

# The Iceberg Theory and Ernest Hemingway

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## Abstract

The iceberg theory, also known as the "theory of omission," involves the intentional omission of details and explicit explanations in writing, leaving the reader to infer the meaning and significance of the story. Hemingway's sparse and straightforward writing style, characterized by short, simple sentences and minimal use of adjectives, effectively employs the iceberg theory to convey a deeper emotional and psychological subtext to his stories. The research draws on primary and secondary sources, including Hemingway's own works, critical reviews, and literary scholarship, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the iceberg theory. By illuminating the intricacies of Hemingway's writing style and the iceberg theory, this research paper sheds light on the enduring legacy of one of the most influential writers of the 20th century.

**Keywords** – Ernest Hemingway, Iceberg Theory, The Old Man and The Sea, A Farewell to Arms, The Sun Also Rises, Narrative Technique, Minimalistic Writing Style.

**Introduction** - The iceberg theory is a concept in psychology and literary analysis that was first introduced by Ernest Hemingway. According to this theory, a person's thoughts and feelings are represented by only a small portion of what is visible on the surface (the tip of the iceberg), while a larger portion of their thoughts and emotions are hidden below the surface (the bulk of the iceberg). This theory suggests that people reveal only a small part of their true selves to others and that to truly understand someone, one must look deeper than what is immediately visible.

Ernest Hemingway was known for his simple, direct, and unadorned writing style. He is often associated with the "Iceberg Theory" of writing, which emphasizes the idea that a writer should only reveal a small portion of the story, with the bulk of the meaning and emotion implied or hinted at. Hemingway's writing style continues to influence modern writers and is often praised for its simplicity, concision, and emotional depth.

Ernest Hemingway was known for applying the iceberg theory in his writing style. He believed that the best way to convey a character's emotions was not through direct description or dialogue but through subtle hints and implications. In his works, Hemingway often presented only the tip of the iceberg by leaving much of the character's thoughts and feelings unsaid, allowing the reader to infer them from the characters' actions, dialogue, and other subtle cues.

In Hemingway's works, this approach is evident in his use of:

1. Omission of internal thoughts and emotions: Hemingway often omitted plain descriptions of a character's thoughts and emotions, leaving the reader to infer them based on the character's actions and dialogue.

2. Use of indirect characterization: Hemingway used indirect characterization to reveal a character's personality and motivations. For example, a character's actions, speech patterns, and attitudes toward others can all provide hints about their personality and motivations.
3. Emphasis on setting and atmosphere: Hemingway believed that setting and atmosphere were crucial for establishing mood and tone. By using sensory details and vivid imagery, he created a rich and immersive world for the reader.
4. Simple and direct language: Hemingway used simple and direct language to create an unadorned, stripped-down style that emphasized the emotional impact of the story.

The portrayal of Hemingway's application of the iceberg theory can be seen in works such as "**A Farewell to Arms**", "**The Sun Also Rises**" and "**The Old Man and the Sea**". Through his use of the iceberg theory, Hemingway was able to create characters and stories that were both simple and complex, direct and nuanced, and that explored the human condition with emotional depth and insight.

### **The Iceberg Theory and A Farewell to Arms**

Ernest Hemingway's novel "A Farewell to Arms" is a prime example of the writer's use of the iceberg theory. In this novel, Hemingway uses the theory to convey the complex emotions and thoughts of the main character, Frederic Henry, without explicitly stating them.

For instance, instead of explicitly describing Frederic's feelings of loss and disillusionment as a result of the war, Hemingway shows these emotions through Frederic's actions, such as his drinking and his decision to desert the army. Similarly, Hemingway hints at Frederic's love for Catherine through their conversations and the descriptions of their interactions, rather than through direct statements of love. Here are some quotes from "A Farewell to Arms" that display the use of the iceberg theory:

1. "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it, kills."(249) - This quote from the novel's narrator, Frederic Henry, implies the novel's themes of the human struggle against adversity and the fragility of life.
2. "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain."(225) - This line from Frederic implies his disillusionment with the rhetoric of war and the empty promises of heroism.
3. "The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it."(246) - This line from Frederic implies his acceptance of his own mortality and his appreciation for life.
4. "The world is not a pleasant place to be. It is beautiful, it is the only world, but you mustn't trust it."(7) - This quote, spoken by Frederic's friend Rinaldi, implies the novel's themes of the ambiguity of life and the need to be cautious.
5. "The summer nights were long and the sky was made of stars and he who could not work could at least lie down and look at them."(16) - This quote, describing the simple pleasures of life during wartime, implies the contrast between the beauty of nature and the ugliness of human conflict.
6. "I had gone to no place where the roads were frozen and hard as iron, where it was clear and cold and dry and the snow was dry and powdery and hare-tracks in the snow and the peasants took off their hats and called you Lord and there was good hunting."(3) - This quote, describing Frederic's

nostalgia for a simpler, more natural way of life, implies the novel's themes of the loss of innocence and the desire for escape.

These quotes rely on implication and understatement to convey complex ideas and emotions. They show how Hemingway's minimalist style can be deceptively simple, hiding layers of meaning and emotion beneath the surface. These quotes exhibit how Hemingway uses the iceberg theory in "A Farewell to Arms" to imply the emotional states of the characters and explore complex themes such as disillusionment, love, and loss. Through his mastery of minimalism and omission, Hemingway creates a nuanced and emotionally rich portrayal of the characters and their experiences during World War I.

### **The Iceberg Theory and The Sun Also Rises**

"The Sun Also Rises" explores themes of love, loss, and the disillusionment of the Lost Generation, a group of young people who came of age during World War I and were disillusioned by the war's destruction and the societal changes that followed. The novel's characters, including Jake Barnes and Brett Ashley, are aimless and searching for meaning in a world that no longer makes sense to them.

Hemingway uses the iceberg theory to explore these themes and to portray the characters' emotional states. Through his use of minimalism and omission, Hemingway conveys the depth of the characters' experiences and emotions, allowing the reader to understand their motivations and struggles. For example, Hemingway hints at the deep emotional connection between Jake and Brett through their conversations and interactions, without ever explicitly stating that they are in love. This approach allows the reader to feel the emotional weight of their relationship and to understand the complexities of their feelings for one another.

Similarly, Hemingway uses the iceberg theory to explore the sense of disillusionment and aimlessness that characterizes the Lost Generation. Through his descriptions of the character's travels, Hemingway conveys the sense of rootlessness and emptiness that pervades the lives of Jake and his friends.

The iceberg theory is a literary style that emphasizes showing rather than telling. In "The Sun Also Rises," Hemingway uses this style to convey the characters' emotions and thoughts through their actions, conversations, and descriptions, rather than through direct statements.

Here are some quotes from the novel that demonstrate the use of the iceberg theory:

1. "I mistrust all frank and simple people, especially when their stories hold together." (Chapter 1, p. 10) - This line from the novel's narrator, Jake Barnes, implies his own insecurities and his distrust of people who seem to have everything figured out.
2. "The road to hell is paved with unbought stuffed dogs." (Chapter 3, p. 65) - This line, spoken by a minor character, implies the novel's themes of materialism and the emptiness of modern life.
3. "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (Chapter 5, p. 133) - This famous line, spoken by Lady Brett Ashley, implies her longing for a different kind of life and her disappointment with the reality of her situation.
4. "You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another." (Chapter 13, p. 246) - This line, spoken by the character Georgette, implies the novel's themes of rootlessness and the futility of trying to escape one's problems.

5. "The sun also rises." (Chapter 14, p. 247) - This line, taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, is the novel's title and implies its themes of renewal and the cyclical nature of life.

### Iceberg Theory and the Old Man and the Sea

Ernest Hemingway's novel "The Old Man and the Sea" is an excellent example of the author's use of the iceberg theory in literature. The iceberg theory emphasizes the idea of showing rather than telling, and Hemingway uses this style in "The Old Man and the Sea" to convey the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of his characters through their actions, conversations, and descriptions, rather than through direct statements.

Here are some quotes from "The Old Man and the Sea" that illustrate the use of the iceberg theory:

1. "The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks." (9) - This description of the old man is simple and straightforward, but it implies much about his life and character.
2. "It was considered a virtue not to talk unnecessarily at sea, and the old man had always considered it so and respected it." (26) - This line suggests the old man's experience and the importance of the code of conduct among sailors.
3. "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." (10) - This quote implies that the old man's eyes reveal his inner strength and resilience.
4. "The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time, and he never thought about the past when he was doing it." (51) - This quote highlights the old man's determination and his focus on the present moment, rather than dwelling on past successes or failures.
5. "But man is not made for defeat," he said. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." (103) - This line is a direct statement of the novel's theme, but it is also an example of the iceberg theory, as it implies much about the old man's character and his struggle.

The above quotes explain how Hemingway uses the iceberg theory in "The Old Man and the Sea" to convey the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of the characters and to explore themes such as perseverance, determination, and the love of the sea. Through his masterful use of minimalism and omission, Hemingway creates a nuanced and emotionally rich portrayal of Santiago and his journey.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Iceberg Theory and Hemingway's writing demonstrate the power of suggestion and implication in literature. His writing style has left a profound impact on the literary world, shaping the way we understand and approach storytelling. Hemingway's minimalist style and deliberate use of omission continue to inspire writers to explore new and innovative ways of communicating complex ideas and emotions through literature. By revealing only what is necessary, the writer Hemingway's legacy as a writer continues to inspire and influence writers today, reminding us of the importance of economy and elegance in writing.

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