

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FALLAY IN HEMINGWAY'S
"CROSS COUNTRY SNOW" AND "HILLS LIKE
WHITE ELEPHANTS"

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"Cross Country Snow" and "Hills Like White Elephants" are products of Ernest Hemingway's skill as a master of the short story. At least one these stories, and very likely both of them is characteristic of much Hemingway's work in that it draws upon elements from the author's own experience and uses these elements as a point from which to depart into the realm of the creative.

"Cross Country Snow", which first appeared in the 1925 edition of *In Our Time*, and which belongs to the Nick Adams stories, includes more straight-forward autobiographical background than does "Hills Like White Elephants". However, although there is no readily available factual material to support an unquestionable autobiographical source for "Hills Like White Elephants", it would be unreasonable not to attribute at least idea behind the second story to some of Hemingway's personal sentiments during and after his marriage to Hadley

Although Hemingway's ideas on writing are summed up in his statement that "a man should write only about what he has known", (1) one can not assume that either of these stories is simply a direct account of his personal life. On the other hand, whatever autobiographical details do exist are not essential to the stories' functioning on an artistic level. Being aware of the autobiographical material simply enhances the readers' appreciation of Hemingway's ability to turn the familiar into art.

(1) — Charles Fenton, *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: the Viking Press, 1954), p. 38.

The factual autobiographical details of "Cross Country Snow" can be traced to two different occurrences. First, the announcement of Hadley's pregnancy, and second, Hemingway's recollection of a ski trip which he and Hadley took in Switzerland in late 1922 and early 1923, during the months of December and January. Along with these two incidents was Hemingway's attitude toward the part his male companions played in his life, and his feelings about fatherhood versus his own career as a writer.

Although Hadley and Ernest, early in their marriage, had discussed how many children they wanted and where they wanted to have them, Ernest was quite shocked when Hadley announced that she was pregnant (2). Hemingway's acceptance of the news was slightly delayed, to say the least Gertrude Stein's description of the occasion summarizes Hemingway's initial reaction to his future role as a father: "He came to the house about ten o'clock in the morning and he stayed, he stayed for lunch, he stayed all afternoon, he stayed for dinner and he stayed until about ten o'clock at night and then all of a sudden he announced that his wife was enceinte and then with great bitterness, and I. I am too young to be a father" (3)

Hemingway had just decided to give up his job as a journalist and devote all his energies to his writing when Hadley's news surfaced. He was primarily concerned about their financial insecurity and was afraid that the added responsibility of a child would interfere with his freedom to write, especially after having made the decision on to quit his job as a correspondent and try to get along on Hadley's small monthly check (4).

Hadley, on the other hand, was delighted about the pregnancy, and although the couple decided to return to America for the birth of the baby, and to stay a year before returning to Paris, they had several months ahead of them before the return trip would begin (5). So, in the early months following Hadley's announcement of the pregnancy, the Hemingways took an extended tour of Italy with Ezra Pound and his wife, and later they even went to Spain before returning to Paris to sail to America.

"Cross Country Snow" was based on the ski trip the Hemingway's took at the end of 1922 in Switzerland with George O'Neil,

(2) — Alice Hunt Sokoloff, *Hadley: The First Mrs. Hemingway* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1973), p. 61.

(3) — Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1933), p. 213.

(4) — Sokoloff, p. 61.

(5) — *Ibid.*, p. 61.

but the feelings expressed within the story probably refer to Hemingway's own attitudes as he anticipated fatherhood at a later date. His male cohorts were very important to him, so important that on a winter vacation in Switzerland in 1922, Ernest was heartbroken and quite depressed, despite the fact that Hadley was with him, because none of his friends could join him on his vacation. He even remarked to Hadley that "With the men along. . .Switzerland would be the great show on earth" (6). For Hemingway the idea of male companionship was "... rough and friendly camaraderie, an informal brotherhood with by-laws which are not written down but are perfectly understood and rigidly adhered to by the contracting parties. For woman, closely associated with the Home-symbol, stands in opposition, perhaps even in a kind enmity, to that wholly happy and normal condition which two men, hiking or drinking or talking together, can build like a world of their own" (7). It is for this reason that Hemingway presents such a sharp contrast between the free, nomadic existence of Nick and George on the slopes, and the representation of parenting as such a restricted occupation.

"Cross Country Snow" begins with a refined account of the ski conditions, every detail suggesting the absolute pleasure of the skiing experience. Sensations are alluded to with adjectives which suggest ultimate freedom. Nick experiences the "wonderful flying, dropping sensation" (8) as he rushes rapidly down the side of a steep mountain of fresh powder. The beauty of imagery in this scene intimates the graceful moves of the skiers. Conditions are perfect, and Nick and George are isolated from the world and its problems, faced with nothing except the sensual pleasure of their skiing holiday together.

When Nick and George stop for a drink at the inn the dialogue begins and the two friends discuss their love for skiing. It is not until the waitress returns with the wine that Nick notices her huge belly, hidden at first by an apron. The waitress is hostile and her pregnancy makes her the symbol of what Nick has rejected. He rationalizes her hostility as being due to the fact that she is probably married, and may be slightly ashamed of her pregnancy. Then George asks if Nick is glad about his future child and he answers, "Yes. Now." (p. 187). When George comments "It's hell, isn't it?" (p. 187), Nick is able to provide the key to his feelings through his answer, "No. Not exactly." (p. 187).

(6) — Carlos Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 85.

(7) — Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 132.

(8) — Ernest Hemingway, "Cross Country Snow," *Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 183.

At this point Nick shows his maturity. He has accepted the responsibilities of fatherhood but is simply fearful that all the approaching domestication will take away his freedom to “enjoy” life with his friends. Baker sums up Nick’s feelings this way: “Nick recognizes, without complaint, that domestic responsibility presents a powerful case. It couldn’t, conceivably, cancel out those things in his life that are symbolized by the skiing with a good companion” (9).

Apparently, Hemingway did adjust to the idea of fatherhood by the time his first son was born. Before leaving Europe for America the Hemingways took a trip to Pamplona for the running of the bulls because Ernest felt it would be a good prenatal experience for the unborn child (10). And finally, from America, one month after Bumby’s birth, Ernest wrote to Gertrude Stein that he was “getting very fond” of the baby (11). Hadley was the one who suggested the Hemingways return to Paris only three months after the baby was born, instead of waiting a year, so that Ernest could continue with his writing without further delay. It is apparent then that Hemingway did not experience any undue suffering because of the child, nor did he find himself totally distracted from his writing. It was, furthermore, Hadley’s sensitivity to Ernest’s desire to write which made their return to Paris possible shortly after Bumby’s birth.

Jackson Benson has identified a birth-death connection with much of the imagery in the Nick Adams stories (12). George, in “Cross Country Snow,” says “It’s hell, isn’t it?” (p. 187) as he refers to the future *birth* of Nick’s child. There is also the birth-death association made between the child’s birth and the death of a very important part of Nick’s life, to which he seems to resign himself rather stoically:

“Will you ever go skiing together in the States?” George said.

“I don’t know,” said Nick.

“The mountains aren’t much,” George said.

“No,” said Nick. “They’re too rocky. There’s too much timber and they’re too far away.”

“Yes,” . . . Nick said, “that’s the way it is everywhere I’ve ever been.” (p. 187-88)

Nick’s acceptance of the near future shows that he is more mature than George, but he still maintains a rather cool attitude about the whole ordeal.

(9) — Baker, *Writer As Artist*, p. 133.

(10) — James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 266.

(11) — Mellow, p. 266.

(12) — Jackson J. Benson, “Patterns of Connection and Their Development in Hemingway’s ‘In Our Time’ *Rendezvous*”, 5 (Winter), p. 48.

Although "Hills Like White Elephants" is not a Nick Adams story, there are many parallels between "Cross Country Snow," "Hills Like White Elephants," and Hemingway's life which suggest that the story may be, at least partially, autobiographical in nature.

In April 1927, after Ernest's first divorce, and prior to the publication of *Men Without Women*, Ernest saw Hadley and Bumby off to the United States. By the end of May he had written "Hills Like White Elephants." Before his marriage to Pauline took place on the 10th of May during the same year, and later while the couple was on a three week honeymoon after the wedding Ernest began and finished writing "Hills" (13). This story, consisting almost entirely of dialogue concerns a young couple in disagreement over the girl's fate due to her "untimely" pregnancy.

The birth-death connection which Benson mentions is perspicuous in "Hills" as well. The girl agrees to the abortion so as not to ruin the relationship the couple has previously enjoyed, and thus, the story can be added to the list of Hemingway's examples of "symbiotic" love relationships, which according to Erich Fromm, are composed of one partner who assumes a passive, masochistic, inferior role to the other partner's active, sadistic superiority (14). In "Hills," the lover exerts a subtle, but strong pressure on the woman, forcing her to agree to an abortion even though she believes that with the child they "could have everything" (15).

Although the entire story is made up of one scene, as the couple awaits the train to Madrid, the dialogue reveals the tension and lack of real communication going on between the two lovers. The man alludes to their past happiness as sufficient evidence for the lack of need of a third party to enhance their relationship, and reinforces his position using rhetorical arguments such as ".if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple." (p. 275). His desires are clearly superior, the woman feeling herself inferior to his position. And in the end, it is his decision which holds more weight, as the woman submissively

(13) — Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, p. 184. Baker states that "Hills" was written for inclusion in the soon to be published volume of *Men Without Women*, however, the story was published prior to that in a magazine titled *transition*, No. 5 (Aug. 1927), pp. 9-14.

(14) — Scott Donaldson, *By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), p. 173.

(15) — Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants," *Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, p. 276.

gives in to his arguments. The woman, however, seems to win a sort of moral victory over the man in spite of the fact that his decision has priority (16)

The perplexing problem of this story, as it relates to the fatherhood theme of "Cross Country Snow" and to Hemingway's life, is in the girl's willingness to have the abortion. This is the true tragedy--the girl's willingness to accept the pressure from a person who does not mean what he says and in all probability does not even love her. This single short scene, which makes up the entire story, presents the manifestation of suffering to that of perversity. It is hard to imagine Hemingway treating Hadley this way, especially from what we know about their relationship today

The exact source of "Hills" has never been established due to the fact that two anecdotal accounts of the story's origin have never been resolved (17). In the George Plimpton interview Hemingway stated: "I met a girl in Prunier where I'd gone to eat oysters before lunch. I knew she'd had an abortion. I went over and we talked, not about that, but on the way home I thought of the story, skipped lunch, and spent the afternoon writing it." However, Robert McAlmon suggests that the genesis of the story dates from 1923 when he told Hemingway of a girl who had an abortion and treated it very casually. "Oh, it was nothing. The doctor just let the air in and a few hours later it was over." McAlmon said Hemingway later told him the remark suggested the story

As previously mentioned, the majority of details in the story do not coincide with the particulars of Ernest's marriage to Hadley, making the theory that "Hills" is a retelling of one of Hemingway's personal experiences very doubtful. It is possible that Hemingway may have first wished Hadley to have an abortion when she found out that she was pregnant, however, even though Hadley was always sensitive to Ernest's needs there is no indication that she would have been quite this sensitive, for sensitivity is not submissiveness. In "Hills," furthermore, there are several details which insinuate that the couple in the story represents a couple entirely different than Hadley and Ernest. The couple in question has travelled together throughout Europe. They are car-

(16) — Austin McGiffert Wright, *The American Short Story in the Twenties* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 248.

(17) — W. Keith Kraus, "Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants': A Note on a 'Reasonable Source'," *English Record*, XXI (Dec. 1970), p. 23. The following statements concerning the source of "Hills" are contained in the Kraus article. The sources are *Hemingway and His Critics*, ed. by Carlos Baker (New York, 1961), p. 34, and the Plimpton interview is contained in Robert McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together* (London, 1938), p. 159.

rying heavy suitcases, which suggests they have been gone for quite some time. A rejection of society and an escape from reality are implied in this constant travelling. It is an illicit relationship, one which leads to an unwanted pregnancy and finally to the question of abortion. Indeed, none of these details seems to parallel Ernest's normal married state with Hadley.

Richard W. Lid refers to the story as the "author's favorite," (18) a comment which brings to mind Hemingway's opinion that "the writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined" (19). If "Hills" were his favorite story one might have reason to believe that was imagined, at least in part, since many of Hemingway's works do have autobiographical sources. There is, nevertheless, an interesting parallel in "Hills" which might indicate an autobiographical source not yet considered. This is the parallel between the man's selfishness and the woman's submissiveness which seems to characterize many of Hemingway's other fictional love relationships. One such example is the relationship between Cat and Frederick in *A Farewell to Arms*. This love relationship has been critically accepted as the representation of Ernest's relationship with Hadley. Donaldson comments that "In all his fiction written during and immediately after his marriage to Hadley, Ernest dealt subtly and indirectly with the cause for their breakup. In story after early love story, he depicted the male of the species-himself, at one remove-as unwilling to share, to give, to take responsibility" (20) This is a perfect description of what goes on in "Hills."

Therefore, although the story may not be an exact retelling of one of Hemingway's personal experiences, it does appear to be one of the pieces which Donaldson points out as being introspective. The union of the couple in the story resembles Hemingway's first union with Hadley, at least in his own eyes the selfish man and the unselfish woman-whose interactions leave both individuals totally alone in the end. This similarity, coupled with Hemingway's distaste for fatherhood in general, highly suggests some autobiographical reality to the sources of "Hills Like White Elephants," as well as to the critical study of the couple involved in the trauma in "Hills."

Finally, an observation of Hemingway's growing dislike for fatherhood is proof again of the reality he presents his reader in these stories. Baker describes his thoughts and feelings after the birth of

(18) — Richard W. Lid, "Hills Like White Elephants," *Modern Fiction Studies* VIII (Winter 1962-63), p. 402.

(19) — Ernest Hemingway, "Company of two: On Writing," *The Nick Adams Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 237.

(20) — Donaldson, p. 150.

his second son through his marriage to Pauline: "By the time Pauline and the baby were ready to travel, Ernest had finished the 478th page of his novel. He was already disgusted with fatherhood. It took them twenty-one steaming to go by train from Kansas City to Piggot and the baby cried most of the way. His son, said Ernest, was built like a bull and bellowed like one. It was enough to drive a man 'bughouse.' He could not understand why Waldo Peirce was so eager to have children" (21). Hemingway was honest about these feelings, and did not try and cover up for them. He openly presents his resignation to the future role of father in "Cross Country Snow," and very critically studies himself, as well as his interactions with his first wife, in "Hills Like White Elephants." The attitudes he dealt with in the writing of "Cross Country Snow" were not as serious as those expressed in "Hills," and it may have been exactly for this reason that "Cross Country Snow" was included in the Nick Adams stories. The characterization of the man in "Hills Like White Elephants," however, is quite chilling and the story itself, like other more serious ones, is independent and certainly timeless.

In light of Hemingway's tendency to borrow elements and experiences from his own for use in this fiction, it is often assumed that his work is more biographical than it actually is. "Cross Country Snow" and "Hills Like White Elephants" are excellent examples for documentation of this autobiographical fallacy in Ernest Hemingway's work.

(21) — Baker, *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*, p. 195.

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