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**SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO LITERARY ANALYSIS  
(BASED ON O'HENRY "THE LAST LEAF")**

**АДАБИЙ ТАЛДООДОГУ СЕМИОТИКАЛЫК ЖОЛДОРУ  
(О. ГЕНРИНИН «АКЫРКЫ ЖАЛБЫРАК» ЧЫГАРМАЛАРМАСЫНЫН НЕГИЗИНДЕ)**

**СЕМИОТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОДХОД К ЛИТЕРАТУРНОМУ АНАЛИЗУ (НА ОСНОВЕ  
ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯ О'ГЕНРИ "ПОСЛЕДНИЙ ЛИСТ")**

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**Аннотациясы:** Макалa адабий талдоодогу семиотикалык багытка арналып, О'Генринин «Акыркы жалбырак» аттуу аңгемесинин негизинде жүргүзүлөт. О'Генри чыгармасында көптөгөн семиотик белгилерди жогорку чыгармачылык менен колдонуу аркылуу окурмандын чыгармадагы каармандардын сезимин, азабын, ички дүйнөсүн, психологиялык абалын тереңдетип түшүнүүгө жардам берген. Бул семиотикалык белгилер диалогдорду, чыгарманын сөздүк курамын, сүрөттөлөрдү, синтаксисттик конструкцияларды жана көркөм сөз каражаттарын камтыйт.

**Негизги сөздөр:** символизм, абаырайы сүрөттөө, диалог, полисиндетон, асиндетон, куттүрбөгөн аягы, персонификация.

**Аннотация:** Статья посвящена анализу семиотического подхода в литературном анализе на основе рассказа О'Генри "Последний лист". О'Генри мастерски использовал ряд семиотических сигналов, позволившие читателю понять чувства, страдания, внутренний мир, психологическое состояние своих героев. Эти знаковые сигналы включают в себя использование диалогов, вокабуляр, описание погоды, синтаксические конструкции (использование бессоюзия, многосоюзия и т.д.), образного языка (метафор, персонификации, и т.д ...), символы.

**Ключевые слова:** символизм, описание погоды, диалог, полисиндетон, асиндетон, эффект обманутого ожидания, персонификация.

**Abstract:** The paper is devoted to the study of semiotic approach in literary analysis on the basis of O'Henry "The Last Leaf". O'Henry masterfully used a number of semiotic signals that help the reader understand the feelings, sufferings, inner world, psychological state of his characters. These semiotic signals included dialogues, vocabulary, weather depiction, syntactical constructions (the use of asyndeton, polysyndeton, etc.), figurative language (metaphors, personification, etc...), symbols.

**Key words:** symbolism, weather depiction, dialogues, polysyndeton, asyndeton, effect of deceived expectation, personification.

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Every author has his/her individual style. W. S. Maugham's style can be defined as "story-within a story" or "after-dinner table-talk-intonation", etc. Ernest Hemingway was a writer whose style

was very different to that of most writers in his time. Instead of using more drawn out, overly descriptive writing, E. Hemingway's stories were more of a "get to the point" style. The critics call

E. Hemingway's style as "iceberg", i.e. the main idea is hidden and the reader should read between the lines. O'Henry is famous for his style known as "effect of deceived expectation".

O'Henry is one of the greatest American short story writers. O'Henry's stories are famous for their humorous language and an effect of deceived expectation or surprise endings. The plots of his stories are exceedingly clever and interesting; humor abounds, and the ending is always surprising and unexpected. *The Last Leaf* is a story of the real friendship and self-sacrifice between three poor artists. The moral of the story is as follows: despite the difficulties of life, people should never give up hopes and try to overcome the hardships and obstacles, and pursue a better tomorrow.

The story is about two young girls, Sue and Johnsy, who live together in Greenwich Village in New York city. Johnsy falls ill with pneumonia. She believes that as soon as all the leaves, that she can see outside of her window, fall down, then she will die as well. She counts the leaves every day as they fall, but one remains, even after all the others die off. Johnsy keeps watching that "last leaf" but it never falls off the tree. She finally becomes convinced that she has been selfish and morose waiting for her own death, and decides to suck it up and get better. If that little leaf could hold on for so long, so could she. The irony of the story is that the last leaf was painted on the window by Mr. Behrman, an old artist and a friend of the girls. Mr. Behrman climbed up on a ladder and painted the leaf in the cold and rain and caught pneumonia himself and died.

The topic to be discussed in this paper deals with semiotic approach to literary analysis in O'Henry's *The Last Leaf*.

O'Henry uses dialogues, vocabulary, weather depiction, syntactical constructions (the use of asyndeton, polysyndeton, etc.), metaphors, personification, symbols that contribute to the semiotics in literary analysis of the story.

O'Henry skillfully managed to portray his characters in this story. There are several characters in the story: Johnsy, Sue, Doctor and Behrman, and a non-living character Mr. Pneumonia. Johnsy and Sue are roommates. Johnsy falls ill with pneumonia and she has an idea that she will die when the last

ivy leaf falls down. However, Sue that is the very optimist, tells the painter, Behrman, about the problems and the painter draws an ivy leaf against the wall. Behrman paints such a real leaf against the wall that Johnsy believes it to be real and soon she recovers from her disease. However, Behrman dies of pneumonia in the hospital.

The usage of **dialogues** between the characters also shows the atmosphere and the mood in this story. Dialogues are considered to be a type of indirect characterization, which can also contribute to the semiotics in literary analysis. In the story under analysis the author's narration is interrupted by dialogues of the characters; inner thoughts of some characters are imperceptibly interwoven with narration. Dialogues always occur between the two people who talk face to face. The mostly action of this story proceeds with the dialogues of Johnsy and Sue.

*"Try to sleep," said Sue, I must call Behrman."*

*"What is it, dear?" asked Sue."*

*"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy.*

As it was mentioned above, **weather depiction** also contributes to the semiotics in the literary analysis. There are universal symbols in weather depiction, like winter and snow depicting pureness and coldness at the same time; summer and heat depicting freedom and love adventures; autumn and rain depicting the end of love and nostalgia; spring and rain and first flowers depicting something new, romantic relations, new life, new feelings, new love, etc. To depict the worsening of relations between the husband and the wife, the tense atmosphere in the family relations, E. Hemingway uses weather depiction, using the phrases: *It was getting dark. It was quite dark now and still raining in the palm trees.* Using the colour symbol *dark* in weather depiction E. Hemingway masterfully reveals the feeling of tension and her husband dominance and indifference to her.

However, these universal symbols and weather depiction may have additional or opposite meanings in some particular texts. For example, an American woman writer, Ann Beattie, in her story "Snow" by using the image of snow as a symbol, shows that love as snow can be white, i.e. pure love; it can be warm, i.e. warm relations between

people. However, like snow, some love stories have an ending; like snow that can melt in spring, love is not always forever. Then spring comes. As a universal symbol, spring is something new: new life, new love. Usually in spring, the Nature awakens from its long winter sleep. The trees are in blossom. Countless sparrows start twittering in the eaves. The tops of trees are aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of the spring is in the air. The ground is covered with beautiful flowers. It looks like a Persian carpet: white, brown, red, purple, yellow colors. However, in this particular story, spring represents a different symbol; it is a symbol of the end of their fascinating love. With years passed away, the sense of respect remains, but Love is gone. Therefore, the weather depiction plays one of the important roles in the story, since it reveals the character's inner state, emotions, state, and the atmosphere in general. Rain symbolizes here sadness, loneliness, unhappiness.

To depict despair and pain that the characters experience, O'Henry uses the depiction of autumn and rain in the story "The Last Leaf". In late autumn leaves usually fall down on the ground. Trees become bare. Therefore, autumn is the mortal season for leaves. Moreover, in autumn it rains a lot. Rain means tears or mourning on the dead.

As it was mentioned above, O'Henry uses **syntactical constructions** (the use of polysyndeton, etc.) that also contribute to the semiotics in literary analysis of the story.

Polysyndeton is a specific type of connection between the sentence components by one and the same conjunction which gives some rhythm to the utterance and makes the speech more melodic: *Johnsy's eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting - counting backward. "Twelve," she said, and little later "eleven"; and then "ten," and "nine"; and then "eight" and "seven", almost together.* The use of polysyndeton here creates an atmosphere of despair, the feeling that the end was coming soon.

In the following sentences below the author wanted to show the atmosphere of sadness, the atmosphere of despair and regret by using a number of polysyndeton: *The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see the*

*lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. And then, with the coming of the night the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves.*

"I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsy. "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die. You may bring me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and - no; bring me a hand-mirror first, and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook."

His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn't imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colours mixed on it, and - look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall.

O'Henry uses a number of **personification** in the story.

The story starts with the description of the surroundings of the setting of the story. In the very first line of this story, streets are personified by the writer but there streets symbolize human passions and relationships: *"The streets run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called 'places'."*

He personifies the disease Pneumonia to create in reader's mind a character with human traits to show all dangers of this disease. *That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy fingers. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown "places."*

Pneumonia is a serious kind of disease and may become the cause of death. Johnsy falls ill with pneumonia. Moreover, Behrman dies of it. *Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman.*

The author uses personification like *The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks* to show sad atmosphere. Warm summer days are over, the autumn is coming

to an end, and the winter that is cold is coming.

O'Henry uses **metaphors and similes** to show the inner state of Johnsy, her unwillingness to live and readiness to die: "*Johnsy was lying white and still as a fallen statue.*"

To characterize an old painter the author uses metaphor and allusion: "*Behrman had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along the body of an imp.*" Though in the story he was considered a failure in art, nevertheless he was compared with *Michelangelo* who is widely regarded as the most famous artist of the Italian Renaissance. It means that really Behrman was a genuine painter. Moreover, the leaf he painted and that saved Johnsy's life was a real masterpiece.

The author compares art and literature that are very close to each other on the level of their functions. "*Young artists must pave their way to art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young authors write to pave their way to literature.*"

The author uses a number of **symbols** in the story which are also signs in semiotics.

Leaf itself means life, nutrition and growth as well. Moreover as it is well known that leaves of ivy vine are used for healing coughing, lung diseases, including pneumonia. Therefore, the use of leaves of ivy vine but not the leaves of other tree is also the symbol that Johnsy's life will be sustained. The crawling of ivy vine upwards is also the symbol of hope, hope to survive: *An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. It was the last one on the vine. Still dark green near its stem, with its serrated edges tinted with the yellow of dissolution and decay, it hung bravely from the branch some twenty feet above the ground.*

The falling leaves symbolize despair. "*When the last one falls I must go, too.*" "*She was looking out the window and counting-counting backward.*"

The last leaf is the symbol of hope that empowers a person for having the strength to fight death. The last leaf of the ivy vine had the power to sustain Johnsy's life and Behrman had the power to sustain the last leaf by creating it. This art gave Johnsy the power to sustain her hope to live and indeed, until hope persists. *Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me a how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die.*" The Doctor said

to Sue, "*She's out of danger. You've won.*"

On the other hand, the word Last means very close to death or closely to be end. The life or growth of the tree or plant may be guessed through its branches and the condition of leaves. There were almost a hundred leaves clinging with the stem but they were falling due to autumn season.

Autumn is the mortal season for leaves. At the same time Johnsy fell ill with Pneumonia. Pneumonia is the symbol of death for human being and old Behrman dies of it. "*When the last one falls I must go, too.*" "*Mr. Behrman died of Pneumonia today in the hospital.*"

The symbol of shoes and icy cold is also used in this story. Shoes are the symbol of oppression, tyranny and death as well. The writer uses this symbol to show the death of Mr. Behrman. "*His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold.*"

Mr. Behrman himself is a symbol of true friend and family. He sacrificed his life to save the girl's life.

Bay of Naples is a symbol of dreams. When speaking about the Bay of Naples, people can not but say about it without enthusiasm. Writers and poets devote their stories and poems to it, composers – their songs, artists – their paintings. "*Sadie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples.*" "*She - she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day.*" said Sue.

There are sailboats gently gliding on surface of the sea for centuries accompanied by seagulls, and life here seems to be free and beautiful. Of course, some people remember Naples as a city of contrasts. Fans criticize city unanimously acknowledged. But nevertheless, the sea, however, is a fabulously beautiful.

The author uses **color symbolism** in the story. The use of white mouse symbolizes innocence and purity and means that Johnsy recovers. "*I have something to tell you, white mouse.*"

"*Johnsy was contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woolen shoulder scarf.*"

"*Old Behrman, with his red eyes...*"

"The last leaf" shows the theme of friendship and sacrifice. Friendship is such a relationship that is completed with the ties of sacrifice, sincerity, love, loyalties etc. Sue is friend of Johnsy and she progresses this relation through sacrifices.

*Said Sue, "Will you promise me to keep your eyes close, and not looked out the window until I am done working?"*

To resume, O'Henry masterfully used a number of semiotic signals that help the reader understand the feelings, sufferings, inner world, psychological state of his characters. Among these semiotic signals we can mention dialogues, vocabulary,

weather depiction, syntactical constructions (the use of asyndeton, polysyndeton, etc.), figurative language (metaphors, personification, etc...), symbols that contribute to the semiotics in literary analysis of the story.

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