

Looking at David Wyche's "Letting the Air Into a Relationship" as an Example of Synthesis and Evaluation

The following paragraph, taken from David Wyche's article "Letting the Air Into a Relationship: Metaphorical Abortion in 'Hills Like White Elephants,'" reveals a model of synthesis and evaluation using secondary sources (articles by others in the field) and the primary source (the short story). Wyche's method does not strictly follow the "outline" offered for papers in this course. Your papers need not strictly follow this outline either, nor do they need to follow Wyche's model slavishly. Combining the advice offered on the outline and what you see in this model, determine your own solution as to how structure and form a paper that fulfills the assignment.

Wyche's synthesis is quotation-heavy and attempts to integrate more sources than you would use in paper 2 (although it perhaps functions well as model for research papers). However, the basic format of his paragraph serves as a solid model. Initially, he states the controversy (or lack thereof in this case) in his topic sentence. Then he relates the various points of view, showing the reader how the views relate to one another.

The outcome of the protagonists' love affair, however, is less controversial. Critics who foresee abortion, and those who do not, tend to agree that Jig and the American will not long remain a couple. Johnston regards the American's attitude as "ominous," and indication of "some future dissolution of their relationship" (237). Jig is both "well aware that the intrusion of a child will send the man packing" and certain that "their relationship will be radically altered, perhaps destroyed, if she goes through with the abortion" (236). Stanley Renner suggests that, as a result of the couple's discussion, Jig "has become able to make a more clear-sighted estimation, and perhaps a better choice, of men" (40). Howard L. Hannum concurs that Jig will leave the American, who by the end of the story had, himself, become a "white elephant" (53). This concept of the American as a burden, consisting—from Jig's perspective—more than he is worth, is supported by Justice's assertion that the hills on both sides of the valley, Jig's and the American's are "like white elephants" (19). Justice sees the shifting of bags as evidence of a capitulation on the American's part, but cautions that, while "he many have done the honorable thing," he still sees "their previous live as having been ruined." She considers the "prognosis" as "guarded at best" (27). Gilligan asserts that "[i]f the man loses in this little game, the girl does not win," and mutual disappointment is hardly a recipe for longevity. Gilligan also suggests that the story's "substance [. . .] reveals the very core of a human relationship," where

“we really do find nothing” (n.pag.).

In the next two paragraphs, Wyche argues for his point of view. First, he outlines the relationship between the views he has just synthesized: that while the critics disagree concerning the couple’s decision to have an abortion, most critics agree that the relationship will end. Second, he states his interpretation: that the abortion is a metaphor for the dismal failure of the relationship.

Here we, somewhat like Jig and the American reach a crucial point. If Jig gives in to her lover’s wishes, their lives cannot, as she well knows, be the same as before. The aborted fetus will continue to come between them as they try to “look at things and try new drinks” (SS247). Their old existence, like their feelings for one another, will not be theirs anymore. They will have negated the relationship, and once it is taken away, “you can never get it back” (276). Should Jig insist on having the baby, the American, having lost his “unencumbered sexual playhouse” (Renner 33), will leave her, either sooner or later. [. . .] We are unsure, and can only speculate about the tangible outcome—abortion or childbirth—of what we have witnessed. We can be more certain that we have seen the termination of the couple’s relationship, a metaphorical abortion. Whatever Jig’s decision, the love affair, such as it is, cannot continue. It is the figurative womb into which air is let, and by the end of the story it is as arid and empty as the Spanish countryside.

Wyche also backs up his assertions with examples pulled from the story itself:

Consideration of the story’s abortion as metaphorical is consistent with arguments that Jig (Hannum, Renner) or the American (Justice) is a dynamic character. However, when we recognize the figurative significance of the proposed abortion, we see that if either or both of the characters experience “growth” throughout the course of the story, neither necessarily moves toward the other’s “side.” When Jig observes that the hills “look like white elephants,” the American says that he has “never seen one.” “No you wouldn’t have,” Jig replies. This bit of dialogue establishes the characters’ opening positions in what is, essentially, an emotionally charged negotiation. To Jig, the unborn child she carries is eminently, painfully real; to the American it is a concept, an abstraction and too expensive to keep. Much has been made of his inability to grasp metaphor, but he is uncomfortably aware that the crucial issue at hand has been broached, as evidenced by the nature of his response: “I might have . . . Just because you say I wouldn’t have doesn’t prove anything” (SS 273). The statement is also

indicative of his lack of emotional development. He is, after all, the one who “knows” things, but his words would be more appropriate to a child in a nursery than to an adult grappling with what is, for the potential life he has sired, a question of being or not being.

(Again, remember that Wyche, having more sources to contend with, offers paragraphs here that are somewhat longer than may be needed for paper 2. However, something approaching this length and depth might be more appropriate for a research paper).

Elements to note in Wyche’s paragraphs that you will want to apply to your own include:

The graceful integration of quotation (you may need more paraphrase than Wyche).

The use of transitions in the synthesis paragraph such as “also” and “as a result” that help determine the relationship between sources.

The use of verbs such as “concur” that also indicate the relationship between sources.

He frequently references, both in quotation and in paraphrase, details and elements of the story—note that these appear even in the synthesis paragraph as well as in the paragraph where he supports his evaluation.