Symbols In Hills Like White Elephants

Have you ever been to a “white elephant gift” exchange, or heard someone talk about avoiding “the elephant in the room”? In both expressions, the world’s largest mammal is used as a symbol of its size, but with different meanings. In “Hills Like White Elephants,” Ernest Hemingway uses both meanings as a way of symbolizing the magnitude of the decision the girl has to make- does she keep the baby or not? Of course, the answer to this question is pretty straightforward but the underlying theme of Hemingway’s short story deals with the complex emotions involved when a relationship faces an unexpected pregnancy, particularly in the early 20th century.

The first symbol in the story is the white elephant. White elephant parties at the office are a relatively new tradition, but the expression itself has been around for some time. Historically, a white elephant is a gift that has no usefulness to the recipient. For example, someone gives me a mansion, but I am not able to pay the property taxes for it. Same is the case here, the American-presumably the girl’s lover sees the pregnancy as white elephant gift, as we can tell from his frequent and falsely supportive nudges to get her to have abortion. The Elephant in the room could also be consider as a symbol in the story. The English expression “Avoiding the elephant in the room” exemplifies the situation in which someone refuses to address an important or obvious topic. For the girl, her pregnancy is not a gift that she is unwilling to receive from the God. However, when it comes to talking about the situation with the American, she had rather avoid the discussion altogether, even begging at one point “Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?”.

I think the whole scenery around them where they were sitting could also be consider as a symbol to illustrate the intentions of both girl and man towards the unborn baby. The way I visualized the scenery is that the American man and girl are sitting outside somewhere at the bar located between the two tracks. On one side of the track, everything looks so green and lush which symbolizes Jig’s pregnancy. On the other side, the images seem to be very dry and barren that simulates the abortion which is the procedure that she is possibly considering to act on it just for the sake of his man happiness. I like the stories which end with the questions just like the Hemingway’s short story. He leaves the story open minded which allows the readers to fill in the gaps through their own way of thinking.

Overall, I enjoy reading this story because the way writer uses the symbolism is really up to the mark. On the surface, this story seems dry, but when I understand the deeper meaning behind the words after reading couple of articles and professor notes, it really brings the liveliness to the story and makes it thought provoking. In conclusion, I would like to say is that the writer tried his best to illustrate the idea of how important our choices that we made values in our everyday lives.