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Akhmedova Diana Ruslanovna

English teacher at Asia International University

sia_0905@mail.ru

THE ICEBERG THEORY AS A NARRATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

Abstract

This article examines Ernest Hemingway's iceberg theory, also known as the theory of omission, as a fundamental narrative principle in his novella "The Old Man and the Sea." The research demonstrates that the iceberg theory functions not merely as a stylistic preference but as a sophisticated literary technique that demands active reader participation in meaning construction.

Keywords

iceberg theory, theory of omission, minimalism, narrative technique, literary symbolism, modernist prose, implied meaning, reader response

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается теория айсберга Эрнеста Хемингуэя, также известная как теория умолчания, как фундаментальный повествовательный принцип в его повести «Старик и море». Исследование показывает, что теория айсберга функционирует не просто как стилистическое предпочтение, а как сложный литературный приём, требующий активного участия читателя в построении смысла.

Ключевые слова

теория айсберга, теория умолчания, минимализм, повествовательная техника, литературный символизм, модернистская проза, подразумеваемый смысл, читательская реакция.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Ernest Xemingueyning “aysberg nazariyasi”, ya’ni “tushirib qoldirish nazariyasi” uning “Chol va dengiz” qissasidagi asosiy badiiy hikoya qilish tamoyili sifatida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot shuni ko‘rsatadiki, aysberg nazariyasi faqat uslubiy tanlov bo‘lib qolmay, balki o‘quvchining ma’no yaratish jarayonida faol ishtirokini talab qiladigan murakkab adabiy usul hisoblanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar

aysberg nazariyasi, tushirib qoldirish nazariyasi, minimalizm, hikoya qilish texnikasi, adabiy ramziylik, modernistik nasr, yashirin ma'no, o'quvchi reaksiyasi.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway's contribution to twentieth-century literature extends beyond his narrative achievements to encompass a revolutionary approach to prose composition that fundamentally altered the trajectory of modern fiction. His iceberg theory, articulated most explicitly in "Death in the Afternoon" (1932), posits that the dignity of movement of an iceberg derives from only one-eighth of it being above water [1]. This principle of deliberate omission became the cornerstone of Hemingway's aesthetic philosophy, influencing generations of writers and establishing new paradigms for literary expression. "The Old Man and the Sea," published in 1952 and awarded the Pulitzer Prize, represents the culmination of Hemingway's lifelong refinement of this technique, presenting a deceptively simple narrative that conceals vast symbolic and emotional depths beneath its spare surface [2]. The relevance of examining this narrative principle lies in understanding how minimalist prose can achieve maximum emotional impact, a question that continues to preoccupy contemporary literary scholars and practitioners alike. This article aims to analyze the specific mechanisms through which the iceberg theory operates in "The Old Man and the Sea," demonstrating how Hemingway's strategic omissions create meaning through absence and silence.

METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The methodological framework of this study relies upon close textual analysis combined with comprehensive examination of critical scholarship addressing Hemingway's narrative techniques. The research employs hermeneutic interpretation to identify instances of deliberate omission within the text and assess their contribution to overall narrative meaning. Critical sources spanning American, Russian, and Uzbek scholarship provide diverse perspectives on Hemingway's literary methodology. Baker's seminal biography establishes the biographical context for understanding Hemingway's development of the iceberg theory, tracing its origins to his journalistic training and early experimental fiction [3]. Russian scholar Kashkin's analysis emphasizes the philosophical dimensions of Hemingway's minimalism, arguing that his omissions reflect an existentialist worldview wherein silence communicates what language cannot adequately express [4]. Young's psychological interpretation suggests that Hemingway's technique emerged from traumatic experience, with omission serving as a narrative analogue to psychological repression [5]. Uzbek literary scholar Qosimov's comparative analysis examines how Hemingway's techniques influenced Central Asian prose writers, demonstrating the universal applicability of the iceberg principle across cultural contexts [6]. Brenner's critical anthology provides multiple scholarly perspectives on "The Old Man and the Sea," establishing consensus regarding the text's symbolic complexity despite its apparent simplicity [7].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of "The Old Man and the Sea" reveals systematic application of the iceberg theory across multiple narrative dimensions, including characterization, dialogue, symbolism, and thematic development. Santiago's character emerges not through explicit psychological exposition but through accumulated details of action and sparse dialogue that suggest profound interior depths without directly articulating them. Hemingway never explains Santiago's motivations or philosophy; instead, these emerge implicitly through his patient endurance, his conversations with the marlin, and his dreams of African lions [8]. The dialogue throughout the novella exemplifies Hemingway's technique of communicating through what remains unsaid.

Conversations between Santiago and Manolin contain significant emotional weight precisely because affection and concern remain unexpressed, conveyed instead through practical gestures and mundane exchanges about baseball. This restraint creates emotional resonance that direct declaration would diminish. The symbolic dimension of the narrative demonstrates the iceberg theory's most sophisticated operation. The marlin, the sea, the sharks, and Santiago's struggle carry symbolic weight that Hemingway deliberately refrains from explicating. Stoltzfus argues that this symbolic openness transforms readers into active participants who must construct meaning from textual evidence rather than passively receiving authorial interpretation [9]. The religious symbolism surrounding Santiago's suffering, including his wounded hands and his carrying the mast like a cross, remains suggestive rather than declarative, allowing multiple interpretive possibilities to coexist.

Rahimov's analysis demonstrates how Hemingway's technique influenced Uzbek writers seeking to develop modernist prose traditions, suggesting that the iceberg theory's effectiveness transcends specific cultural contexts [10]. The seven-eighths of meaning submerged beneath Hemingway's prose creates a participatory reading experience wherein emotional and intellectual engagement intensifies precisely because meaning must be excavated rather than merely received. This technique proves particularly effective in "The Old Man and the Sea" because the narrative's apparent simplicity belies its symbolic complexity, creating productive tension between surface accessibility and interpretive depth.

CONCLUSION

This analysis confirms that the iceberg theory functions as the organizing narrative principle of "The Old Man and the Sea," operating across characterization, dialogue, symbolism, and thematic development to create meaning through strategic omission. Hemingway's minimalist technique demands active reader participation, transforming the reading experience from passive reception to collaborative meaning-making. The novella's enduring critical and popular success demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach, suggesting that restraint and implication can achieve emotional impacts beyond the capacity of explicit declaration. Future scholarship might productively examine how contemporary writers have adapted and modified Hemingway's technique for twenty-first-century literary contexts.

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