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Hemingway and the 2015 Relationship

“‘I feel fine,’ she said. ‘There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.’” Is this the line from a 1927 short story, or a 2015 text message? In “Hills like White Elephants,” Ernest Hemingway makes it almost impossible to differentiate between the two. In this brief story, one can see a modern day relationship unfold. This story entails all the difficulties one sees in modern relationships today: tangled one-sided responses, mixed messages, and tip-toed discussions. Through Hemingway’s writing style and his story behind “Hills like White Elephants,” today’s modern day relationships are portrayed more than accurately.

Starting with two careless, young characters, much in what we define as “love” in today’s age, Hemmingway begins to unravel a story touching upon a sensitive topic. At first glance we just see a bickering couple staged by a train station in Spain. They order a few drinks and fight about what we further decode as an abortion. The couple is portrayed as young and reckless due to their clashing opinions: to keep or rid themselves of their perspective child. Hemingway defines the means of the two’s informal relationship by capitalizing on small clues, such as their luggage, “there were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights” (358). Referencing that they traveled a lot allows the audience to infer that they most likely spent endless romantic nights together, without any burdens or constraints up until this point. The couple tries to persuade themselves that this major complication can be simply shrugged off, and

they can go back to normal, “we’ll be fine afterward, just like we were before,” (356). The American man exemplifies much of the typical American man in today’s society; willing to go along with the girl and the relationship, which is until it becomes too difficult and too much effort is required. The American man voices his opinion, “it’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig,” (355). By saying it is just a simple procedure he disregards her health and safety. He also refers to the girl as “Jig,” which is a type of dance. It can almost be explicitly inferred that the man only thinks of the girl in terms of adding pure enjoyment to his life, and nothing else; disregarding her as any long term partner. These two characters also have appeared to be spending a lot of time together, preconceived by the fact they have been traveling through Spain. Hemmingway chooses specifically to refer to the two as the American man and the girl. He avoids terms like “girlfriend” or “boyfriend,” capitalizing again on the lack of commitment found between the two. Due to the lack of effort and strength in their relationship, it appears the man’s opinion is set on ridding themselves of any hardships because, “it’s the best thing to do,” (356). Through this brief short story we can see the lack of commitment and effort that is present in today’s modern relationships.

Two hundred likes you see on yet another cheesy, “Happy 4 months 23 days and 43 minutes Bae,” attached with the ever so happy emoji with hearts as eyes. Overcome with perhaps envy, you wonder to yourself, how do they do it? Relationships seem easy, and blissful through most of mass media’s mediated content; however there is of course the side that remains under wraps. The true turmoil of relationships presents itself in the yearly increasing divorce rates each year. Hemingway portrays these difficulties through the conversation of the American man and the girl. The two characters fight about “having everything,” where the girl takes the opposition of saying, “No we can’t,” repetitively to the man (357). The girl also seems to be more than

misleading by coming to terms with that the hills remind her of white elephants, referring to the potential child, and stating to the man, “wasn’t that bright?” (355). However she immediately withdraws that “bright” opinion of hers and claims in the next line, “They don’t really look like white elephants,” (355). Her uncertainty in such a quick amount of time makes her more than misleading. The girl also becomes upset with the man, asking if he can stop talking several times, especially when she asks him to, “. . . please please please stop talking,” (357). The man also has some heated remarks as he claims the girl is reacting crazy, asking her to, “come back in the shade,” and continuing, “you mustn’t feel that way,” (357). Through the context of their conversation, similarities between the present-day, misleading relationships and that of these two characters emerge.

In several cases I have personally witnessed, oftentimes in a relationship the girl is far too attached, and emotionally invested in the man. I have also seen it the other way around as well, where the man has become much more attached than their partner is. This is highly relatable in the context of this story, whereas the girl is hung-up on the American man, who on the opposite spectrum is only using the girl simply for fun; referring again to the nickname “Jig”.

Hemingway capitalizes on her emotions by having her ask over and over again, “You’ll love me?” referring to after the operation (356). A loss of self-respect and identity is seen where the girl states twice, “I don’t care about me,” (356). She disregards her own feelings in hopes to please the American man. Through the circumstances of my friends’ relationships, I have seen this same hopeless devotion, and the degradation of their own identities, for yet a lost cause. Highly common in today’s society, this trend is seen in many emotionally abusive relationships. Domestic violence and troubled relationships present themselves where partners do not share equally power in their relationship. Often one partner dominates the relationship and has control,

usually physically and emotionally. Perhaps not to the same extent, but still relevant, the girl in this story is far more emotionally invested in the man in comparison to that of the man's feelings.

Call me Dr. Phil, Oprah, Maury; whatever gets you through the day. Somewhat of a love guru, I have always been there to mediate my friends' relationships. As touched upon earlier, I have witnessed many of my friends failed relationships. Oftentimes, this failure is accredited to this exact lack of dedication and investment by one half of the relationship. One of my best friend's relationships with her boyfriend consists of many fights on a daily basis, usually around many insignificant details; however this works for them. Somehow their arguments pull them closer together, perhaps due to this investment and hard work as touched upon earlier. They actually are closer together because of their bickering arguments, as compared to my other best friend's relationship, where they never fight, unless it is something highly relevant. When they do fight, it brings on about a week-long break every time. I accredit these fights to her boyfriend, who is far more emotionally invested than her. Take a look around one's own life; I am sure one can relate to these situations by simply examining those relationships of your own; for example one's parents, friends, or family members. Once analyzing our own relationships, one can see how prevalent Hemingway's writing continues to be today.

There is a reason why literature is always relevant and a story written in 1927 is still relevant in the year 2015. Hemmingway used such a "hushed" topic of an abortion to portray the uncommitted relationship of an American man and a girl. With abortion rates over a million a year reported in the U.S., this is still a "hushed" topic. However, as compared to 1927 it has become much more acceptable and common. Through a quick argument at a train station, Hemmingway deciphers exactly the problems of modern and past relationships. He makes it clear that couples oftentimes rather take the easy way out, break up, and then move on to the next

in life, rather than sticking around and fighting through the hardships they face. Then and now relationships come across as easily disposable; unless both partners are willing to put forth the required effort that is acquainted with genuine love.