

LETTING THE AIR
INTO A RELATIONSHIP:
METAPHORICAL ABORTION
IN 'HILL WHITE ELEPHANTS'

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two recurring themes in analyses of Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" are the debate over whether or not Jig will carry her pregnancy to term and the search for biographical experiences that may have inspired and influenced the story. These open questions seem rather disparate at first glance, but Hilary K. Justice has taken a significant step toward unifying them by following what she calls the "signpost 'To Biography'" (30)—the story's dedicatory inscription—and pointing out that Hemingway used abortion as a metaphor for threats to his relationship with his second wife (27). After we realize that this word, unspoken but all-important in the story, was a symbol in the author's love affair with Pauline Pfeiffer, we should consider whether it functions similarly in "Hills." The unmentioned abortion in "Hills Like White Elephants" is both a metaphor for the fate of the protagonists' love affair and an allegorical vehicle for Hemingway's response to a series of terminated relationships in his own life. While the story can be understood in light of abortion-as-metaphor, and this reading is consistent with the variety of critical interpretations, available biographical evidence lends additional support.

Critics continue to disagree over the fate of Jig's unborn baby. Timothy O'Brien sees the "outcome of the couple's journey" as "bleak and infertile" (19). Their destination of Madrid—ironic because of the name's similarity to *madre*, the Spanish word for mother—will be "the site of the artificial in-

tervention advocated by the male" (23). Kenneth Johnston interprets the cloud shadow that Jig sees moving over the fertile grain field as "foreshadowing the death of her unborn child" (235). Thomas Maher Gilligan suggests that the shifting of baggage from one side of the station to the other indicates that "the couple reconsiders, decides to go to Barcelona instead, and also decides to allow the pregnancy to continue." For him, the shadow of the cloud emphasizes Jig's—and the reader's—awareness of "how little communication exists between herself and her companion" (n. pag.). Justice notes that the story can "support two equal and opposite meanings" (30): "Either they are taking the train to the abortion or they are not" (20). Justice also points out that the cloud can be read as yet another symbol of fertility, bringing "the cool relief of rain to a parched valley" (26).

The outcome of the protagonists' love affair, however, is less controversial. Critics who foresee abortion, and those who do not, tend to agree that Jig and the American will not long remain a couple. Johnston regards the American's attitude as "ominous," an indication of "some future dissolution of their relationship" (237). Jig is both "well aware that the intrusion of a child will send the man packing" and certain that "their relationship will be radically altered, perhaps destroyed, if she goes through with the abortion" (236). Stanley Renner suggests that, as a result of the couple's discussion, Jig "has become able to make a more clear-sighted estimation, and perhaps a better choice, of men" (40). Howard L. Hannum concurs that Jig will leave the American, who by the end of the story has, himself, become a "white elephant" (53). This concept of the American as a burden, costing—from Jig's perspective—more than he is worth, is supported by Justice's assertion that the hills on both sides of the valley, Jig's and the American's, are "like white elephants" (19). Justice sees the shifting of bags as evidence of a capitulation on the American's part, but cautions that, while "he may have done the honorable thing," he still sees "their previous life as having been ruined." She considers the "prognosis" as "guarded at best" (27). Gilligan asserts that "[i]f the man loses in this little game, the girl does not win," and mutual disappointment is hardly a recipe for longevity. Gilligan also suggests that the story's "substance...reveals the very core of a human relationship," where "we really do find nothing" (n. pag.).

Here we, somewhat like Jig and the American, reach a crucial point. If Jig gives in to her lover's wishes, their lives cannot, as she well knows, be the same as before. The aborted fetus will continue to come between them as

they try to “look at things and try new drinks” (SS274). Their old existence, like their feelings for one another, will not be theirs anymore. They will have negated the relationship, and once it is taken away, “you never get it back” (276). Should Jig insist on having the baby, the American, having lost his “unencumbered sexual playhouse” (Renner 33), will leave her, either sooner or later. Like Harold Krebs, in “Soldier’s Home,” though without Krebs’s justification, he will continue to seek a life free of consequences. But an abortion, or its absence, lies in a future that we, like the American looking up the tracks for the train, cannot quite see. He knows what has been decided, but is unable to discern the effects of that choice. We are unsure, and can only speculate about the tangible outcome—abortion or childbirth—of what we have witnessed. We can be more certain that we have seen the termination of the couple’s relationship, a metaphorical abortion. Whatever Jig’s decision, the love affair, such as it is, cannot continue. It is the figurative womb into which air is let, and by the end of the story it is as arid and empty as the Spanish countryside.

Arguments that Jig will or will not terminate her pregnancy rely on metaphor, but regard the abortion literally. Abortion is considered solely as a factual prospect, even though virtually every other element of “Hills” is read in light of its symbolic import. The station is situated between two sets of rails, whose significance lies “in their figurative implications” (Renner 34), and between two contrasting landscapes that symbolize the couple’s options. On one side are the “hills on the dry side of the valley” (SS277), which are “long and white” (273), inspiring Jig’s titular simile; and on the other are “fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro” (276); the setting illustrates Jig’s choice “between sterility and fertility” (O’Brien 19). The characters’ physical movements indicate “movement of the mind” (Renner 32). The American’s anonymity renders him symbolic of “an American male attitude” in general (38). Jig’s nickname carries sexual (Hannum 46) and mechanical (O’Brien 21) implications. Her pregnancy “is an apt metaphor for the life she has lived with the American” (Hannum 52). Even items as apparently insignificant as the felt pads placed beneath sweating beer glasses can evoke, in light of the couple’s conversation, images of the operating room and gauze pads used to soak up blood. A review of the story’s many symbols and their various interpretations might continue almost indefinitely. To argue that “Hills” is an allegory is perhaps to belabor the obvious.

Consideration of the story’s abortion as metaphorical is consistent with arguments that Jig (Hannum, Renner) or the American (Justice) is a dynamic

character. However, when we recognize the figurative significance of the proposed abortion, we see that if either or both of the characters experience “growth” throughout the course of the story, neither necessarily moves toward the other’s “side.” When Jig observes that the hills “look like white elephants,” the American says that he has “never seen one.” “No, you wouldn’t have,” Jig replies. This bit of dialogue establishes the characters’ opening positions in what is, essentially, an emotionally charged negotiation. To Jig, the unborn child she carries is eminently, painfully real; to the American it is a concept, an abstraction, and too expensive to keep. Much has been made of his inability to grasp metaphor, but he is uncomfortably aware that the crucial issue at hand has been broached, as evidenced by the nature of his response: “I might have. . . Just because you say I wouldn’t have doesn’t prove anything” (SS 273). The statement is also indicative of his lack of emotional development. He is, after all, the one who “knows” things, but his words would be more appropriate to a child in a nursery than to an adult grappling with what is, for the potential life he has sired, a question of being or not being.

Both characters are isolated by their predicament and by the decision they have to make. Caught between two sets of rails—their mutually exclusive alternatives—in the full heat of their dilemma and able to take refuge only in the shade of a bar—the anesthetizing effect of the drinks they consume—they are separated by a bead curtain from the patrons “waiting reasonably” inside (SS 278). When Jig asks what the curtain’s advertisement says, we are reminded that her isolation is inevitably greater. Just as Jig is unfamiliar with the language of Spain, she struggles to express herself in the heretofore alien country of impending (or not) motherhood: hence her reliance on figurative speech, an attempt to make language communicate feelings for which she lacks direct signifiers. Just as she has to ask whether *Anis del Toro* is good with water, so she must surely have questions about her newfound condition. Alone with the American, she is unlikely to encounter even the limited insight and empathy that a well-intentioned, loving man might provide. Disappointment is inevitable. Like her drink, and “like absinthe” and “all the [other] things [she has] waited so long for,” her current experience “tastes of licorice.” Her use of synecdoche in an attempt to express her disillusionment results in another childish interchange—“Oh, cut it out.” “You started it.”—reminding us not only that Jig is young, but that anyone might feel justifiably child-like when faced with such a profoundly life-altering situation. Jig, though, is growing before our very eyes. “That’s all we do, isn’t it—look at

things and try new drinks?" (274). She manages to articulate, again figuratively, what has no doubt been an increasing awareness of the emptiness of the couple's lifestyle to date. She effectively reinforces her previously established negotiating position: she has strong reservations about the option that, as Hannum points out, they have certainly discussed previously (46).

Only after their third drink—perhaps he requires the fortification—does the man mention the "awfully simple operation," which is "just to let the air in." Jig "looked at the ground the table legs rested on"; she "did not say anything," but her silence speaks volumes. As the more "grounded" of the two, she knows that the mechanical dilation of the cervix, causing the uterus to spontaneously void itself, followed by curettage, a scraping procedure, is far from "perfectly natural." Perhaps she is beginning to realize, at this point, that whether or not she terminates her pregnancy, they can never again be "like we were before." When the American states that her pregnancy is "the only thing that bothers us... the only thing that's made us unhappy," she is again silent, thoughtfully fondling two strings of beads from the curtain. Then:

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

"I know we will.... I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I.... And afterward they were all so happy." (SS 275)

Her initial response is, significantly, a statement, not a question. She is not asking him, even rhetorically, what he thinks, but restating what he has said in previous conversations. The American's position has been long established, and she need not wonder about it. Her second statement drips with sarcasm, inspiring the American to reverse course and adopt a new stance in order to continue bargaining. "I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to" (275). Far from being thrown by the shift, Jig responds with a series of questions that require the American to restate his position: he thinks abortion is the best option (unless she really doesn't want one); he loves her; he even loves her witticism about white elephants, but is so worried by her pregnancy that he "just can't think about it." Jig extends his logic to its illogical extreme: "If I do it you won't ever worry?" The American, aware enough not to be backed into this corner, whatever his linguistic or intellectual limitations,

offers a qualified response: “I won’t worry about that because it’s perfectly simple” (275). Thwarted, Jig must now shift her position, employing an attempt at reverse psychology not unlike the American’s current stance and, in fact, as old as relationships themselves, the martyr’s pose. “Then I’ll do it. Because I don’t care about me” (275). This is no capitulation, no abandonment of self, but an attempt—calculated, instinctive, or both—to elicit a desired response from the man.

The effort succeeds because the American is less able than his companion/adversary to think on his metaphorical feet:

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t care about me.”

“Well, I care about you.”

“Oh, yes. But I don’t care about me. And I’ll do it and then everything will be fine.”

“I don’t want you to do it if you feel that way.”

Not only *wouldn’t* he want her to have an abortion if, hypothetically, she did not desire one: he now *doesn’t* want this, a more concrete and immediate statement. His “if,” though, still leaves open the possibility that she might not actually “feel that way,” or that if she does she might change her mind and come around to the American’s way of thinking. Each potential parent has now established a negotiating position diametrically opposed to his/her previous one, though each heart remains unmoved. The man still wants to maintain his former lifestyle—of which Jig is an intrinsic part, thus the delicacy of this debate. Jig has shown by her previous questions that she knows “everything” will not be “fine” if she agrees to the surgery (SS 276). Nevertheless, the argument has indeed reached “new limits” (Hannum 46). At this point Jig drops the beads she has held (Justice 20) and physically distances herself from the American, now able to apprehend symbols of all they might have if they did not “every day...make it more impossible,” while the American insists that “We can have the whole world” (276). His inability to think beyond his immediate goal, the abortion, and his belief that he can return to an Edenic never-never land of irresponsibility echo the adolescent idealism of Marlowe’s Passionate Shepherd. The difference, of course, is that the American’s love has come to live with him, and now he must deal with the consequences, which, whether or not he is conscious of the fact, have banished him forever from that Garden.

Justice suggests that the man, here, moves to join Jig on her end of the platform, metaphorically indicating his movement toward her argumentative position. This case is based in part on the fact that, after the American encourages her to “Come on back in the shade,” and Jig, aware that they are now merely retracing old dialectical ground, requests they “stop talking” (SS 276), “*They sat* down at the table” (277; emphasis added). If “they” sit, Justice reasons, “both must have been standing” (21). However, like the opening paragraph’s statement that “The American and the girl with him *sat* at the table...” (SS 273; emphasis added), the phrase does not necessarily suggest that the American and Jig both sit down at this particular moment. We know that, previously, Jig “stood up and walked to the end of the station” (276). We are not told whether the man follows. Justice offers the stichomythic pacing of dialogue as evidence that he does (21). But the renewed rapidity of the interchange following the American’s query, “What did you say?”, might as easily indicate that Jig turns from looking at the “fields of grain and trees along the...Ebro” and faces the man in order to continue their debate. We do not know how much physical distance separates the two, but we do know they are alone on the platform, and the story provides no evidence of extraneous noise from trains, bar patrons, etc. Arguably, the brief staccato dialogue could take place with some degree of space between the participants. Nor can we rule out the possibility that another time-lapse occurs between Jig’s “Can’t we maybe stop talking?” (SS 276) and the statement that “They sat” (277), as when drinks are ordered in one sentence and have already been served in the next. Perhaps for a brief but indeterminate period the couple actually does not speak, or at any rate says nothing pertinent to our story. Obviously, Jig moves back to the table. Has the American ever left it? Hemingway does not tell us.

In either case, the American returns soon enough to his newly adopted negotiating stance: “. . . I don’t want you to do it if you don’t want to. I’m perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you” (SS 277). Thus begins a series of indefinite pronouns whose antecedents, like the story’s unspoken abortion, must be inferred. The first “it” has to be the abortion; the second, the pregnancy; and the third, the child. Throughout the remainder of the exchange, this most imprecise of English words is always without antecedent but, considered in context, seems to carry one of these three meanings. After Jig’s insistence that they “please please please please please please stop talking” and before her threat, “I’ll scream,” the American, having

“looked at the bags against the wall of the station” and the “labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent [the] nights” that have brought them to this ironic place in the sun, offers what appears to be another reiteration. “‘But I don’t want you to,’ he said, ‘I don’t care anything about it’” (277). In this context, “it” would seem to be the surgical procedure under negotiation. Justice notes, though, that in the second of two drafts of “Hills” Hemingway appears to have considered assigning to the American, at just this point, a line previously belonging to Jig: “Three of us could get along” (24). She reasons, therefore, that this “it” refers to the man’s previous stance and indicates his ultimate concession (25). Hemingway never completed the sentence, crossing out the line before adding the final word (24). This deletion might, indeed, indicate an authorial intent to have the American acquiesce to Jig’s wishes, or to very subtly have him appear to do so: if the American offers an apparent capitulation in order to diffuse an increasingly volatile confrontation, he would not be the first lover—literary or otherwise—to adopt this ploy. Could the emendation as reasonably have been the result of a simple mistake, a slip of the hand during drafting and revision? Like the question of whether the American leaves the table, this too might be unanswerable.

When, with the train “coming in five minutes,” the American moves the couple’s bags “to the other side of the station” (SS 277), some decision has been reached—at least tentatively. We can hypothesize about the nature of the decision, but in light of the numerous plausible scenarios offered by serious readers, we simply cannot *know*. Jig’s smile might indicate gratitude for his concession (Justice 26), satisfaction that “she has decided to have the abortion” but leave her partner (Hannum 53), or, as Renner says of her final insistence, after yet another smile, that “I feel fine” (SS 278), “just a hint of smug triumph” (Renner 37). Whatever motivates the American to transfer the bags, and whatever causes Jig to smile, we can be certain about the dissolution of the relationship. The American’s looking down the tracks, straining to glimpse a future moving toward him as inexorably as the approaching train, certainly indicates a degree of uneasiness on his part, as does his stopping to have another drink, alone, before returning to Jig. One has a hard time conceiving of the American as a devoted husband and father, even though recent arguments by Renner and Justice logically suggest that he has given in for the moment. Equally difficult to imagine is Jig’s continuing the relationship after being convinced to abort a pregnancy about which she

feels so strongly. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations we have witnessed, the relationship is terminated, and the allegorical abortion has taken place not in an operating room, but in Jig's—and the reader's—mind. Jig now *knows*: perhaps this is why she smiles. Her knowledge is the culmination of what Hannum calls a “continuing evolution” (53), which has led to “her realization that there is something wrong with her companion” (Renner 40).

While the figurative abortion in “Hills Like White Elephants” can be understood on the basis of internal evidence, the concept of abortion as metaphor invites consideration of a number of biographical influences on the story, but without risking a fall into the “pit of autobiographical assumption” that, as Robert E. Fleming states, is “already strewn with the bodies of too many Hemingway critics” (n. pag.). Paul Smith, noting that “[i]n lieu of any literary source, speculation on the story’s biographical sources is more than plentiful” (206), cites Fleming in recounting four. The first is Robert McAlmon’s claim to have inspired the story and to have provided the euphemism of letting the air in. The second is a comment related by Gertrude Stein (noted below), and Guy Hickock’s report (by way of Lincoln Steffens) that Hemingway recognized that no form of birth control was completely effective (207). The third is the 1925 sketch that “shares the story’s setting and . . . the simile that become the story’s title,” but whose “events and moods could not differ more” (204). The fourth is a story Hemingway told to George Plimpton, about meeting a girl who had had an abortion and going home to write the story. As a whole, Smith asserts, these “add little” to our understanding of “Hills Like White Elephants” (207).

Kenneth Lynn, stumbling into the trap of autobiographical assumption, states that Jig’s potential abortion reflects Hemingway’s conviction that the birth of his first son—John Hadley Nicanor, nicknamed Bumby—caused the collapse of his first marriage (363). Lynn even theorizes that the story dramatizes its author’s conflict between “an obsessive dream of killing his son in utero and the realization that such a dream was monstrous” (364). Lynn is correct in saying that “Hills” expresses its author’s mental conflict, but is hindered by regarding the abortion as merely literal, as well as by assuming a rather simplistic equation of fact and fiction. Hemingway’s angst, as reflected in the story, is real, but a claim that it results from a repressed desire to abort his son’s life retroactively can, at best, be only speculative.

Certainly, the author’s ambivalence toward fatherhood is well-documented. Gertrude Stein reports that after informing her of Bumby’s immi-

nant birth he lamented, "I am too young to be a father" (262). After the child was born, Hemingway began keeping a careful record of his wife's menstrual cycles, believing that her pregnancy had resulted from a miscalculation on her part (Reynolds, *The Paris Years* 219). According to Robert McAlmon, when Hadley appeared to be pregnant a second time (she wasn't), "Hemingway was most unhappy because he feared he was again to become a father" (277). Michael Reynolds cautions, though, that suppositions about the author's reaction to his first son's conception can be only "plausible fictions" (*The Paris Years* 113). Reynolds also notes that no evidence exists that either Hadley or Pauline ever had an abortion (*The American Homecoming* 244), and no biographer offers any support for an assumption that Hemingway ever urged either woman to do so.

Still, like Robert Cohn in the original typescript of *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway seems to have "lived in an atmosphere of abortions and rumors of abortions" (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 24). Before Hadley's second pregnancy proved a false alarm, Sally Bird urged him to "[s]top acting like a damn fool and crybaby" and offered him the obvious ultimatum: "Either you do something about not having it, or you have it" (McAlmon 277). Reynolds, noting that "[t]hey all knew abortions were available in Paris," nonetheless asserts that "a boy raised in Oak Park did not easily accept that solution" (*The Paris Years* 219). Just how Hemingway did think of abortion is reflected in letters he wrote to Pauline Pfeiffer in the fall of 1926, some eighteen months prior to the completion of "Hills," when the lovers were expecting to remain apart for one hundred days. The separation was imposed by Hadley, according to an agreement under which she would grant Hemingway a divorce at the end of the prescribed period. To his future wife he wrote, "when two people love each other terribly much and need each other in every way and then go away from each other it works almost as bad as an abortion" (Lynn 363). With this statement, Hemingway set a precedent for using the termination of a pregnancy as a metaphor for the pain of separation between lovers.

Justice points out that he was "encoding" his relationship with Pauline "as a nascent body." Efforts by Pauline's mother to play on her daughter's guilt over "destroying Hemingway's marriage and family" were "'deadly,' and 'for the relationship to be in 'deadly' peril, it must be somehow 'alive'" (28). Hemingway, via letter, implored his future wife that they "not try self sacrifices in the middle of surgical operations." Justice sees in his statement that

“lately it [the separation] has me all shot to hell inside,” evidence of the author “representing himself as a pregnant mother”—apparently post-abortion. For her, the story is “a very heavily fictionalized, cross-gendered representation of Ernest and Pauline’s relationship” (29).

Both Kenneth Lynn and Paul Smith have noted the dedicatory inscription at the end of the manuscript: “Mss for Pauline—well, well, well.” Lynn suggests this “may have been intended to convey a warning” (364). Smith concludes, “[t]here is no telling what might be made of that note,” especially considering that “the conflict is over abortion” and Pauline was Catholic (206). Justice, however, asserts that Pauline would have well understood the figurative significance of the story’s theme “within the context of their relationship” (27). At the very least, Hemingway’s metaphorical use of the concept of abortion in his own love affair would seem to corroborate a claim that it functions similarly in an allegorical short story.

“Hills Like White Elephants” portrays the tension and despair born of an internal struggle between Hemingway the man, who missed estranged friends and suffered remorse over the failure of his first marriage, and Hemingway the writer, who realized that the fire with which he refined his art was often fed by burning bridges. Reynolds says of the young author’s penchant for turning life into fiction that, “[t]o whatever he touched in those days he added scale and a sense of importance” (*The American Homecoming* 2). This ability to extract aesthetic significance from personal experience is abundantly clear in “Hills.” James R. Mellow describes the story as “a classic” (348). Jeffrey Meyers considers it Hemingway’s “most subtle” (196), and declares the image of Jig and the American at the train station one of our culture’s “unforgettable scenes” (572). Fleming sees the story’s complexity as evidence of “just how subtle Hemingway’s artistic method could be in the best of his stories.” Ironically, the insight and empathy apparent in “Hills” resulted directly from a life that came perilously close to being a shambles. As Fleming notes, though, efforts to determine “a single source for a given story or character... [are] a disservice to readers as well as to the reputation of the artist” (n. pag.). Life and creative inspiration, like the art that is born of their interaction, are far more complex, and “Hemingway was too professional a writer to make his art a mirror image of reality” (Reynolds, *Hemingway’s First War* 217).

One element of this complexity is the fact that Hemingway’s friends were less than enthusiastic when they found themselves transformed into his fictional characters. Duff Twysden became the drunken and promiscuous Lady

Brett Ashley, and Harold Loeb the ineffectual Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* (Meyers 155-156). Hemingway also broke with Gertrude Stein, who “was no longer the writer he first admired on coming to Paris” (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 84), and whose work he now considered “very lazy” (85). He parodied Louis Bromfield in a piece written for *The Boulevardier* (146). A contemporary expatriate newspaper, *The Herald*, commented: “Hemingway is noted for being an observant journalist and for not respecting the feelings of his friends” (74).

In *The Torrents of Spring*, Hemingway parodied Sherwood Anderson and portrayed Ford Madox Ford, an early supporter, “as an old windbag and purveyor of stale anecdotes” (Meyers 130). Anderson was Hemingway’s “first literary father” (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 90). He had helped persuade Boni and Liveright to publish *In Our Time*, Hemingway’s first collection of stories, in 1925 (Reynolds, *The Paris Years* 282), but the young author was annoyed when critics noted similarities between their writing styles (328–329). *The Torrents of Spring* severed Hemingway’s ties to his former mentor and allowed him to exchange his Boni and Liveright contract for a more promising one at Scribner’s (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 4). At the time of the book’s publication, Hemingway wrote to Anderson that he seemed to feel “an irresistible need to push you in the face with the true writer’s gratitude” (33). The note was supposed to be an apology. The two men met a final time on the day after Christmas 1926, when they sat, like Jig and the American at their train station, over beers in a small Paris café. Unlike the fictional lovers, neither man had “anything much to say” as their relationship reached “the end of the line” (92).

While all of these terminated friendships must have had their influence on the metaphorical abortion of “Hills,” the breakup of Hemingway’s first marriage was of undeniable importance to his state of mind when he conceived and wrote the story. In February 1926 (Meyers 187), he had begun playing “a very old game to which there could be no pleasant conclusion” (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 27). When Hadley confronted him about Pauline, Hemingway’s reaction foreshadowed the American’s juvenile reply to Jig’s ironic assertion that he would not have seen a white elephant. The confrontation resulted in “silly words and slammed doors.” Hemingway felt that no problem would have existed had his wife not mentioned the ongoing affair. In his mind, “[s]omehow it was Hadley’s fault” (30). The American, employing similar logic, believes that his only worries result from Jig’s reluctance to abort their child.

The relationship between Ernest and Hadley bore a distinct similarity to that of the story's protagonists. After Bumby's conception, Hemingway had begun to see his wife in the same way the American sees the pregnant Jig, "as a woman who imposed restraints and limited his freedom" (Meyers 120). He had thought he "could continue to write and travel around Europe indefinitely." This "carefree life," however, was threatened by Hadley's pregnancy (119). Ernest began "to resent her dependence upon him." Hadley grew "a little weary of Ernest's emotional demands." She wanted "a more regular existence" than Hemingway's "continual roving life" (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 7).

In May 1926, Hemingway traveled alone to Madrid, away from both his wife and his lover. He found himself "in another country where conversation was impossible" because his Spanish was good enough for only the most basic communications (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 26). Here he glimpsed the isolation Jig experiences in a foreign land where she cannot speak the language, a detail he would use to emphasize her initial dependence on the American and her alienation from his tourist lifestyle. Hemingway's apparent belief that childbirth meant the end of something might also have intensified during this period. Bumby was sick in bed, suffering from whooping cough and preventing Hadley from joining her husband in Spain, where "they might have worked the problem [of his affair with Pauline] out in bed as they had previous problems" (31).

The American's conviction that a baby will mean a diminishment rather than an enrichment of his life had already been foreshadowed in "Indian Camp," in which the father commits suicide while the mother is in labor, and would be echoed in *A Farewell to Arms*, in which Catherine Barkley hemorrhages to death after a caesarian section. These coincidences provide further evidence, not only that the author had come to equate childbirth with deprivation, but that he chose fictional death as a dramatic vehicle for the pain of separation. This conclusion is consistent both with the letters to Pauline, in which he equates separation and abortion, and with a reading of the proposed abortion in "Hills Like White Elephants" as a metaphor for the couple's fate.

After returning to Paris from Madrid, faced with the prospect of the infamous hundred-day separation from both Hadley and Pauline, Hemingway was, like the American, "trapped by circumstances beyond his control," not quite the master of his own fate (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 53). He also had the opportunity to learn what the American might experience

after his relationship with Jig comes to an end. From Hadley's letters he found that his "formerly dependent wife was leading a far more active life than she ever had before" (71). On Christmas Eve, 1926, two days before his final meeting with Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway went to Hadley's apartment and watched Bumby open his gifts, "knowing that this was the last Christmas they would share" as a family (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 91). Whatever relief he may have felt over being released from his marriage, this experience must have seemed like the end of the world. He was finding out about loss, discovering just how bad the hurt could be when love affairs end, experiencing the same pain he would eventually impart to Jig and the American.

The lesson continued into the new year. In January 1927, a friend's letter brought an anecdote in which Hadley sang "little French songs." Hemingway "knew exactly which songs they were and when she had sung them to him" (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 101). In March, some two months before the completion of "Hills Like White Elephants," the divorce became final. Hadley was "like a new woman with inner resources Ernest had not suspected, a woman relieved to be on her own." Her newly former husband "might have wondered who had been set free, himself or Hadley" (111). That the American might have a similar revelation is suggested, as the story progresses, by Jig's growing self-awareness and independence.

After his divorce, Hemingway lived alone for a while in Gerald Murphy's studio apartment. He tried to begin a new life, but found he could not make "a completely fresh start, for one always carried old baggage on one's back" (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 116)—or in one's hands, shifting it from one railway line, one set of possibilities, to another without being able to see the train coming down the tracks. Hemingway now knew, having suffered through the pain and remorse of the preceding twelve months, the part of the story that lay beneath the surface, its considerable emotional impact. He was ready to sketch in the visible details. On honeymoon with Pauline in May 1927 (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 126), he completed the manuscript of "Hills Like White Elephants," which he would submit to *transit* because he knew no American periodical would accept a story about abortion, metaphorical or otherwise. After its initial publication, it appeared, appropriately, in *Men Without Women*. His heartache had provided him with the insight he needed to complete the story of Jig and her lover's "anguished situation" (Meyers 197).

Perhaps Lynn is at least partially correct in saying that the manuscript's handwritten inscription might have been a warning. That Hemingway wrote the story at all, and that he wrote it the way he did, using a metaphor born of his feelings for Pauline to commemorate the end of a relationship so similar to his and Hadley's, indicates a degree of self-awareness that might have made him believe a warning—albeit a vague one—was in order. He had left his first wife at the very moment when he stood on the brink of professional fame and fortune, when he “no longer needed a devoted Hadley leaning heavily on his lead,” but instead a “better schooled— more critical reader— a silent partner in [his] literary career” (Reynolds, *The American Homecoming* 98–99). He might well have suspected that he would do the same thing again, and that he would do it to Pauline, offering her the same “writer's gratitude” (33) that he had extended to others, for “between life and writing there was no choice; his fiction came first so long as he called himself a writer” (83).

The diversity of plausible, but mutually exclusive, scenarios for the fate of Jig's baby would seem to render any definitive interpretation unlikely. If, however, we read the unmentioned abortion as an additional metaphor in a story that critics have long recognized as allegorical, then we can say with some certainty that, by the story's conclusion, the relationship between Jig and the American has been effectively destroyed. This is true whether Jig concedes to the American's adolescent demands, whether he acquiesces to her more mature insight, or whether apparent concessions are merely shifts in negotiating positions, with psychological movement being toward polarities rather than consensus. Like an aborted fetus, the love affair has died before it had time to grow into a complex and meaningful life. Such a reading confirms biographical evidence beyond the four examples noted by Paul Smith. It alerts us not only to Justice's “signpost ‘To Biography,’” —the dedication, and Hemingway's use of abortion as a metaphor in his relationship with Pauline—but also to aborted relationships with friends and mentors and, most important, the failure of the author's marriage to Hadley.

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