

## MINIMALISM

Minimalism has minimal importance.

Minimalism was a fashion during the 1980s, the literary equivalent of a style in clothes wear designed by Gordon Lish, an editor at Knopf who promoted chosen Minimalists, especially attractive young women, in an elite New York journal called *The Journal*--the epitome of pretense. Frederick Barthelme, brother of Donald, is a respectable Minimalist, as are others. But Minimalism is an aesthetic of surfaces—flat, dull, monotonal and materialistic. No heart, no soul. The consciousness induced by Minimalism is lobotomized. The star client of Gordon Lish was Raymond Carver.

At first Minimalism was said to be imitation Hemingway--by people ignorant of Hemingway. The actual Hemingway was economical through understatement. Meanings are implied rather than stated. His understatement sustains a tension between the literal and the figurative meanings of words, as in poetry. He gives “tips” that evoke a deep substructure like an iceberg. As implications cohere the narrative becomes allegorical as in *The Old Man and the Sea*. To readers with depth perception, Hemingway at his best is maximal. He evokes a maximum of meaning with a minimum of words, whereas Minimalism evokes a minimum of meaning because it remains on the surface of perception with no symbolism, no figurative language, no submerged iceberg of implications.

During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, aspiring writers found Hemingway too challenging to imitate. Raymond Carver became the revered model in creative writing programs and Minimalism, an oversimplification of his style, became the fashion. Carver excels at realistic dialogue. Imitators did not have to come up with any metaphors or know much about literary history. Even so, in perhaps his best story, “Cathedral,” Carver far transcended Minimalism. Some critics have expanded the school of Minimalists, trying to make much of little by including writers such as Jerzy Kosinski, a Polish immigrant who was minimal because he had a very limited vocabulary.

Michael Hollister (2015)