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Psychological Criticism

Hills like White Elephants

American author Ernest Hemingway authored a short story in 1927 which was entitled, “Hills like White Elephants.” The author has described the discussion, or what can also be said as the argumentation of a man and woman, over the topic of having an operation. The conversation of the two of them reveals that the man is trying to convince the woman to have an operation, which would ease out their lives. The woman is contemplating and thinking if they can live their lives without having her to go through the operation. The author has not revealed the details of the operations, however, it can be successfully implied that he is talking about abortion and wants the woman to abort their baby so they can live their lives peacefully and happily. The psychological criticism of “Hills like White Elephants” will be discussed in this paper, in order to explore the unconscious motives of the man to motivate the woman for having the operation.

 Psychological criticism of the short story provides the insight that the man wants to live his life freely and does not want to take any responsibility for the family. The man, who is introduced in the short story as an American, perfectly depicts the psychology of the male member of the society, who do not only want to keep their dominance over the women but also want to exercise their personal freedom without the interference of any other individual. The context of the story provides the insight that he is not willing to have the baby at that stage of life and considers that the baby would hinder his personal freedom. While trying to convince the woman, who is referred to as Jig, he states that "I said we could have everything.” "We can have everything.” "No we can’t" (Hemingway, 41).” He tries to tell her that the baby would become a hindrance in their personal space and freedom and they would not be able to do anything, enjoy their lives and travel freely and they can also enjoy all of these pleasures, if they get rid of the baby, by having her undergo the operation. Jig presents her point that they can still enjoy their lives and their time together while traveling around the world having the baby; however, he is consistent on his point that they cannot have anything with the existence or presence of the baby in their lives. The attitude of the man represents the nature and psychology of most of the male members of the society who consider the baby as a burden and responsibility, which they do not want to take. They just want to enjoy their lives, without having any responsibility on their shoulders.

Psychological criticism of the short story reveals that Jig is the female character who represents the dominance of the male members of the society over the women. The short story provides the notion that jig wants to have the baby and does not want to abort it, however, her boyfriend and the father of the child is not willing to have it and is almost forcing her to undergo the operation and abort it. She tries to convince him that they can spend their lives without any difference; however, he is also not willing to accept her point of view and just wants her to comply with his opinion. Jig tries to divert his attention towards the hills while comparing them to the white elephants to which he straight away denies her point that he was never seen the white elephant. This highlights that the opinion or the point of view of Jig does not hold any importance for him and he is only concerned about the fact that she accepts his decision and surrenders to his wish, without him making an effort to understand the things from her perspective (Hemingway, 39).

Psychological criticism of the short story reveals that the author has incorporated symbolism in order to provide the details about the mood, thinking, and choice of the characters. One of the most important symbolism is the white elephant as Jig says that the hills seem like the white elephants. She is trying to provide a different perspective to her boyfriend and letting him view their life from her perspective, with the presence of their child. However, he is not even ready to imagine the things with the presence of the baby, let alone allow the birth of the baby. Another most important symbolism incorporated in the short story is its setting which is the train station. The couple is at conflict about their destination, as the American does not want to have the baby, while jig wants to have it; however, she also wants the love and support of her boyfriend as well. When she depicts her agreement of having the operation, the American says that "I'd better take the bags over to the other side of the station," the man said. She smiled at him (Hemingway, 44).” This highlights the change of their destination not only in terms of travelling but also in terms of the course of their future life.

Psychological criticism has provided the opportunity of exploring the unconscious motive of the American for not having the baby as well as the suppressed character of Jig, being a woman, in addition to the utilization of the symbolism to highlight the situation. The American does not want to compromise his personal freedom, while the woman does not want to lose her love. The symbolism provides insight into the destination and the future life of the couple.

Works Cited

Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills like white elephants." *Men without women* (1927): 39-44.