

**Binary Opposition In “Hills Like
White Elephants”. : A short Story
By Ernest Hemingway. :The
Structural Analysis**

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Abstract

This study examines the short story "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway through the lens of structuralism, focusing on the concept of binary opposition. As a narrative text, Hemingway's story utilizes a minimalist style to convey complex themes, leaving much of its meaning open to interpretation. This analysis employs Saussure's theory of structuralism to explore the contrasting elements within the story, such as the opposing desires of the characters, Jig and the American man, in relation to their decision about an unplanned pregnancy. Through a close textual analysis, the research identifies key binary oppositions present in the dialogue and symbolism of the story, including certainty versus uncertainty, power versus vulnerability, and pragmatism versus emotional depth. These Binary opposition highlight the underlying tensions in the relationship and the broader themes of freedom and responsibility. By examining these binaries, this study reveals the nuanced ways in which Hemingway constructs meaning and tension, offering insights into the complexities of human relationships and the challenges of communication. The findings underscore the significance of structural analysis in understanding the intricate layers of meaning in literary texts.

Keywords

Binary Opposition, Narrative Text, Structural Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Narrative texts serve as a compelling medium for engaging readers by recounting stories that are both entertaining and thought-provoking. These texts often weave together real and imaginary experiences to explore complex human emotions and situations. Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants" exemplifies this narrative form, presenting a dialogue-driven tale that leaves much unsaid, inviting readers to interpret its underlying meanings. Aditya (2019) noted that narrative texts entertain by sharing stories that reflect real or imagined events, often culminating in a crisis. Similarly, Billups-Thomas (2011) emphasized that the narrative aims to provide an enjoyable experience while recounting stories that resonate with readers. Thus, the success in learning literature was marked by the increase of the students' reading interest (Roslina et al., 2020).

Structuralism, a critical theory that focuses on the underlying structures within texts, offers a valuable framework for analyzing narrative texts like Hemingway's. According to structuralist theory, elements of a story derive meaning not in isolation but through their relationships with other elements (Sanusi, 2012). This approach, pioneered by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, views language and literature as constructed systems of signs and symbols, where meaning arises from differences and relationships between those signs.

Central to structuralism is the concept of binary opposition, which posits that human understanding is shaped through contrasting pairs of concepts. Saussure argued that the human mind comprehends meaning by identifying relationships and distinctions between opposing elements (Putri & Sarwoto, 2015). In "Hills Like White Elephants," these binary oppositions are critical to unraveling the story's deeper meanings and exploring the dynamics between the characters.

This study explores the use of binary opposition in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" to uncover the tension and complexity embedded within the narrative. By analyzing the dialogue between the American man and Jig, the story's female protagonist, this paper seeks to illuminate how contrasting elements convey themes of choice, freedom, and responsibility. Through this structural analysis, the study aims to offer new insights into Hemingway's craft and the story's enduring impact on readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have examined Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants" from various analytical perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of its narrative complexity and thematic richness. These studies often employ different theoretical frameworks to explore the story's intricate dynamics between the characters, Jig and the American man.

Malik et al., (2022) study, titled "A Barthesian Study of Hills Like White Elephants by Ernest Hemingway," employs Roland Barthes's five codes: proairetic, hermeneutic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural. This analysis provides a detailed examination of the narrative structure and its underlying connotations. Malik's study highlights the symbolic code, particularly the use of binary oppositions, as crucial to understanding the tensions and conflicts between the characters. The study concludes that

Hemingway effectively contrasts the personalities and emotions of the American man and Jig, revealing how their opposing views drive the narrative.

In a similar vein, Alashjaai, (2014) explores the interpersonal relationship between Jig and the American man in "The Interpersonal Relationship between Jig and the American in Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants'." This analysis focuses on the characters' inability to communicate effectively about the underlying issue of abortion, which remains unspoken yet central to their conversation. By applying New Criticism, Alashjaai examines the dramatic dialogue and cultural conflict, providing insights into the breakdown of their relationship and the societal implications of their decisions.

Another study by Obaid (2021), titled "The Significance of Dialogue in Hemingway's 'A Canary for One' and 'Hills Like White Elephants,'" underscores the importance of dialogue in revealing character motivations and advancing the plot. Obaid employs a formalistic approach to analyze how Hemingway uses dialogue, imagery, and symbolism to explore themes and character development. The study emphasizes that the dialogue in "Hills Like White Elephants" not only anticipates the story's events but also highlights the complexity of the characters' relationship and their internal conflicts.

The analysis of symbols in Hemingway's work is further elaborated by Nainggolan (2016), in "The Analysis of Symbols in Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants'." This thesis investigates the symbolic elements embedded in the story, such as nature, material objects, and situational symbols. Nainggolan argues that these symbols contribute to the story's thematic depth, with elements like the train station, hills, and white elephants serving as metaphors for the characters' dilemmas and the choices they face.

Sarwindah (2020) article, "The Reception Analysis in Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants'," offers a unique perspective by analyzing readers' responses to the narrative. The study examines how Indonesian readers interpret the story's moral values and the implications of its themes within a cultural context. Sarwindah's reception analysis highlights the diverse interpretations and emotional resonances the story elicits, reflecting the broader cultural and societal dimensions of Hemingway's work.

Building on these previous analyses, the current study seeks to explore the binary oppositions within "Hills Like White Elephants" as a means to further understand the story's underlying tensions and complexities. Unlike the existing literature, this study focuses on how the dialogue between the American man and Jig exemplifies Saussurean structuralism, revealing the contrasting perspectives and emotional dynamics that drive the narrative forward.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the short story "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway, utilizing Saussurean structuralism as the primary theoretical framework (Stawarska, 2020). This methodology focuses on uncovering the binary oppositions present in the narrative and understanding how these oppositions contribute to the story's thematic complexity and character dynamics.

The research design is exploratory and interpretative, aiming to provide an in-depth analysis of the text through a structuralist lens. By applying Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of structuralism (Al Umman, 2015), the study seeks to identify and analyze the binary oppositions that underpin the narrative structure of the story.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in the story, with key symbols such as the hills, the train station, and the setting contributing to the development of binary oppositions. The analysis focuses on how these symbols interact with the identified oppositions, providing deeper insights into the characters' conflicts and the story's thematic concerns.

This study uses Saussurean structuralism as the analytical framework, focusing on the relationships between signs within the text. Saussure's theory posits that meaning is derived from the differences and oppositions between signs, rather than from the signs themselves in isolation. This approach allows for an examination of how binary oppositions create meaning and tension within the narrative.

The study identifies and analyzes key binary oppositions present in the story, such as:

1. Fertility vs. Barrenness: Represented by the contrasting imagery of the lush landscape and the barren hills.
2. Communication vs. Silence: Explored through the fragmented and evasive dialogue between the characters.
3. Freedom vs. Responsibility: Highlighted by the characters' conflicting desires and perspectives on the issue of abortion.

The analysis is conducted through a close reading of the text, with a focus on identifying and interpreting the binary oppositions within the narrative. The following steps outline the data analysis process:

1. Textual Analysis: A detailed examination of the text is conducted to identify instances of binary oppositions. This involves analyzing the language, imagery, and dialogue used by the characters.
2. Identification of Themes: Key themes related to the identified binary oppositions are extracted from the text. This includes themes such as choice, consequence, communication, and relational conflict.
3. Interpretation: The identified themes and binary oppositions are interpreted within the context of Saussurean structuralism. This involves exploring how the oppositions contribute to the story's overall meaning and the characters' internal and interpersonal conflicts.
4. Thematic Synthesis: The findings are synthesized to provide a cohesive understanding of how binary oppositions function within the narrative. This synthesis highlights the complexities of human relationships and communication as depicted in the story.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study explores the intricate narrative dynamics in Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" through the lens of binary oppositions, drawing on Saussurean structuralism. This analysis highlights the underlying conflicts

and complexities in the story, emphasizing the contrasting perspectives of the main characters, Jig and the American man.

Table 1. Signifier and Signified in Short Story

Signifier	Signified	Explanation
Hills	Symbolize the woman's pregnant abdomen	The signified behind the title may include themes of fertility, burden, and the looming presence of a difficult decision. The " hills " may symbolize the woman's pregnant abdomen, suggesting the weight of an unplanned pregnancy and the uncertainty it brings.
The Train Station	It represents the crossroads of their relationship	Setting - The Train Station : The train station where the majority of the story takes place serves as a signifier of transition and decision-making. It represents a liminal space, where the characters are poised between two possible courses of action—continuing their journey together or parting ways. The train station serves as a signified for the characters' state of limbo and the pivotal moment they find themselves in. It represents the crossroads of their relationship, where they must confront difficult choices and navigate the consequences of their decisions.
Beer and Anis Del Toro	Discomfort and unease	The alcoholic drink of beer and Anis del Toro is described as an escape from a difficult reality. Jig and American Man in the story use this drink as a way to escape the conflict they face. They drink it to distract themselves from difficult conversations about pregnancy and their future. The use of alcoholic drinks as an escape reflects their desire to temporarily forget the problems that bother them.
White Elephants	Pregnancy	The white elephants in dialog between an American Man and jig. White elephants are considered symbols of wealth, good fortune, and power. Monarchs in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam kept white elephants because they were regarded as sacred. At the beginning of the story, the girl's comment that the surrounding hills look like

		white elephants initially appears to be a casual remark, but it actually serves as a segue for her and the American to discuss their baby and the possibility of having an abortion.
The O Operation	Abortion	In the short story, they discuss the operation, which refers to an abortion, which is the central topic of their conversation but is never directly named. The American men tell the Jig its simple operation. <i>"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig."</i> The American man's attempt to downplay seriousness of the abortion, trying to convince Jig that it's a straightforward and easy solution.

The analysis of the signifiers and signified elements in Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" demonstrates how the author skillfully uses symbolism and binary oppositions to convey complex themes and character dynamics within a seemingly simple narrative. Through the lens of Saussurean structuralism, we can understand how these elements serve as pivotal tools for illustrating the underlying conflicts and emotional nuances between the characters.

The signifiers identified in the story, such as the hills, the train station, and the drinks, each carry deeper signified meanings that contribute to the narrative's thematic richness:

1. Hills: The hills, described as resembling white elephants, symbolize the woman's pregnancy and the looming decision regarding abortion. This imagery conveys themes of fertility, burden, and the complex emotions surrounding the characters' predicament.
2. Train Station: The train station serves as a signifier of transition and decision-making, representing a liminal space where the characters confront their future paths. It symbolizes the crossroads in their relationship, highlighting the tension between moving forward together or parting ways.
3. Beer and Anis Del Toro: These drinks signify the characters' attempt to escape reality and avoid confronting the difficult choices before them. They reflect the characters' desire to temporarily distract themselves from the gravity of their situation.
4. White Elephants: The dialogue about white elephants not only refers to the hills but also symbolizes the weight and complexity of the woman's pregnancy. This metaphor underscores the significance of their conversation and the central conflict of the story.
5. The Operation: The term "operation" signifies the abortion, a subject never explicitly named in the text. The man's casual description of the procedure

contrasts with its profound implications, revealing the power dynamics and differing perspectives between the characters.

Through these signifiers, Hemingway effectively uses binary oppositions to illuminate the characters' conflicting desires and emotional struggles. The man's pragmatic and detached approach contrasts with the woman's vulnerability and longing for connection, illustrating the broader themes of communication versus silence, certainty versus uncertainty, and control versus submission.

Overall, the structuralist analysis of signifiers and signified meanings in "Hills Like White Elephants" provides a deeper understanding of the narrative's complexity and the characters' internal conflicts. Hemingway's use of symbolism enriches the story, inviting readers to engage with the text's subtleties and explore the intricacies of human relationships and choices. This analysis underscores the enduring impact of Hemingway's minimalist style and the profound thematic depth embedded within his seemingly straightforward prose.

Table 2. Binary Opposition

The American Man	Jig	Men	Women	Interpretation
Man: <i>"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."</i>	Jig: <i>"Then what will we do afterward?" don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine."</i>	Certainty	Uncertainty	The American speaks with confidence and assurance, presenting the abortion as a simple solution to their problem. He expresses certainty about the procedure's benefits and downplays any potential consequences.
The American Man: <i>"It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig," the man said. "It's not</i>	Jig: The girl gazed at the ground where the table legs rested, remaining silent.	Power	Vulnerability	The American exerts power and influence over Jig, pressuring her to agree to the abortion and dismissing her concerns. Jig displays

*really an
operation at
all."*

*" I know you
wouldn't
mind it, Jig.
It's really
not
anything.
It's just to
let
the air in."*

vulnerability,
expressing her
uncertainty and
vulnerability in
the face of the
American's
dominance and
the weight of the
decision they
must make.

The
American
Man: "We
can have
everything."

Jig: No we
can't

Affirmative

Negative
Responses

Throughout the
conversation, the
American's
responses tend to
be affirmative,
asserting his
viewpoint and
pushing for the
abortion. He
dismisses Jig's
concerns and
attempts to
persuade her to
agree with him.

In contrast, Jig's
responses often
lean towards the
negative,
expressing her
doubts and
reservations
about the
abortion. She
challenges the
American's
assertions and
seeks
clarification on
her own terms.

These binary oppositions highlight the underlying tensions and conflicts in the dialogue between the American man and Jig, illustrating the complexities of their relationship and the challenges they face in communicating effectively. In Dialog we can find another Binary Opposition **Consent Vs Refusal** : The American seeks Jig's consent for the abortion, repeatedly encouraging her to agree to the procedure. Jig's reluctance and hesitation can be interpreted as a form of refusal, as she is not fully convinced or willing to consent to the abortion. To prove that statement we can see in the whole dialog Jig and American men in table. With affirmative dialog from an American man and negative responses from Jig.

FINDINGS

1. Symbolism and Binary Oppositions

The analysis reveals that Hemingway employs a rich tapestry of symbols and binary oppositions to illustrate the emotional and thematic tensions between the characters. Key oppositions identified include:

- a. **Nature vs. Decision:** The contrasting landscapes on either side of the train tracks symbolize the choices faced by the characters. The barren hills and fertile valley serve as metaphors for the decision about the abortion and its potential impact on their lives.
- b. **Communication vs. Silence:** The dialogue between Jig and the American man is fraught with subtext and unspoken meaning. The characters' inability to openly discuss the abortion reflects their emotional disconnect and differing priorities, underscoring the opposition between open communication and suppressed feelings.
- c. **Freedom vs. Responsibility:** The American man's desire for an uncomplicated life contrasts with Jig's longing for emotional connection and responsibility. This opposition highlights the core conflict of the story, where individual desires clash with relational commitments.

2. Character Dynamics

The study finds that the narrative is driven by the characters' opposing worldviews and emotional states. Jig's introspective nature and sensitivity clash with the American man's pragmatic and detached approach. This clash is evident in their dialogue, where Jig's indirect references to their situation reveal her internal struggle and desire for change, while the American man's insistence on simplicity underscores his resistance to it.

3. Cultural Context

The story's setting at a train station in Spain serves as a microcosm for the broader cultural and societal tensions of the time. The transient nature of the location reflects the characters' transient relationship and the uncertainty of their future. This cultural backdrop amplifies the story's exploration of themes such as choice, freedom, and consequence.

DISCUSSION

1. The Role of Symbolism in Narrative Tension

The use of symbols and binary oppositions in "Hills Like White Elephants" is pivotal in creating narrative tension and depth. Hemingway's strategic placement of symbols, such as the white elephants and the contrasting landscapes, allows readers to infer the internal and external conflicts faced by the characters. This aligns with Roland Barthes's (2014) concept of the symbolic code, where meaning is generated through the interplay of symbols and their oppositions.

2. Interpersonal Communication and Miscommunication

The study's findings underscore the complexity of interpersonal communication in the story. The characters' dialogue is marked by evasion and indirectness, reflecting their reluctance to confront the central issue of abortion. This aligns with previous analyses, such as those by Alashjaai (2014), which highlight the breakdown of communication as a significant factor in the characters' relationship. The inability to articulate their emotions and desires exacerbates the tension between Jig and the American man, ultimately leaving the resolution of their conflict ambiguous.

3. Cultural Implications and Reader Reception

The cultural context of "Hills Like White Elephants" offers a lens through which to examine the broader societal implications of the characters' choices. The transient setting and the theme of abortion reflect the changing social norms and gender dynamics of the early 20th century. Sarwindah (2020) reception analysis supports this view, showing how different cultural interpretations can influence readers' understanding of the story's moral and thematic dimensions.

4. Implications for Structuralist Analysis

By applying Saussurean structuralism, this study contributes to the existing body of literature by emphasizing the significance of binary oppositions in understanding narrative structure. The findings suggest that Hemingway's use of oppositions is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate technique to explore complex themes and

character dynamics. This approach provides a framework for analyzing other works of literature where underlying tensions and conflicts are central to the narrative.

CONCLUSION

The application of Saussurean structuralism in analyzing Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" reveals the intricate use of binary oppositions and symbolism that underpin the narrative. Through the identification of key oppositions such as fertility vs. barrenness, communication vs. silence, and freedom vs. responsibility, this study highlights how Hemingway crafts a complex portrayal of human relationships and existential dilemmas.

The analysis demonstrates that these binary oppositions are not merely narrative devices but are essential to understanding the characters' internal conflicts and the thematic essence of the story. The juxtaposition of these oppositional elements reflects the tension between the characters, particularly the man and the woman, as they navigate a pivotal moment in their relationship. The symbols of the hills, the train station, and the surrounding environment further enrich the narrative by visually representing the characters' psychological and emotional states.

By employing Saussurean structuralism, the study underscores the significance of language and structure in shaping meaning within the text. The binary oppositions and symbolic elements work in tandem to create a layered and multifaceted narrative, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple levels.

This analysis contributes to the broader understanding of Hemingway's literary technique, demonstrating how structuralism can uncover the subtle and profound dynamics at play in his writing. The study reaffirms Hemingway's mastery in using minimalistic dialogue and descriptive detail to convey complex themes of choice, consequence, and the human condition.

In conclusion, the exploration of binary oppositions in "Hills Like White Elephants" offers valuable insights into the narrative's thematic depth and Hemingway's storytelling prowess. This structuralist approach not only enriches the interpretation of the story but also encourages further scholarly engagement with Hemingway's oeuvre and the potential of structuralism in literary analysis.

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