and next to an abortion clinic in accordance with his desires. Suddenly, however, both Clara and Hemingway's girl find themselves in situations in which they can no longer drift along in mindless accompaniment. But both find themselves painfully unequipped to assert their own feelings. Clara Middleton, musing to Laetitia Dale over the predicament she is in, is struck by the realization "'That very few women are able to be straightforwardly sincere in their speech, however much they may desire to be'" (132).

Both the novel and the story generate suspense by making readers wonder whether the women will be able to assert themselves or will be overpowered by a male will they find intolerable: Clara to marry a monster of male egoism, the girl in Hemingway's story to abort an experience she implies she has waited so long for. The summation of Clara's plight by the narrative voice in *The Egoist* provides an apt commentary on what in the story is left to be inferred. While "not many men are trained to courage," the narrator allows:

> young women are trained to cowardice. For them to front an evil with plain speech is to be guilty of effrontery and forfeit the waxen polish of purity, and therewith their commanding place in the market. They are trained to please man's taste, for which purpose they soon learn to live out of themselves, and look on themselves as he looks, almost as little disturbed as he by the undiscovered. (204).

Neither Clara nor Hemingway's girl is able decisively to undo her conditioning in feminine deference, but both, energized by the arousal of the undiscovered—their true feelings—manage through indirect means to avoid the evil which they are unable to confront with plain speech. Clara is saved by the help of others and a *deus ex machina*, and the girl by the mere vehemence of her feelings, the import of which the American understands even though she never can say plainly what she means.

So firmly does the story's sympathy side with the girl and her values, so strong is her repugnance toward the idea of abortion, and so critical is the story of the male's self-serving reluctance to shoulder the responsibility of the child he has begotten that the reading I have proposed seems the most logical resolution to its conflict. Hemingway's insistent exposure of the self-centered motives of his male character extends to the naming of the characters in the story. He names his male character "the American" apparently to generalize about an American male attitude toward the responsibility of parenthood, perhaps in contrast to the Europeans, presumably Spaniards, who are waiting "reasonably" for the train that symbolizes moving forward into reproductive life. In his naming of the female character it has not escaped notice that "The girl is called 'Jig,' but only twice in the entire story, in successive addresses by the American" and that the sexual innuendo implied by the word "'Jig' expresses all too well what the girl had meant to the American" (Hannum 46). With its denotations of a jerky up-and-down or to-and-fro motion and of any mechanical device operated in a jerky "jigging" motion, the term's long-standing connotation of

sexual innuendo creates pointed implications of how the American thinks of the girl—as an apparatus for "the old in-out, in-out" (as Alex callously calls it in *A Clockwork Orange*) of sexual intercourse. What has not been justly credited, however, is that the girl is never called Jig by the authorial voice—only by the American. Hemingway scrupulously dissociates his narrative voice from the American's sexual instrumentalization of his female companion, setting an example not followed by many of the story's commentators.

If, however, the naming of his female companion represents Hemingway's way of exposing the demeaning way the American thinks of her, what are we to make of the fact that the authorial voice calls her, an adult female and pregnant, "the girl" throughout the story, a naming, to readers sensitive to gender-biased language, almost as belittling as "Jig"? In responding to this question one may not fall back on the explanation that Hemingway does this unintentionally. As Nadine DeVost has demonstrated in impressive detail, he used the designations "girl," "woman," and "wife" with careful deliberation to suggest nuances of female sexual status and orientation in his fiction. It must be acknowledged, in view of current national concerns, that the mere fact that a female is pregnant does not assure that she is not still a girl. Hemingway's use of "girl" in "Hills Like White Elephants" follows a similar logic, one not utterly at odds with the principles of gender neutrality. DeVost notes that in stories like "Hills Like White Elephants" Hemingway often used the term "girl" to refer to "female characters whose sexual identity and/or maturity is not recognized or acknowledged by another important character" (51). But it is precisely the point of "Hills Like White Elephants," in the reading proposed in this essay, that the girl's maturity is not recognized through most of the story by the authorial persona as well. As has been argued, her achievement of mature self-knowledge and assertion is the main line of development in the story. Even though chronologically adult, as we assume, and pregnant, she has allowed herself to be guided as if she were still a child—thus, by definition, a "girl." Only when she discovers her own mind and takes charge of her own life does she become mature and a woman.

And, indeed, in the final movement of the story, which begins when the American carries their luggage to the other side of the station, she is no longer referred to as "the girl." It would have been too heavy-handed, surely, for the story now to call her "woman." But there is at least some evidence to suggest that Hemingway takes pains to avoid calling her a girl now that she is no longer being guided like a child. When it becomes necessary to refer to her in the final

movement, it has been fully ten lines since she was last named by a noun. The remoteness of that referent would seem to dictate a repetition of the noun. The fact that Hemingway instead strains the reference, as nowhere else in the story, and uses the pronoun "she" may indicate his awareness that in the logic of his story "girl" is no longer an appropriate designation for his female character. (Although I have avoided calling her "Jig" and thus assuming the American's sexually demeaning perspective toward her, I have not scrupled against following the story's logic and calling her "girl" until her climactic transformation near the end.)

The girl's—now woman's—achievement of mature self-direction may be reflected also in the tone of the final movement. If, as I have proposed, she feels triumphant at the end, perhaps she deserves to feel good, not simply about getting the better of the American but about becoming her own person. Then the line "'There's nothing wrong with *me*'" (emphasis added), in keeping with the story's persistent reliance on suggesting irony or sarcasm in tone of voice, may well imply her realization that there *is* something wrong with her companion. Whether or not, as Hannum believes, such a realization, which has been clear to most readers all along, means she will dump the American, at least it does imply that she has become able to make a more clear-sighted estimation, and perhaps a better choice, of men.

In any case, although "Hills Like White Elephants" has generated a good deal of admiration through the years for its technical virtuosity, the story has not received all the credit it deserves. For one thing, for those who cannot completely shake the notion that the responsible writer should not leave readers hanging, left with crucial unanswered questions like "How does the story end? Is she going to get an abortion or not?", Hemingway has, I believe, provided the means by which they can reach the closure toward which the drama proceeds logically, movement by movement. For another thing, the story turns out to be even more rightminded, in terms of current sympathies, than has been generally perceived. Not only does it side with its female character's values, it also understands and sensitively dramatizes her struggle to take charge of her own arena, to have a say about the direction of her own life. Finally, it shows a Hemingway more perceptive about the underlying dynamics of female-male relationships than he has often been given credit for.

NOTES

1. Although Hannum may be technically correct to assert that "the dynamic possibility of Jig's having the abortion and then leaving the American has not really been considered" (47), it has at least been mentioned by Brenner, for whom the story ends with "Jig's abortion and separation from her companion" (12).
2. Smith's survey found that "No one has argued that [the girl] has decided to bear the child" (211), but J. F. Kobler states at the end of his brief discussion of the bead curtain that when in the last paragraph of the story the girl says "'I feel fine,'" "she means that she feels fine in her pregnancy and intends to remain in that condition for her normal term" (7).
3. The story remains vague about which way is which, and Smiley provides no evidence to support her assumption that the abortion clinic is in Barcelona. Other critics—for example, Kenneth G. Johnston (127) and Fletcher (18)—assume that the place of the abortion is Madrid.
4. Pamela Smiley, in her study of the dialogue in "Hills Like White Elephants" in the light of recent theorizing about the different ways women and men communicate, argues cogently that the girl's "language is traditionally feminine," but she fails to follow through to the logic of her own observations, as when she writes, "Unfortunately, Jig smiles at the American at a point when common sense indicates that she should have the most hostility toward him . . . ." (297). Overlooking the girl's decisive, though still indirect, assertion of her own wishes and the capitulation of the American, who has understood her real meaning, Smiley concludes that "The final conflict in the story leaves the issue of abortion unresolved."

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