Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants*

There are moments in life when we have to make choices, to follow our heart or our brain, no matter how difficult may it seem. Those may appear because of a conflict between what we want and what others want us to do. One of the reason of choosing this text for talking about is a similitude, established between the main character, the girl, and a good friend of mine. In this girl's character I see my friend's life and her options, like I look in an enchanted mirror.

First of all, we all need to know some things about Ernest Hemingway, the one who wrote *Hills Like White Elephants,* as I have already mentioned in this essay's title. We all know, maybe, some things about his adventurous life, which was mirrored in his works. But, we need to start with the beginning. Some of us know that he was born on July 21, 1899, in Cicero (now in Oak Park), Illinois. Clarence and Grace Hemingway raised their son in this conservative suburb of Chicago, but the family also spent a great deal of time in northern Michigan, where they had a cabin. It was there that the writer learned to hunt, fish and, the last but not the least, appreciate the outdoors, which influenced a lot his life and not only. During his highschool, he worked on his highschool newspaper, and after graduation went to work for the *Kansas City Star,* in order to gain enough experience for his style. After the United States entered the First World War, he joined a volunteer ambulance unit in the Italian army. Serving at the front, he was wounded, was decorated by the Italian Government, and spent considerable time in hospitals. After his return to the United States, he became a reporter for Canadian and American newspapers and was soon sent back to Europe to cover such events as the Greek Revolution.

During the 20s, Hemingway took part in the group of expatriate Americans in Paris, experience described in his first important work, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Equally successful was *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), the study of an American ambulance officer's disillusionment in the war and his role as a deserter. Hemingway used his experiences as a reporter during the civil war in Spain as the background for his most ambitious novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Among his later works, the most outstanding is the short novel, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the story of an old fisherman's journey, his long and lonely struggle with a fish and the sea, and his victory in defeat. The author continued his expeditions into Africa and has been injured for several times during his adventures, even surviving multiple plane crashes, just like an angel covered him with his wings. In 1954, he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Even at this moment when he reached the top of his career, his life showed him how surprising can be. Recovering from various old injuries in Cuba, Hemingway suffered from depression and was treated for numerous diseases such as high blood pressure and liver disease. He retired permanently to Idaho, where he continued to fight against his not so good mental and physical health. Early on the morning of July 2, 1961, Ernest Hemingway committed suicide in his Ketchum home, shoting himself in his mouth, even being kind of old aged. (nobelprize.org, biography.com).

About *Hills Like White Elephants,* can be said a lot of things. I will talk a little bit about this story, about symbols, about characters (just like a brief analysis). The action is quite simple: the story opens with a description of the view of the river Ebro, and the white hills (mountains) beyond it, from a train station in Spain. An American guy and a woman are having some beers outside the station bar as they wait for the train from Barcelona to Madrid. As the couple drinks, the woman tells that man that the hills in the distance remind her of "white elephants.", which is a symbol of something fantastic, of something which no one wants, just like J K Rowling talks about the so-called „unborn baby”. This causes a little argument between them, which the woman stops showing to something painted on the beaded curtain that hangs over the doorway of the bar. The painting advertises a liquor called Anis del Toro, which they decide to try. Their conversation remains tense, and soon the man begins trying to persuade the woman, Jig, to have an abortion, but only, he says, if she wants to (trying to use thus the reverse psychology). She wants to know if this will solve their problems, and get their relationship back on track. He tells her that their relationship is ok, but that he is distracted because of the pregnancy. She agrees to have the abortion, but only because she no longer cares about herself. The man says she shouldn’t do it for that reason. She expresses despair over the situation and a feeling that all is now lost. The man tries to reassure her that this is not the case, and finally tells her (without actually saying it) that he is willing to marry her instead, but makes it clear he would prefer that she have the abortion. She becomes anxious and asks him to stop talking. He responds by saying he doesn’t want her to have the abortion if she doesn’t want it. Jig threatens to scream. The woman who has been serving their drinks tells them that the train will soon arrive, and the man gets up and takes their luggage over to the train stop. Then he goes into the bar and has another Anis del Toro. When he gets back to Jig, sitting at the table outside, she gives him a smile. He asks her if she "feel[s]" better," and she responds by insinuating she never felt bad in the first place. And that’s the end of the story. It is very ambiguous because the narrator wants us to figure out whether the abortion will take place or not.

If we have to talk and to briefly analyse this text, I think we should start with themes. These are pretty often used by Hemingway: I guess there are many texts that talk, even just a little, about alchool and drugs. Alcohol is more than just a motif in *Hills Like White Elephants* – it seems to be a major part of the main characters’ relationship. Unlike some Ernest Hemingway's stories, the characters in *Hills Like White Elephants* seem to drink kinda little, but there are several references to alcohol in this very short piece, just like in *The Snows Of Kilimanjaro.* There are many other themes in this story, as if identity, foreign lands, communication, but I think the most important theme is the choices: the couple in Ernest Hemingway’s *Hills Like White Elephants* faces a difficult situation – how to deal with an unplanned pregnancy. To complicate the issue, it's pretty clear that one partner wants to have the baby, while the other partner doesn’t. Since we don’t see what the characters actually decide, the story is mostly about how they discuss the issues, what choices they explore, and even what choices they don’t explore. Written in 1927 when sex education and discussion of birth control were federal crimes in the U.S., the story also comments on what little was known about reproductive issues in those days, and how this lack of information impacts the options the characters consider available to them. (sparknotes.com)

I think we all have moments in life when we are supposed to choose between good and bad, between what we want and what the others want us to do. Sometimes, after a wise choice, we are satisfied because we did it well. On the contrary, we choose bad too. We do not always know what to do, and that's why we ask for advices, eventhough they may not be as we wish. I tend to believe that Jig has chosen to keep the baby, and I simply admire her for what she did, because, in a certain moment in my life, I had a friend who was also in a constant struggle after an unexpected pregnancy. My friend kept the baby, and now, the girl, called Sophia, is 10 years old, and she's the best writer from her class. I am glad she managed to keep the baby, and, if Jig really did it, she's my favourite character ever! Honestly, it was a surprise for me to see her character in a story written by Ernest Hemingway, but this proves me he had a sensitive side as well, just like moon, which has a side which she never shows to anyone.