

An Analysis of Iceberg Theory in *Hills like White Elephants* by Hemingway

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Abstract: Iceberg Theory is Hemingway's unique writing theory. It presents readers how the most succinct writing style can create the strongest interaction. The thesis condensed the abstract concept of Iceberg Theory into concrete elements such as dialogues, wordings, sentence structure, narration, and etc. In order to assist people to understand the abstract implications and expressiveness of the theory. The analysis of the Iceberg Theory is carried out based on the short story *Hills like White Elephants*.

Keywords: Iceberg Theory; *Hills like White Elephants*; Specific application; Implication

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1. Introduction

In 1926, Hemingway's unique writing style took Europe by storm, following the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*. At that time, the superficially luxurious literary style was prevailing and overflowing. The fresh air of Hemingway's writing brought a revolution to the literary world. As well as what contributes to his achievement is the soul of his works, Iceberg Theory. Iceberg Theory is an art of simplicity. Therefore, in the following chapters, the thesis will analyze the application of Iceberg Theory in *Hills Like White Elephants* from multiple facets.

2. Background Information

Ernest Hemingway, a literary master, was born in 1899. His experiences in two cruel World Wars left an indelible mark on him, but they also provided him with a wealth of literary inspiration. He published a number of related works, one of which is *Hills Like White Elephants*. The majority of the dialogue in the story is between two lovers from the lost generation, where the boy planned to take a girl to get an abortion while the girl felt reluctant. Hemingway applied his Iceberg Theory into the creation of the story, making the article turn into a masterpiece ^[1].

3. The Implication of Iceberg Theory

In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway puts forward the Iceberg Theory. He attributed an iceberg's majestic power to its seven eighths below the surface, as well as comparing his narrative to such a magnificent iceberg. The one-eighth refers to concrete elements such as symbolic images, dialogues, actions, and environments, whereas the seven-eighth refers to the connotations behind words. When reading Hemingway's works, readers need to take their initiative to investigate. The following paragraphs will dissect the effects of Iceberg Theory on the short story *Hills Like White Elephants*.

4. The Application of Iceberg Theory in *Hills like White Elephants*

In this chapter, the research will systematically illustrate the actual application of the Iceberg Theory by listing concrete examples and offering evidence backup in the story *Hills like White Elephants*.

4.1. The one-eighth of the iceberg in *Hills like White Elephants*

The one-eighth of the iceberg theory mainly refers to how the author organizes diction, sentence structure, dialogues and how the author employs rhetorical phrases. These concrete elements enable readers to detect the personalities and mental activities of the characters, to understand the connotation of each image, and to infer the relationship between characters.

4.1.1. Preference of verbs and nouns

In *Hills like White Elephants*, the use of adjectives and adverbs are rare. Verbs and Nouns, on the contrary, are used all over the story. From Hemingway's point of view, nouns are concise and verbs are vivid. They are direct and natural, presenting things in a clear way it should be in real life. In reality, when people see two strangers having conversations, assumptions can only be made based on things seen and heard. Therefore, when reading the story through the author's camera, the readers feel as if they are hiding in a corner and secretly watching protagonists. For example, Jig said, "I'll scream" at the end of the story to express her dissatisfaction, due to the normality of when people lose control, they cannot speak but to scream to express themselves. Therefore, "scream" suggests that Jig was on the edge of a breakdown. By the same rule, "smile" is also key in observing Jig's mental activity. "Smile" appeared three times in the last few paragraphs. The first "smile" is Jig's thank to the waitress. The second "smile" and third "smile," however, suggests other things. Some readers think it's a self-comforting smile that Jig used to cheer herself up, some say it indicates the calmness of Jig because she already made a decision and prepared to face up to the future. The zero use of adjectives adds the mystery to the ending.

The nouns are also complex. Since important nouns in *Hills like White Elephants* have deeper symbolic meanings, they will be thoroughly discussed later. Here, this article mainly focuses on more general type of nouns. "White elephants" for example, usually refers to something precious but difficult to maintain. In this story, it refers to the unborn baby (Liu. 301) ^[2]. It was mentioned three times all by the young woman, Jig. The first "white elephant" was mentioned as they just sat by the table. The man then responded to it indifferently. Here, it presents two opposite opinions about the baby. The second time that Jig mentioned "white elephants" showed Jig still had some hope. However, the man still responded indifferently. For the third time, Jig became hesitant about the word, with the man ignoring her this time. This proves how selfish the man was and how confused Jig was.

4.1.2. Laconic Sentences

Another impressive and obvious feature of the Iceberg Theory is its explicit and terse sentence structure. The sentence structure in *Hills like White Elephants* is so succinct that almost no subordinate clause can be found in the text. There is no exaggerating embellishment.

Case 1: "The hills across the valley were long and white"

Case 2: "On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun."

The two sentences are organized in the simplest grammar. By reading them, readers could easily imagine a scene in front of them: Weather being hot, the train station was surrounded by bare hills with no tree in the neighborhood. Any extra word or grammar change will destroy the quiet and perfect image. Apart from creating an intuitionistic environment for readers in the text, laconic sentence structure also makes dialogues stand out, strengthening the influence of emotional eruption. The following part will analyze the drama-like dialogues.

4.1.3. Drama-like dialogues

In *Hills like White Elephants*, drama-like dialogues predominate the whole story. In Hemingway's eyes, dialogue is most direct and vivid in conveying emotions. What's more, the oral English shortens the distance between readers and the story. Look at the following dialogue:

"Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you don't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple."

"And you really want to?"

"I think it's the best thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you don't want to."

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

"I love you now. You know I love you."

"I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?"

"I'll love it. I like it now but I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry."

"If I do it, you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it is very simple."

This dialogue is very intense, as every sentence Jig said ended with a question mark, which indicates her anxiety. Jig couldn't seek a future promise from the man. She was so desperate and at a loss. Then, almost every sentence the man said began with a "I love you" and ended with a "but." According to common sense, the content that comes after "but" is the thing that truly matters. Although the man expressed his love and care for Jig, he immediately said "but I know it's perfectly fine." This dialogue peeled the hypocritical mask off his face and unveiled his selfish nature. What else, the time tense is also a key point. Jig used "you'll" repetitively while the man kept emphasizing "now," meaning Jig cared about their future but the man never thought about it. He cared about the operation only. At the end of this dialogue, Jig kept asking if the man would love her, which indicates that Jig cared about the man even more than the baby.

4.1.4. Symbolic images

Symbolism is the most unnoticeable and delicate feature in *Hills like White Elephants*. To have a clearer understanding of their symbolic meanings, the research classifies them into three groups: baby-related symbols, relationship-related symbols and life-related symbols. Baby-related symbols include "hills," "white elephants," "country" and "beads." The shape of "hills" is like a pregnant belly. Jig kept praising how lovely those hills were, trying to suggest that pregnancy was beautiful. "Country" was depicted as brown and dry in contrast to hills that were long and white. So "country" symbolizes Jig after the abortion. As pregnant Jig was so full of hopes while the other Jig was lifeless. "As illustrated previously, "white elephants" was the precious baby. It was a lovely burden. Since "beads" was the toy of children, it also stands for the baby.

Relationship-related symbols are "bamboo," "express", and "rails." "Bamboo" is hollow inside, symbolizing the emptiness of the relationship between the two youngsters. "Express" is fast, hinting some quick turns in their relationship. "Rails" implies the fate of the two lovers. They might be close to each other but they are heading separate ways. The girl craved for a stable family life, while the boy wanted pleasure and freedom.

Life-related symbols are "bags," "Anis del Toro," "licorice" and "absinthe." "Bags" stands for their past lifestyle: traveling and having fun. The men looked at "bags" a few times, showing that the man did not want to settle down. The latter three symbols are names of liquors. They all taste bittersweet, indicating the present situation of the two youngsters: the baby could be a new hope and joy but they had to get rid of it.

Symbols help bring out the theme or topic of the story. As well as the theme is the left seven eighths of the iceberg, which is the main focus of the following analysis.

4.2. The Seven Eighths of the Iceberg in *Hills like White Elephants*

As mentioned earlier in the article, the seven-eighths refers to the abstract expressiveness of Hemingway's designs which are presented as objective narration, rich emotion, devoid of information and profound theme in *Hills like White Elephants*. The following chapters show how these elements sublime the artistry of the work.

4.2.1. Objective narration and rich emotion

In Hemingway's works, he designs stories with no trace of narrator. There is only narration existing to let readers play with their imaginations (Zhuang, 200) [3]. From Hemingway's point of view, the sense of existence of narrators will impose some subjective thoughts and feelings on readers. Then readers are very likely to change their stand in the very beginning. In Hemingway's works, readers experience freedom. His pen is like a camera making films for our eyes. A million people can have a million attitudes towards his stories. In *Hills like White Elephants*, the narrator might be anyone, be it some waiter or some guest. He hides so well that readers pay attention only to the conversation in front of them. While reading, readers may want to reach out to Jig. They closely feel the fight, the anger and the sense of desolation Jig was feeling. Narration with no narrator might be the cleverest way of guaranteeing a story's objectivity.

This kind of objectivity ensures we decide how we feel. Hemingway always suppresses his own emotion or any possible subjective emotion to let the readers act as the lead. With the selfless intention, he received explanations by standing aside, reaped love and care by ignoring, and achieved emotional blast through indifference. Look at the following conversation in *Hills like White Elephants*:

"It tastes like licorice," the girl said and put the glass down.

"That's the way with everything."

"Yes," said the girl. "Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe."

This short conversation revolves around "liquor". Hemingway wrote it in the coolest manner. However, the mental activity of the girl seems obvious to anyone. She was sad and upset. A baby and a family meant joy and happiness to her all the time, and she anticipated it for a long time. But when it truly occurred, the man she loved was so determined to destroy everything she had ever wanted.

The most objective and cold-blood narration leaves the biggest room for readers to hate, to like and to sympathize, and that is part of the magical seven eighths under the surface of the sea.

4.2.2. Devoid of information and profound theme

Devoid information means that the author left out direct descriptions of feelings of the characters to reap emotions coming from readers. It isn't written in words but the absence of feelings and information interacts with readers in an unlimited degree.

In *Hills like White Elephants*, the author didn't tell us who the two lovers are. However, readers could infer that from their dialogues. For example, "It's just to let the air in" suggests they were talking about the abortion. And by observing the seat they chose, it can be inferred that abortion was unacceptable to the mass and the society in Spain at that time. All of a sudden, the time background becomes clear. In conclusion, Hemingway left out things that readers could add to the context based on their life experiences.

At the end of the story, no one knew the final ending of the two youngsters. A million people have a million guesses. Devoid of information makes readers feel they own the story themselves. It becomes one of their life experiences. Finally, devoid of information never really affects the theme. On the contrary, the voice speaking for the facts and the theme is made the most resonant, thus subliming the theme.

5. Conclusion

Although *Hills like White Elephants* has the most vivid characters, the plainest language, the most dramatic dialogues and the deepest thoughts. But every element extremely on-point. One eighth of the story attracts the attention of every reader and the other seven eighths arouse the enthusiasm of theirs. Each element

contained in Iceberg Theory make Hemingway's works writings more artistic and reading more adventurous.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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