



MIKHAIL BULGAKOV'S "HEART OF A DOG": DEFAMILIARIZATION THROUGH NARRATION

Gaurav Mor

PhD Scholar,

JNU, New Delhi, India

Abstract: This article analyses Mikhail Bulgakov's novel "The Heart of a Dog" through the formalist prism of the technique of defamiliarization. This literary technique was proposed by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, and is used to present the familiar in an unfamiliar way so as to break the automatic perception. Bulgakov presents us the story through the point of the view of a street dog, thus giving us a new perspective and a new unfamiliar vision of our familiar world.

Keywords: Defamiliarization, Bulgakov, Formalism

Introduction

Formalism is a school of literary criticism that emerged in the second decade of the 20th century. Two groups of Russian formalism were formed, the first of which was the Moscow Linguistic Circle which was founded in 1915. The leading figures of this group were Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev, who later helped found the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926. The second group was the Opojaz ('Society for the Study of Poetic Language') which was founded in 1916, whose leading figures were Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynyanov and Boris Eichenbaum. Russian formalists were interested in the concept of 'literariness' which can be described as a special linguistic effect in literature. The concept of literariness is quite important in the formalist theory, as described by the Russian formalist Roman Jakobson: "The object of study in literary science is not literature but 'literariness' that is, what makes a given work a literary work." [(Eichenbaum, 1971), as cited in (Miall, 2015)]. In other words, one can conclude that the object under study is not the literary work itself, but the form or the 'literariness' of the work. It is this literariness that makes a work literary and unique from the ordinary non-literary texts. Another concept developed by the formalists is the technique called defamiliarization or estrangement ('ostranenie' in Russian).

Defamiliarization is a literary technique that aims to take the reader out of the automatism of perception, that is, the technique violates the familiar perception of everyday life. This term was first introduced by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky in 1916 in his article "Art as Technique" which became the manifesto of the opojaz group. "Art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways" (Shklovsky, 1986). Defamiliarization or Estrangement is a literary technique that is presented in a story through the use of poetic language in the form of such techniques as metaphors, metonymies, images, etc. Formalists believe that poetic language or the language used in art is different from ordinary language, and therefore alienation becomes a

way to make an artistic text much deeper and different from ordinary. As Shklovsky himself says that “defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found” (Shklovsky, 1986)

Defamiliarization in Bulgakov’s novella

The defamiliarization technique was used by Bulgakov to create a satirical world from the point of view of a dog. The narration in the novella "Heart of a Dog" takes place from the point of view of a street dog called Sharik. This new view of the world or narrative from someone else's point of view opens up a new perspective and side. The narrative is used to show the familiar in a different way and disrupt the automatism of perception. Bulgakov employs the technique to expose the cruelty of this world through satire. Everything from people, weather, relationships between men and women to food is presented in a strange or unfamiliar way. Through the narration from the point of view of a speechless animal, we see the world as if we see it for the first time.

The story begins with the sounds of screaming and pain which force the reader to participate more in the story, and also force the reader to try to guess why the narrator is in pain. A riddle is a form of estrangement because it challenges an established form, so I think the very beginning of the narrative is estrangement itself. Defamiliarization is realized in the story in the form of absurdity. An experiment on a street dog, turning it into a human being is a strange look at the political and scientific experiments of early Soviet society. The dog seems to know about the political differences as well as he knows, for example, who the proletariat is. This is again a trick, because no one could imagine that a dog could be aware of human political and cultural ideas. The description of various streets of Moscow occurs through the description of the flavor of food. The dog has a keen sense of smell, so places in Moscow are described as they smell. In accordance with our usual ideas about how we see cities, a new and strange view of the city is used in the story. Sharik experiences shock, disgust and excitement when he observes the various aspects of human life. The dog describes Zina as a person who smells nice. Again, the use of the sense of smell to describe people is used as a way of a new look. The dog describes Philip Philipovich as a gentleman who is not afraid, who seems confident, but then he describes him by the smell of hospitals and cigars. Thus, we really see that the sense of smell plays an important role in describing people. The question of youth and age is again raised in the story through the act of the dog. The dog feels better and more agile just from the smell of salami. It seems to have rejuvenated him. The act of naming dogs is presented in a detached and absurd form, when the dog himself questions the basis of naming. Sharik, according to him, is a name for a dog that is well fed and has a house, and he is a street tramp who has nowhere to go and nothing to eat, so how could he be a Sharik.

We see social problems such as class struggle, gender issues, etc. The dog vividly describes the life of a typist. The first female character in this story is a typist who receives gifts from her lover and must obey his orders. There is no sexual liberation or choice for her, because how to make love is also determined by a man, not a woman. The narrator (the dog) also claims that she is in a disorderly state, since her income is less, and her salary is deducted. The typist doesn't even have the freedom to choose the underpants of her choice. This is an example of a human relationship that a dog sees. The reason why the typist's example is a distraction is that the observation of her life and attitude is conducted by a dog.

"Some bastard in a dirty white cap" (Bulgakov, 1968, p. 1) is a cook who in our perception is clean, organized and prepares various dishes for us, but is described as an evil being. The dog uses various metaphors to describe the cook. A metaphor is a device that makes things absurd and defamiliarized. The cook is a villainous figure in the life of a street dog as the cook constantly beats or pours boiling water on the dog. According to the dog, the cook is a "Greedy pig!" and a "Hard-faced crook" (Bulgakov, 1968, p. 1) The narrative uses onomatopoeia to show us the different feelings and emotions of the dog. People don't use sounds like a dog, so it makes the perception different and unique. The concept of time and day is shown to us through the smell of various dishes, as the dog guesses the time of day by smelling food. The dog considers summer a pleasant time, as the grass is good and green, and he can easily find food, as there are leftovers in some places. But winter is a sad and harsh time of year when there are fewer people on the streets, and wherever he tries to go, people push him or beat him. The winter wind is given a metaphorical representation of a cruel witch who

beats people with her broom. The dog is hurt and talks about philosophical concepts such as soul, heaven, hell. He also criticizes the janitors, because they represent an inferior breed of people whose goal is to disturb street dogs.

When the Professor or Philip Philipovich takes the dog with him to his building, the doorman lets the dog through. This is a surprise to him, as he expected regular mistreatment. The doorman is another villain in a dog's life, and therefore there is surprise and shock by this unique respectful treatment. This is a description of the doorman from the dog's point of view. The doorman is the defense of our building or the world, which becomes a villain in the dog's life. The image of the doorman is very familiar to us, but this description makes a terrifying impression on the reader, since we see the cruelty or inhumanity of the doormen's treatment of a street dog.

The events taking place in the professor's apartment again pass through the prism of the dog's perspective. People who come for treatment and their problems are described in an unfamiliar way. The doctor asks his patients to undress. It's normal for doctors to see their patients, but it seems strange to the dog. Sharik does not understand why the doctor wants to see them without clothes, and therefore thinks that perhaps this is a brothel. This representation of a clinic or a medical worker's apartment defamiliarizes our usual idea of doctors and treatment. The dog sees himself in the mirror and begins to be proud and happy about his appearance. He thinks that maybe his family is a good breed and probably royal. With the help of this, the concept of class consciousness, status, and elitism is satirically depicted. From the dog's point of view, the author makes us perceive and understand the everyday habit of seeing ourselves in the mirror, being aware of our heritage, etc. The sense of pride and snobbery in a dumb animal gives a satirical tone to the entire human perception of class and pride. Another striking example of defamiliarization in the novella is the description of the kitchen. The kitchen is an important part of our daily life, so we don't find anything unusual or strange in it. But from the animal's point of view, the kitchen is shown as a strange place. The ball sees the cook in the kitchen and sees the cooking process. The tone is a little scared or frightening, since the cook for him is an executioner who brutally cuts meat, while the dishes and stove seem noisy, fiery objects.

Thus, we see that normal concepts of life are portrayed in an unfamiliar manner in the novella 'Heart of a Dog' through the use of narration.

References

- Bulgakov, M. (1968). *Heart of a Dog*. New York: Grove Press.
- Eichenbaum, B. M. (1971). The theory of the formal method. In L. M. (eds), *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*. Chicago: Ann Arbor.
- Miall, D. S. (2015). Literariness. In R. H. Jones, *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Shklovsky, V. (1986). Art as Technique. In R. C. (ed), *Contemporary Literary Criticism. Modernism Through Postmodernism*. New York: Longman.