



LACONICISM AND MINIMALISM AS DEFINING FEATURES OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S STYLE

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Abstract: This article explores laconicism and minimalism as central stylistic features of Ernest Hemingway's prose, with a particular focus on *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway's "iceberg principle" is analyzed as a method through which brevity and omission generate depth and reader engagement. The study distinguishes between lexical, syntactic, and compositional levels of laconicism and shows how minimalism functions in dialogue, narrative detail, and characterization. Examples from the novel are provided in both English and Uzbek translation to illustrate how meaning is shaped across linguistic boundaries. Drawing on critical scholarship, the article situates Hemingway within the modernist tradition and considers the challenges his style presents for translation studies. The findings highlight Hemingway's enduring significance for literary stylistics and modern narrative theory.

Keywords: Ernest Hemingway, laconicism, minimalism, iceberg principle, stylistics, translation, modernist prose

Twentieth-century American literature witnessed radical stylistic innovation, with Ernest Hemingway emerging as one of the most distinctive voices of modernism. His prose is striking for its simplicity, precision, and restraint, which sharply contrast with the elaborate language of many of his contemporaries. Instead of ornamental vocabulary and complex syntax, Hemingway employed brevity and understatement. These qualities have been associated with two interrelated stylistic tendencies: laconicism, the use of concise, economical expression¹, and minimalism, the creation of meaning through omission².

The word laconic originates from ancient Laconia, home of the Spartans, who were famous for their terse, sharp replies. In literary stylistics, laconicism refers to economy of words without sacrificing clarity. Scholars distinguish three levels: lexical laconicism, syntactic laconicism, and compositional laconicism³. Minimalism, although related, goes further. As Frederick R. Karl notes, it is "a style that foregrounds omission, allowing silence and absence to carry as much weight as explicit statement." Hemingway himself articulated this principle in the so-called "iceberg theory"⁴: only a small portion of meaning appears on the





surface of the text, while the bulk lies hidden beneath, waiting to be discovered by the reader.

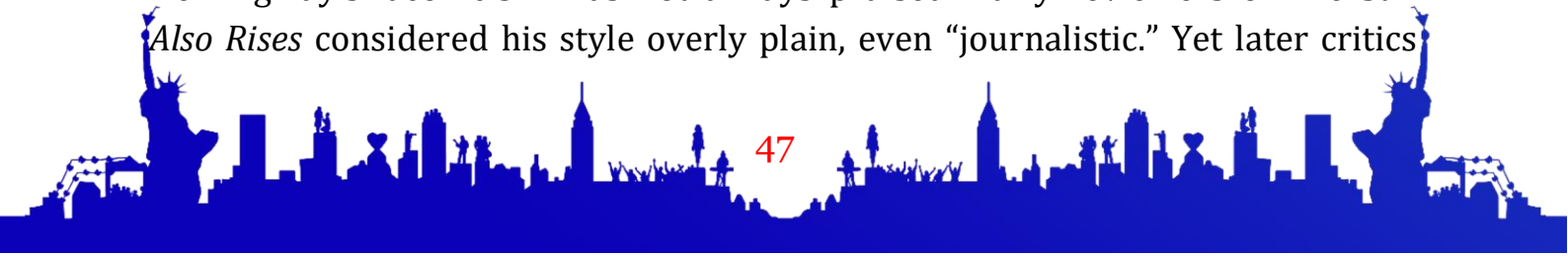
Hemingway's lexical choices favor directness. For example: "*He came. He left. He returned.*" The sequence communicates events without modifiers or commentary. At the syntactic level, Hemingway often compresses entire episodes into short clauses: "He arrived in the evening, left in the morning." This compactness stands in contrast to the elaborate sentences of William Faulkner, illustrating Hemingway's preference for clarity and restraint.

Compositional laconicism is equally evident. Instead of extended descriptions, Hemingway selects essential details: "His hands trembled. His eyes were dark." These two sentences imply fatigue and anxiety, leaving the reader to construct psychological depth behind the minimal surface description⁵.

Minimalism is especially visible in dialogue. Consider the short exchange: "*Did you come?*" – "*Yes.*" – "*Will you return?*" – "*Maybe.*" The brevity of the dialogue reveals hesitation and tension without any explicit commentary. Similarly, a simple description such as "We got into the car and drove down the Boulevard. It was hot, and the windows were open" creates atmosphere and psychological undertones with minimal words⁶.

Jake Barnes, the protagonist of *The Sun Also Rises*, embodies characterization through brevity. When he states, "I was a little drunk. Not drunk in any positive sense but just enough to be careless," the plain wording conveys alienation and existential fatigue⁷. Uzbek scholar Jo'raev emphasizes that such restraint compels the reader to become an active interpreter⁸. Hemingway's laconic and minimalist style has had immense influence on later writers such as Raymond Carver and Cormac McCarthy. For translation studies, Hemingway poses special challenges. Uzbek translators must decide whether to preserve brevity at the risk of ambiguity or expand at the risk of losing stylistic force. As Bassnett notes, translation often requires a "creative compromise"⁹.

Minimalism in Hemingway's fiction cannot be fully understood without reference to the broader cultural movements of the twentieth century. In visual art, minimalism emphasized geometric simplicity and the rejection of unnecessary detail. Just as a minimalist painting forces the viewer to contemplate space and silence, Hemingway's sparse sentences demand interpretive participation from the reader. Both approaches transform absence into meaning, demonstrating that omission itself is a form of expression. Hemingway's laconicism was not always praised. Early reviewers of *The Sun Also Rises* considered his style overly plain, even "journalistic." Yet later critics





recognized that his restraint created intensity and subtlety unmatched by more verbose authors.

Another key dimension of Hemingway's minimalism is the way silence itself becomes a narrative tool. His characters often reveal more through what they do not say than through spoken words. Short, unfinished dialogues, moments of hesitation, and withheld explanations give readers insight into the unspoken struggles of the characters. In *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, Jake Barnes frequently avoids direct statements about his own condition. Instead of explaining his trauma, he remains silent, and this absence of comment forces the reader to confront the weight of what is left unsaid. Silence here functions as a form of psychological realism, suggesting that some emotions and experiences are too painful to articulate.

Such moments highlight how Hemingway transforms absence into meaning. By leaving gaps, he compels the reader to fill them with imagination and empathy. The result is a style that is both concise and profoundly evocative. Far from being a limitation, silence becomes one of Hemingway's most powerful expressive devices, ensuring that the brevity of his prose resonates with emotional depth.

Conclusion

Laconicism and minimalism are not incidental features of Hemingway's prose but central to his artistic vision. By employing short sentences, ordinary vocabulary, and omissions that invite interpretation, he achieves expressive power with remarkable economy. The iceberg principle ensures that unspoken meaning outweighs explicit description. Thus, Hemingway demonstrates that brevity can generate depth, silence can be eloquent, and omission can be as powerful as expression.

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