

Hemingway's "Unsaid but Said" - The Sparse and the Minimalist Style

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Abstract The Iceberg theory is a narrative technique devised by the writers in which the writers reveal the deeper thoughts with economy by choosing less verbal expressions and leaving the deeper thoughts associated with it in a submerged state for the readers to identify and comprehend it on their own. This is a style juxtaposed to the act of visualizing an iceberg with just its tip revealed wherein the deeper portion lies submerged. The writing strategy is also known as the Theory of Emission which was devised by Hemmingway in which the stronger part of his story was hidden just like the iceberg underneath the ocean and this accounts for creating a perfect story as too much of detail strips away the powerful presentation of story's honest idea.

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Hemingway said that only the tip of the iceberg showed in fiction—your reader will see only what is above the water—but the knowledge that you have about your character that never makes it into the story acts as the bulk of the iceberg. And that is what gives your story weight and gravitas.

—Jenna Blum in *The Author at Work*, 2013

As an eminent writer of short stories Hemmingway knew how to get the most out of it, where he needs to prune the language and where he should stop the story dynamics. He was thoughtful enough in composing his brilliantly spun plot to proliferate intense ideas by telling truth in a unique fashion. According to Baker the narrative technique involving Iceberg theory reveals the nuanced complexities and intended symbolisms that function underneath the surface story or main plot. Hemmingway employs the technique meticulously in *Big - Two Hearted River* in Nick Adams act of fishing which has a surface as well as deeper meaning as Nick Adams concentrates on fishing to an extent that he totally forgets his unpleasant experiences of war. Hemmingway mentions his clear thoughts on the Iceberg theory in one of his essays *The Art of Short Story* where he expresses :

: "A few things I have found to be true. If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened. If you leave or skip something because you do not know it, the story will be worthless. The test of any story is how very

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good the stuff that you, not your editors, omit."

According to Hemmingway the idea of employing Iceberg technique in fiction the reader is able to see what is just above the water but at the same time the knowledge that a reader acquires about the character in the due course of reading a fiction forms the bulk of the iceberg. This is something that provides weight to the story. Hemmingway felt that his theory of omission has a significant aspect which he justified as something that needed a greater understanding. In *The Art of Short Story* Hemmingway mentions that he was quite impressed with Kipling's idea of compressing the prose as much as possible and this made him justify the idea of omission which made the omitted art of the story much more powerful than what it could be expressed in words.

However the theory has also led to confusions in the way of understanding the core or intended concept of the writer at times and has created scenes of ambiguity. As Ryley Harris mentions in *Hemmingway's Iceberg Theory* The Blue Route, a literary Journal, Hemmingway's theory of Omission and the affective use of ambiguity in his work *Indian Camp*, which is one of his earlier stories. It is difficult to figure out certain aspects in the story due to Hemmingway's use of Iceberg technique in his narrative style.

The Sun Also Rises by Hemmingway explores the themes of love, loss and disillusionment of a lost generation. It speaks about a group of people who belonged to the times of the First World war and

were deeply influenced by the death and destruction caused by war. The trauma of war poses two principal characters of the story Jake Barnett and Brett Ashley who are disillusioned by the war trauma and are looking for the meaning of life and its aim as the world becomes senseless and meaningless to them when they see large population suffering death and war aftershocks. The story boasts of Hemmingway's employment of the Omission or Iceberg theory through the symbolic interpretations as they beautifully convey the in depth thoughts touching the readers' heart.

"Don't you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you're not taking advantage of it? Do you realize you've lived nearly half the time you have to live already?"

— Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises

The deep emotional attachment between Jack and Brett is revealed through their conversations and their interactive words without explaining in deep that they are in love with each other. The complexities of their feelings and the idea of being rootless and leading an aimless life is revealed through their conversation symbolically justifies the idea of the Lost Generation that has suffered the trauma of war and has witnessed heart rendering scenes of death and destruction.

In this context Hemmingway has employed economy of words and omission theory to avoid his overindulgence emotionally and deeply at certain important instants that needed lot of explanation, but here Hemmingway skips over explanation and implies only through few words and symbolic languages. As Jake Barnes conveys his own insecurities and mistrust of the people around him, he expresses it in limited words when he speaks, "*I mistrust all frank and simple people, especially when their stories hold together.*(Chapter 1, 10)".

According to Matt Wilcox, *Quora*, as a writer gives an advice to the budding writers "Show, Don't tell" which according to him is the most important advice for all the writers who wish to continue writing for longer part of their life. He reflects that due to structural reasons one should not put every bit of research and every developed idea into a novel as it makes the entire thing collapse under its own weight. He adds that narrating a bit of historical aspects is good but too much of it can appear like a dry lifeless material that would drag a plot like concrete boots. It will make the story advance slow, dull and uninteresting. In this

context he makes a comparison between the process of writing a novel to the process of making a painting. He reflects :

I could spend hours painting a water lily in exacting detail, or I could just artfully splash a couple of paint daubs on a canvas and conjure the impression of a water lily just as (if not more) convincingly. Scale this up from a flower to an imagined civilisation (or several!) and things can rapidly get out of hand. I know some people like to immerse themselves in every last detail about a fictional world, but in most cases I'd argue more detail does not mean better story-telling.(Matt Wilcox)

"Show, Don't tell" is in fact a creative technique that allows the reader to feel and experience things within the story rather than reading it word by word that actually mars its true experience and ecstasy. It is a technique that explains and interprets things and actions through senses and other vivid details which helps the writers to make the readers immerse in the story, take a pause and think over the entire scenario. Russian novelist Anton Chekhov came up with a famous quote in this context saying, "*Don't tell me the Moon is shining, show me the glint of light on broken glass*". Telling something about someone in plain words will simply make the individual know about what had happened and this is nothing but an exposition and narrative summary however 'showing' something to someone based on the specific details of an event becomes an experience and transforms them as one of those characters of the story. In this context there is one example showing stark difference between the idea of "telling" and "showing" :

- **Telling:** When Mary failed her test, she was embarrassed.
- **Showing:** When Mary saw the big red F on her work, her cheeks flushed. She crumpled the test and hid it in her desk, hoping no one noticed.

In the above example the one in which the writer 'tells' becomes a closed ended statement as he has already specified what has happened and has left nothing for the reader to imagine whereas in the second example the writer has 'shown' the idea and has symbolically interpreted the idea by using, colour and size of the alphabet, which itself reflects the pain and mental agony of the girl getting embarrassed and many more feelings in her heart, but in the first example just one feeling is specified

and no scope is left for other feelings like anger, apology, and guilt that she may have also experienced at the same time therefore the reader does not take pain to let his imagination wander and establishes what the writer has established already for him. However both examples convey the same idea but the beauty of expression becomes more prominent and stylistic in the second one rather than the first one that appears plain, harsh and simple at the same time.

Hemingway's Iceberg Theory is based on the idea of showing less and reflecting more that creates vivid pictures in the reader's mind making them engrossed and completely meditate over the hidden idea. This is the process of achieving dramatic excellence in writing which multiplies the interest of the reader to look and explore for more that is unexpressed. The style was an innovation in those times that left enough space and room for interpretation that what the character must be thinking in that particular situation and what exactly were his feelings. This was easier that made the readers draw certain conclusions about their characters and helped them to develop a bonding and relationship with them.

Out of numerous characters of Hemmingway the readers developed a close bond with Santiago from *The Old Man and The Sea*. His character embodies immense physical and mental strength even in the times of crisis and odd situations that displays his resilience during adversities of life. His loneliness creates a deep empathy in the heart of readers and his continued struggle even in loneliness displays human endurance and struggle. Taken in the sense of an existential hero Santiago's struggle with Marlin is metaphorical of the idea and the way he retains his humility and kindness under pressure is the best way a writer can ever present a character not purely in the idealistic form but a man living within the odds of the human world. It is the Hemmingway' minimalist and sparse style that builds connection of Santiago with the readers heart.

The prose works of Hemmingway are credited with simplicity and clarity of thoughts and they very much try to survive in the real human world full of harshness of situations and people. The language is straightforward and unwanted embellishments have always been avoided by the writer to remove all kinds of artificiality and bring about the sense of realism in his writings. One such dialogue spoken

by Santiago reflects the realistic aspect of the world through Hemmingway's perspective :

"Fish," he said softly, aloud, "I'll stay with you until I am dead." (TOMATS, Hemmingway Ernst)

The above dialogue reflects Santiago's close connection with the real world and the nature, he seems to be committed to face the adversities as he realizes that they are a part of the human life. Till his last breath one cannot get rid of struggle as life itself begins with struggle. The idea is deeply embraced in the dialogue that showcases the acceptance of realities even though when death may be the ultimate outcome of his battle with Marlin. The statement is simple and straightforward but demonstrates the stoic realism of the unpredictable nature of the world and life that is infused with unseen challenges.

The idea of prioritizing the action and physical sensations more rather than giving mouth to the thoughts has always been the beauty of his style. Rather than indulging in detailed descriptions and conversations his dialogues are concise, realistic and visualize a peculiar kind of internal monologue and this is the reason why they "show , and don't tell". The writings demonstrate a sense of spirituality, introspection and a quest for philosophical exploration. *The Sun Also Rises* Hemmingway explores the themes of disillusionment and spirituality through the conversation between his characters:

Bill: "You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes."

Jake: "We're all a lost generation."

The conversation explored the theme of lost generation in the post war era of uncertainty and disillusionment. It reflects the spiritual void growing day by day in the human society which has been presented as an aftershock of World War I. Bill is criticizing the lifestyle of Jake which is a reflection of the existential crisis faced by the local population in post war Europe that was undergoing the serious issues of identity crisis due to huge migration status and post war trauma haunted the heart of the common people. There was an atmosphere of uncertainty everywhere. Instead of presenting a detailed description of the entire crisis

and traumatic situation Hemmingway in his sparse style uses just one phrase of "lost generation" that itself conveys the depth of existential crisis faced by expatriates in post war Europe. It reflects the moral ambiguity of those times.

The Sun Also Rises showcases the characters of Hemmingway in the light of existentialism, existential dilemma and the one who are seeking peace, stability and solace in life. The characters are struggling to understand a world that is indifferent and chaotic. The main ideas of Hemmingway's writings seem to appreciate introspection and struggles of the human life. Besides his style carries an understatement and leaves behind many things that are unsaid and unspoken but they are not vague, it is just an act of leading someone to a forest from a tunnel and then showing him the openness, it depends upon what the individual derive from it and that is already understood by the guide as peace, harmony, love for nature and ecstatic beauty. In the same way Hemmingway may leave some thoughts unspoken but eventually he knows that what the readers are going to derive out of it, and this coincides with his understanding and idea.

It is said that Hemmingway "unsaid is said" which reflects his implied ideas rather than stating them word to word. His theory of Omission is leaving gaps in his narration which in fact is the hallmark of his literary approach. The style invites readers to actively engage with the text and characters to infer their thoughts and their meanings. His sparse style employed in the conversation between characters and the detailing of the situation acts as a mirror to showcase how people communicate and interact with the world in the form of gestures, silence and sometimes nuances. The minimalist style makes the situations and feelings quite relatable to the readers and the pauses and voids left give the readers some time to stop, think and introspect the situation and character. This is quite important when one tries to make a thoughtful and meaningful approach to his reading.

The writings of Hemmingway are multilayered and complex symbolism makes them even more susceptible to exploration and research and it must be noted that what remains hidden in his writings can reveal much deeper truth than what one feels to have understood at the surface level, therefore his writings need deep exploration of ideas and re-reading that must reveal the real zest of the work.

Some of the unexpressed ideas convey the unspoken truth of the characters and their inner lives that may be the possible reasons behind their actions. They talk about their relationships and human conditions that are responsible for shaping that particular character and his behaviour with all logical reasons and supportive ideas. This is the reason why after reaching to the depth of his multilayered and complex interpretation one can get a different meaning than other and also why the texts of Hemmingway face multiple interpretations as it completely reflects the depth of one's explorations of his writings.

There is an emotional resonance in the underlying themes of Hemmingway, a kind of understated approach that is capable of intensifying the key ideas of the narrative. He realized that emotions when hinted or restrained acted more powerfully than explicitly stated because they powerfully evoked empathy and reflection in the reader's heart. In his work *Hills Like White Elephants* there is an interpretation of restrained emotions but extremely powerful at the same time:

Girl: "And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?"

It is a situation in the story when a girl is in conversation with the American man and is discussing a decision that will affect their relationship. The story is pregnant with unspoken emotions and one of the finest examples of Hemmingway's minimalist style of writing. In this situation the character talks about the effect on relationship but does not address directly her underlying feelings of uncertainty, fear and hopelessness. The dialogue is a restrained statement that covers the weight of unspoken thoughts and feelings of her heart, complexity of her emotions and the future that she wonders with the man. All these feelings have been expressed without explicitly stating them leaving upon the readers to derive the inferences out of their own understanding.

Hemmingway's minimalist approach in this style of narrative art allows the emotional tension to subside beneath the surface which creates a sense of unease and introspection resonating deeply in the reader's mind. It is a beautiful example of Hemmingway's writing style effectively conveying powerful emotions through what is *unsaid but still said*. His economical use of language and restricted detailing ensures that every deep thought must be

understood intelligently , as thoughts , feelings and ideas are abstracts to be cherished and felt rather than being spoken as words are always inappropriate and insufficient to express the heart. His idea of omitting unnecessary explanations , descriptions and just focussing on what is necessary , essential by enhancing clarity of the idea is the most impactful part of his prose compositions.

In essence, Hemingway's ability to convey profound themes and emotions through what is left unsaid demonstrates his mastery as a writer. His minimalist style not only captures the complexities of human experience but also allows readers to participate actively in interpreting and experiencing the narrative, creating a lasting impression long after the story has ended. On the idea of writing concisely Hemmingway stated :

"I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story." (*From a letter to his editor Maxwell Perkins*)

The minimalist approach of Hemmingway speak things of mind and heart and not of words, they are the cosmic feelings that do not require words to support them but simply make the emotional aspect of human mind work in a positive and comprehensive way and as expressed better in his own words :

"If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough,

will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water." (*From "Death in the Afternoon"*)

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