



ISSN: 2957-3874 (Print)

Journal of Al-Farabi for Humanity Sciences (JFHS)

<https://iasj.rdd.edu.iq/journals/journal/view/95>

مجلة الفارابي للعلوم الإنسانية تصدرها جامعة الفارابي



Investigating the Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Interpersonal Fictional Dialogue in Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants*

Lecturer Ibtisam Hussain Naima

College of Arts University of Thi Qar

ibtisamhussain@utq.edu.iq

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the interpersonal dialogue in Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* according to Aristotle's rhetorical appeals (Logos, Pathos, and Ethos) in order to reach at the persuasion strategies used by the American man toward Jig concerning the decision of having an abortion. However, the analysis shows a clear contrast between the man's manipulative rhetoric and Jig's on-gong counter-rhetoric. The American man's persuasion relies heavily upon a flawed Logos, i.e. he tries to reduce the abortion to a simple and guaranteed solution, a superficial Pathos, i.e. he attempts to appeal to a nostalgic and carefree past, and a false Ethos, i.e. he tends to project artificial concern. In opposition, Jig's responses are a consequence of passive acceptance to an active challenge which employs a Pathos of irreversible loss and a precise rhetorical strategy to expose the illogical selfish nature of his argument. Eventually, the study concludes that the dialogue represents a failed rhetorical conquest where the man's attempts to simplify a serious decision are ultimately defeated by Jig's assertion of emotional reality and stable independence.

Keywords: Hemingway's Iceberg Theory, Aristotle's Rhetoric, Logos, Pathos. Ethos, Persuasive strategies.

الخلاصة

تستقصي هذه الدراسة الحوار الشخصي في قصة تلال كاليفلغة البيضاء لإرنست هيمنجواي لفحص استراتيجيات الإقناع التي استخدمها الرجل الأمريكي تجاه جيج بخصوص قرار الإجهاض وفقاً للاستمالات البلاغية لأرسطو (المنطق، والعاطفة، والمصادقية). يكشف التحليل عن تباين واضح بين خطاب الرجل التلاعبي والخطاب المضاد المتطور لجيج. يعتمد إقناع الرجل الأمريكي على منطق معيب (Logos)، أي اختزال الإجهاض إلى حل بسيط ومضمون، وعلى عاطفة سطحية (Pathos)، أي الاستنجد بماضٍ حافل بالحياة الحرة والحنين، وعلى مصادقية زائفة (Ethos)، أي إظهار قلق مصطنع. في المقابل، تتحول ردود جيج من القبول السلبي إلى التحدي الفعال، مستخدمة عاطفة الخسارة التي لا رجعة فيها واستراتيجية بلاغية دقيقة لكشف الطبيعة الأنانية غير المنطقية لحجته. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الحوار يمثل غزواً بلاغياً فاشلاً، حيث هُزمت محاولات الرجل لتبسيط قرار خطير في نهاية المطاف بتأكيد جيج على الواقع العاطفي والاستقلال العقلاني. الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية جبل الجليد لهيمنجواي، بلاغة أرسطو، المنطق، العاطفة، المصادقية، استراتيجيات الإقناع.

1. Introduction

The concept of persuasion can be traced back to Aristotle who directly connected it to rhetoric when he defined rhetoric as the ability to distinguish every available means of persuasion (Kennedy, 2007, p. 37). He emphasized the fact that to achieve persuasion it requires, beside focusing on the central persuasive strategy, a careful considering to the style or linguistic choices and the proper structure of the discourse (Smith, 2009, p. 57). More recently, Charteries-Black (2011, p. 13) offered a modern definition that indicates his view which states that persuasion generally "refers to the use of language by one party to encourage another to accept a point of view." Nevertheless, persuasion, in essence, demonstrates the power and process involved in changing an audience's thoughts and beliefs. As such, it is defined by Halmari & Virtanen (2005, p. 229) as the language which is employed to attempt to and change or reinforce the audience's existing points of view and actions. Accordingly, this process is fundamentally interactive. Besides it is heavily influenced by contextual factors that stem from the specific situations where verbal communication happens. More importantly, attention must be attracted to the fact that persuasion is always aimed at an audience and does not occur in isolation (ibid).

Jones & Simons (2017, p. 23) see persuasion as "human communication designed to influence the judgments and actions of others." Understanding how persuasion functions is therefore crucial for selecting the most effective methods to achieve one's goals and make sound decisions. Furthermore, the persuasion process isn't only about influencing others; it also involves skillfully and thoughtfully responding to the various messages and appeals aimed at securing your approval and engagement. Simultaneously, the authors must conceal their technique, ensuring their

delivery seems natural rather than contrived or artificial. According to this view, truly effective writers employ stylistic elements in a subtle way to enhance and invigorate their prose (Smith, 2009, p. 57). Ernest Hemingway is one of those effective writers who are known for his profound influence on literature. His style is characterized by the briefness, understatement, and the reliance on the unspoken. Consequently, and central to this approach is what is called as the Iceberg Theory (also known as the theory of omission) which is a conceptual framework that transformed narrative technique. Chiefly, this theory adopts that the majority of a story's significance, i.e. its deeper meanings and emotional bulk, is intentionally submerged beneath its surface which is similar to the vast and hidden mass of an actual iceberg. By the light of this point, it can be said that when he deliberately omits explicit explanations, Hemingway forces the readers to participate in the sub textual layers of his work because this will, in consequence, emphasize the power of the reader's inference to construct the full richness and complexity of the narrative. Such philosophy, evidently, outlines Hemingway's literary talent which focuses as much on how he tells his stories as the stories themselves (Kute & Kashyap, 2023, p. 897).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Iceberg Theory

Belikova (2012, pp. 42 – 46) sees that Ernest Hemingway developed the Iceberg Theory to refer to the way individuals communicate their inner state. As such, the theory proposes that only a small tip of a person's thoughts and feelings are consciously conveyed or visible to others, while the massive bulk of their emotions and true self remain hidden below the surface similar to an iceberg. Therefore, it is important for a reader in order to achieve full understanding to look beyond apparent expression. Ernest Hemingway notably employed the Iceberg Theory in his prose since he believes that conveying a character's inner life is best accomplished through suggestions rather than explicit explanations. He purposefully shows the readers only the tip of the iceberg by using actions, dialogues, and little hints in order to drag the reader to infer the deeper and the implicit thoughts and emotions of his characters (ibid). This is practically understood in more than one way. First, the effective textual omissions are not accidental, but, they are in fact deliberately planned gaps. In other words, the text mainly offers essential details which demands the reader actively to participate in creating the wholly meaning by inferring missing information and to fill such gaps with their own imagination and interpretation. Moreover, certainly, the work has implications which are basically the unsaid feelings, motivations, and hidden intentions that remain unspoken and concealed behind the actual spoken dialogue and plot. This level of implicit meaning will, in consequence, allow the story to depict events and characters' interaction with the true complication that reflect the way real-life communication often works. Further, the story will promote the audience through pushing them to read between the lines simply because the text does not easily provide a plot but rather it functions as a prompt that motivates the readers to join in the storytelling process and, accordingly, enrich the story with their personal insights. Furthermore, the structure of the text encourages the audience to become passionately involved with the story. This will certainly allow for a deeper connection and more effective communication. Finally, the text will employ slight recommendations through actions, pauses, and understated moments instead of explicit explanations. This method, in turn, will make the reading experience as an invaluable reading experience without over-explaining (Stares and Chase, 2023).

2.2. Aristotle's Rhetoric of Persuasion: Logos, Pathos, and Ethos

Aristotle defined rhetoric as the ability to identify all possible methods of persuasion in any situation. His important work established the three essential appeals: Ethos (character), Pathos (emotion), and Logos (logic). Besides, he classified speeches into three genres: ceremonial, judicial, and legislative / judgmental. Aristotle argued that rhetoricians needed not only skill in argumentation but also a comprehensive knowledge of human emotion, character, and the specific subject matter relevant to their speech. This main contribution made him the "*The Father of Rhetoric*" (Herrick, 2017, p. 88).

However, Aristotle defined *Logos* as the persuasive influence naturally found in the speech itself, precisely its ability to prove or appear to prove a point (Aristotle, 1990, p. 120). Also known as the "rational appeal," *Logos* aims to generate a rational basis for the audience, often using statistics, math, and pure logic. This appeal uses two main forms of reasoning: inductive (forming conclusions from specific examples, such as historical or theoretical cases) and deductive (deriving specific outcomes from generally accepted truths). Aristotle considered such reasoning (rhetorical deduction) the most critical tool for rhetorical device, and the modern word "logic" grew directly from *Logos* (ibid). Pathos, or emotional appeal, on the other hand, is the rhetorical method of influencing an audience by engaging their feelings, and self-regard. Despite humans being rational, emotions remain an influential means of action. Pathos seeks to evoke definite negative (like fear, anger, or guilt) or positive (such as joy, pride, or love) feelings to motivate a transformation in the audience's attitude. Aristotle noted that this approach includes a wide range of feelings, and its successful application first needs the communicator to construct trust with those they are communicating with. Pathos is

the act of arousing the audience's emotions to lead them toward a specific wanted decision. Pathos involves activating emotions in the audience as a means of persuading them to agree with the speaker's perspective. Pathos, in sum, refers to the rhetorical practice of evoking an emotional response from the audience, exactly to stimulate and persuade them to make the favorable judgment wanted by the speaker (Aristotle & Kennedy, 1991, p. 119). Nevertheless, Ethos is the rhetorical method that appeals to an audience's ethical framework, hence, asking them to consider what is right and proper. This appeal is commonly used to get support for social issues, such as encouraging equality, improving race relations, or protecting the environment. Aristotle broke down the speaker's ethical appeal into three necessary qualities: *phronesis*, i.e. representing beneficial wisdom; *arête*, i.e. showing virtue or concern; and *eunoia*, i.e. displaying concern toward the direct listeners. Aristotle argued that speakers must do more than just present a logical and convincing argument, i.e. they must also ensure their own character appears credible to the audience. This key use of Ethos helps the speaker establish trust because the more reliable a speaker seems, the greater his persuasive power is. In present-day language, the term *Ethos* refers to the natural character associates with a person, group, organization, or movement (ibid, p. 120).

3. Analysis and Discussion

Exploring the rhetoric of persuasion in Ernest Hemingway's short story **Hills Like White Elephants** centers on Hemingway's minimalist Iceberg Theory which uses least dialogue to reveal the man's attempts to persuade the girl (Jig) to have an abortion. Obviously, Hemingway avoids explicit persuasive appeals, i.e. Ethos, Pathos, or Logos in the narration. Instead, they are embedded slightly within the dialogue, symbolism, and structural patterns. Moreover, Hemingway's style suggests that only a small portion of the meaning is visible (above the water), while the majority of the emotion, conflict, and persuasive intention is unsaid or implied (below the water). The conversation between the couple is presented as a neutral text which makes the man's attempts at persuasion seem objective and reasonable at first sight. However, his repetition and use of loaded terms reveal his manipulative purpose. The central topic, i.e. abortion, is never named. This mystery stimulates the reader to be engaged within the text, highlighting the couple's avoidance and maybe the offensive nature of the subject which aids the man's indirect persuasion.

As far as the American man is concerned, he employs a strategy aimed at convincing Jig to undergo the abortion while, at the same time, maintaining an impression of objectivity and concern. His persuasive style is direct, repetitive, and emotionally manipulative, based on minimization and appeals to past life and future freedom. His goal is to persuade Jig to have an abortion while showing himself unselfish. In this respect, his rhetoric shows Aristotle's three appeals. For instance, he consistently avoids the word "abortion," using phrases like "*an awfully simple operation*," "*just to let the air in*," and "*it's all perfectly natural*." This rhetorical method attempts to soften the hardness of the decision and the procedure itself, presenting it as a rational and minor issue, which is essentially Logos. Moreover, his main argument rests on the promise that the operation will restore their relationship to its previous state of free travel and happiness. Phrases like "*We can have everything and because it's the only thing that bothers us*" and "*We'll be happy*" p. 72, appeal to Jig's desire for his approval and a return to their common life which is evidently Pathos. Further, he asserts his perspective as the logical, responsible one which is mainly Ethos. On the other hand, the man repeatedly states, "*I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do*" p. 75. This is a key rhetorical move that shifts the burden of responsibility onto Jig. Thus, he tries to give the idea that he is generous while simultaneously using this conditional statement to stress her, implying that her rejection is the only trouble to their happiness. Outstandingly, the man's "logic" is based on a false evidence, As such, he tries to assure Jig that the procedure is minor and the consequences are trivial. Let's have examples.

- *It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig... It's just to let the air in.* p. 72

This is his main attempt at Logos. He tries to show that the procedure is a simple and practically a fix to a minor issue. Moreover, he deliberately uses terms such as understated, clinical language ("operation," "just to let the air in") to strip the act of its moral and emotional complexity and presenting it as a rational and easy choice.

- *That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that makes us unhappy.* P. 72

Once more he adopts a logical argument when he asserts a clear problem (unhappiness) and offers a clear, simple solution (the abortion). This reasoning attempts are meant to logically reduce the whole complex issue of having a child to a single and possibly removable problem.

On the level of Pathos and appealing to the listener's emotions, the American man's use of Pathos is largely focused on relieving (his own) anxiety and appealing to Jig's desire for their old life, while he avoids the honest emotional weight of the decision. Let's see examples.

- *We can have everything and only the thing that bothers us is gone.* P. 73

This is an appeal to the fear of change. He brings to her mind the emotional perfect life of their past relationship, i.e. a life of freedom and travel, and, at the same time, he shows the baby as the only threat to that happiness. Obviously, he tries to make getting rid of the baby seem like a simple return to happiness.

- *But I don't want anybody but you. I don't want anyone else.* P. 76

Over again, he shows an appeal to love and support. It is a strong emotional claim intended to make Jig feel that her agreement means she is affirming his love and protecting their relationship. He uses the strength of his (claimed) feeling for her to justify his demand.

As far as appeal to Ethos which relates to the speaker's apparent authority is concerned, the American man attempts to establish a persuasive Ethos by focusing on unplanned confidence and universal information of the world and their relationship. Thus:

- *I've known lots of people that have done it.* P. 72

Such claim is an attempt to offer authority to his perspective. That is, by claiming knowledge with others who have undergone the procedure, he is slightly placing himself as the expert who understands the common, safe nature of the "operation." This is his attempt to appear trustworthy about the situation.

- *I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't think it was absolutely the best thing for you.* P. 75

Once more, this is an attempt to frame an image of a considerate partner who is cares for her will, not just his own desires. However, the subsequent burden throughout the conversation undercuts this pretense, making his Ethos ultimately seem manipulative rather than honest.

To sum up, the American man's persuasion is based on a faulty Logos, i.e. the resolve that the procedure is simple and will restore happiness), a strong appeal to Pathos, i.e. the desire for their old carefree life), and an artificial Ethos, i.e. insincere concern. Thus, his rhetoric is a mask for his own self-interest and desires. Jig's dialogue, actually, functions not as a persuasive argument but, rather, as a series of challenges and counter-rhetoric designed to uncover the absurdity of the American man's appeals. She uses Logos, Pathos, and Ethos to reflect his arguments back at him by forcing him to meet the actual seriousness of the situation.

Primarily, Jig's use of Logos is to attack the false logic of the American man's argument, i.e. the idea that the abortion is a simple solution that will guarantee happiness. Here are examples:

- *And if I do it, then it will be nice again and you will love me?* P. 73

Jig's rhetorical question is a professional maneuvering to falsify his seemingly logical argument. Thus, she pushes the American man's argument to its illogical extreme when she demonstrates that the *condition* of their happiness is her agreement, not the simple absence of the baby. This exposes the illogical principle that a difficult medical procedure can magically restore love.

- *Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me.* (Followed by his insistence that she shouldn't do it for him) P. 74
- Yet again her final conditional statement ("*Then I'll do it...*") is a rhetorical check. She encounters his manipulative "caring" logic with her own decision which forces him into a contradiction, i.e. as if she preserves that if the operation is so simple and essential for their happiness, why does he suddenly go back on his word when she agrees?! Similarly, Jig's Pathos is as powerful as Logos since it deals with a loss he refuses to admit. She appeals to the emotional reality of sacrifice contrasting it with his focus on superficial happiness. Hence:

- *And once they take it away, you never get it back.* P. 75

This is an appeal to the emotion of permanent loss. That is, while he talks about gaining "everything" back, i.e. their old life, she states the argument in the true emotional path, i.e. the permanent sacrifice of their relationship's potential and her Motherhood. This contrasts plainly with his emotion-free language.

- *I don't care about me.* P. 74

In fact, this highly overloaded emotional statement can be interpreted in two ways: it is either extreme self-sacrifice or extreme frustration. Thus, by removing herself from the equation, she tries to force him to reconsider the decision in terms of the relationship rather than as a appropriateness for him only.

Jig's Ethos shifts from a passive listener to an active disbeliever. She establishes her reliability by proving her ability to perceive reality independent of his influence. These are examples:

- *They look like white elephants.* (Referring to the hills) P. 70

This simple observation shows her rational individuality. That is, by comparing the hills to something rare as the white elephants, she proficiently introduces the idea that their possible child is a valuable but difficult gift. Accordingly, it can be said that she proves her awareness is not limited to his perspective but rather she offers more credibility to her successive doubts.

- *And you think then we'll be all right and be happy.* P. 73

Through a ironic question she destroys his Ethos of the "caring partner." Thus, by asking him to confirm his oversimplified proposition, she places herself as the rational partner who is checking the validity of his claims. Consequently, she doubts his true motives.

Worth mentioning, Jig's rhetorical turning point comes when she directly declares her perspective and stops engaging in his persuasive game, i.e. "I'll scream" and "I feel fine". The threat of screaming is a strong rejection of his persuasive pressure whereas her final statement, "I feel fine," is ambiguous; it can be read as a lie to end the conversation or a declaration of her determined will namely a newly established sense of inner peace regardless of the man's desire.

4. Conclusions

Throughout the study of interpersonal dialogue in Hemingway's **Hills Like White Elephants** according to Aristotle's rhetorical appeals exposes a failed and manipulative attempt at persuasion by the American man, which is ultimately countered by Jig's shift toward true and confident resolution. Thus, the dialogue is characterized by an apparent imbalance of rhetorical effort. The American man constructs a continuous strategy of persuasion, while Jig primarily responds with indirectness and later with highly precise rhetorical counter-attacks. This highly indicates the American man's argument-initiative role and jig's defensive role. The man's entire argument relies on a unreliable Logos such as his attempt to show that the abortion is a "simple operation" and that the outcome will be guaranteed happiness. Jig pulls this logic to pieces by using the his own words in an ironic way proving that their complex emotional problems cannot be solved with a simple surgical fix. However, the central conflict is one of Pathos. The man appeals to a Pathos of convenience , i.e. longing for their carefree life portraying the operation as the simple removal of an inconvenience. Jig, in opposition, appeals to the Pathos of permanent loss and the deep emotional burden of the decision. The American man's attempt to establish an Ethos of care and rationality is ultimately self-defeating. His repeated insistence that he doesn't want her to do it *if she doesn't want to* seem unconvincing against his persistent conversational pressure. Jig's use of simple and, at the same time, challenging questions exposes his Ethos as no more than mere performance leading to the breakdown of trust. To sum up, the rhetoric of the story is the display of a man using minimized, manipulative language to apply control which, by the end, forces the woman to retreat into herself, making the story a significant study of failed communication and imbalanced power dynamics rather than successful persuasion. Consequently, Jig's final statement, *"I feel fine... There's nothing wrong with me"* p. 77, signifies her rhetorical and emotional freedom. She has stopped engaging with his persuasive framework and has instead asserted her own reality and potential decision, i.e. leaving the man, and the reader too, in a state of unresolved ambiguity.

References

- Aristotle, & Kennedy, G. A. (1991). *Aristotle on Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Aristotle. (1990). *Rhetoric*. In P. P. Matsen, P. B. Rollinson, and M. Sousa (Eds.), *Readings from Classical Rhetoric*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Belikova, Alexandra M. *"The Iceberg Theory: How Hemingway's Stylistic Signature Challenges the Reader."* *Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagradiensia*, vol. 57, no. 1, Dec. 2012, pp. 39-53.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathan. (2011) . *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. United States : Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halmari, H. and Virtanen, T. (2005). *Persuasion Across Genres: A Linguistic Approach*. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hemingway, E. (1927). *"Hills Like White Elephants"* in *Men without Women*. New York: Charlie
- Herrick, J. A. (2017). *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*.
- Jones, J. and Simons, H. (2017). *Persuasion in Society*. New York :Taylors and Francis Group.
- Kute,D. R. & Kashyap A. K. *"Hemingway's Iceberg Theory: Unveiling the Submerged Elements in the Novels"* *International Journal of Innovative of Engineering and Management Research*. Vol 12 Issue 03, Mar
- Kennedy, George A. (2007). *Aristotle On Rhetoric: A Theory Of Civic Discourse*. Oxford:
- Smith, S. (2009). *The Poetry of Persuasion: Early Literary Theory and Its Advice to Legal Writers*. Santa Clara Law Digital Commons. Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1930&context=facpubs>
- Secret to Powerful Stares, N. & and Chase, N. (2023). What is Iceberg Theory? Hemingway's theory/ Writing. <https://blog.celtx.com/what-is-an-iceberg-theory/>*