

**Development of Meaning**  
**in "Hills like White Elephants"**  
**by Contrast of Characters**

The way Ernest Hemingway introduces the main characters is quite remarkable. First, he does not give us any physical description of them. By this, the writer creates an effect of a distance between the couple and us. This also makes us pay extra attention to their dialogue, since it is the only information we get about them. And even their conversation sounds very mysterious, because they never name the subject of it. We know neither what they look like, nor what exactly they are thinking. Second, in the beginning, Hemingway calls them simply "the American and the girl" (p. 155). As you can see, originally, we have more information about the man, for, at least, we know where he is from, but about the girl we know nothing. As we go along, however, we learn the girl's name, Jig, while the man remains just an American, a nameless and faceless American. This symbolizes our lack of knowledge and understanding of the real character of the man. We know nothing about him, and this does not let us trust the man, since we never trust those we know nothing about. Through contrasting the characters in "Hills Like White Elephants", Ernest Hemingway develops the meaning of the story, showing his objection towards abortion.

The first thing we notice about Jig and the American is that she is not willing to talk about the problem that bothers both of them so much and keeps changing the topic. She is trying to help both of them "have a fine time" (p. 156), suggesting new drinks to try and making nice comments about the look of the hills. He, however, is impatient enough to start talking about it even during the short time of rest they have between two trains (p. 156). He is quite eager for Jig to have the "operation". It seems like he feels the need to use every opportunity to convince her to make the "right" decision. This shows that this abortion is really on the heart of the guy. He is pressuring her to do what would be the easiest thing for him, even though he says that he wants the best for her. He says that he cares about Jig, but the things he does do not show that. The American seems to care about getting rid of the "problem" more than about the girl herself. He either does not see her pain, or ignores it. When she asks him to stop talking about the operation, he not realizing how much the girl is hurting inside does not fulfill her request until she cries out with pain. The unborn child is not a being to the American, but something undefined, a problem sort of.

At the first sight, Jig seems to worry and think only about whether the American will still love her and whether they could be happy again. But, she is really lost. She does not want to have this abortion, but is almost forced into it. This is obvious from his comment, "I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig" (p. 156). She does not feel what she wants anymore, neither does she know what is right. And the guy is taking advantage of her confusion. Jig puts her emotions down and tries not to look like she cares too much. She is convincing herself that the abortion would be the best solution for them, by talking more about their happiness coming back and everything being as it used to. Seeing that,

the American keeps insisting on the necessity and simplicity of the "awfully simple operation", that is "not even an operation at all" and is "all perfectly natural" (p. 156). And Jig is trying to conform.

Hemingway portrays Jig as a sweet peacemaker who lacks willpower and the American as a determined, almost unfeeling manipulator. We feel sympathy for the girl. She cares for the American and does not want to lose him while he uses this to manipulate her into having this abortion. This contrast helps to show us how painful and cruel the decision of abortion really is.