

# *Poetic Defamiliarization in D.H. Lawrence's Bat and Elizabeth Bishop's The Fish*

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**Abstract:** This paper gives a close-reading analysis of the symbolizations of animals that appear in Lawrence's and Bishop's works. The application of defamiliarization is combined with similes that compare animals with other objects and symbolizations that deliver messages and emotions from writers. Lawrence's *Bat* applies similes that compare bats with artificial objects that seem weird to describe an animal, but he intentionally creates such an alienated and estranged sensation to defamiliarize the figure of the bat to suggest an anti-anthropocentrism perspective of viewing the bat. Furthermore, Lawrence applies the symbolism of the darkness of the bat to contrast with other symbolizations of brightness, such as swallows, to give his praises to the bat. In Bishop's *The Fish*, Bishop applies similes from a perceptual perspective that imaginatively defamiliarizes the entrails of fish with vivid colors and peonies. While the entrails of fish are usually viewed as valueless and ignorable, Bishop offers a new perspective on finding their aesthetic value. Bishop's creative esthetic pattern could be a resistance to traditional views and hegemonic ideas that used to dominate people's thoughts. This paper concludes that Lawrence's and Bishop's poetic defamiliarizations indicate modernist ideas that reveal the reality concealed by traditional ideas by presenting new perspectives on viewing and appreciating things that bear prejudices.

**Keywords:** defamiliarization, perception, anti-anthropocentrism, D.H. Lawrence, Elizabeth Bishop

## 1. Introduction

Generally speaking, defamiliarization is the use of artistic techniques to make something people are familiar with not that familiar in an artistic way to encourage new perspectives on thinking. The process by which defamiliarization works is to get rid of the "stereotype" of things writers apply defamiliarization to and, therefore, to inspire iconoclastic views on things that people are supposed to be familiar with. In other words, it is a process of moving away from stale habits of thinking and treating things while evoking perceptions of not only being alienated from those concepts they learn from textbooks but also further introspections of anthropocentrism that are used to apply tags on natural elements that make people forget or ignore what this world consists of.

This paper is to give a comparative study on the application of defamiliarization techniques to animals and natural elements given by *Bat* by Lawrence and *The Fish* by Bishop. Both poems target animals, which are traditionally supposed to be away from anthropological terms such as "civilized" or "perceptual". However, such a stereotype could be an implication of anthropocentrism. Both

poets challenge it with two distinct types of defamiliarization, which alienate animals from stereotypes. Lawrence applies artificial objects such as gloves and umbrellas to blur the visual distinction between bats and man-made objects. He offers a pattern of wild animals visually materialized as if they partially come from human society to imply that humans are not yet completely separated from animals, though humans themselves usually deny or ignore it. Instead of applying materialistic defamiliarization as Lawrence does, Bishop offers it in a perceptual way as she cuts a fish in her imagination. Her thoughts give a visual pattern of color scattering wildly in a defamiliarized form that is not supposed to appear on a fish. Bishop's defamiliarized pattern inspires a new perspective on treating animals that humans are supposed to be familiar with. She offers detailed descriptions of both the outer appearance and inner arrangement with imagination and defamiliarizes the visual impact based on that. Though their defamiliarization techniques work in different ways, both of those are made to argue against anthropocentrism, which limits the development of thoughts and perceptions that people should have been able to make, as Lawrence or Bishop does.

Few attempts have been made so far to combine poetic defamiliarization with anti-anthropocentrism, and this paper is to offer a tentative study from which a conclusion of how defamiliarization could deliver anti-anthropocentric perceptions in modern poetry could be inferred. This paper will give a comparative study based mainly on the visual pattern, symbolism, perceptual indication, and other writing techniques to analyze how those two distinguished works make approaches to anti-anthropocentrism from animals, how their defamiliarizing techniques could be similar or distinct from each other, and how they would contribute to modernism and literal criticism.

## **2. General Overview of the Definition of Defamiliarization and Poetic Defamiliarization**

The official definition of defamiliarization has so far been debated. One of the most universally acknowledged interpretations of defamiliarization is from "Art as Technique" by Victor Shklovsky. Shklovsky defines defamiliarization as an artistic technique that interprets an imaginative alienation of objects through poetic language, which is to deliver a visualization out of any traditional view. Surely, defamiliarization should first be applied to objects that people are familiar with, and its objection, which is explained further by Shklovsky after that, is to "create a vision of the object instead of serving as a means of knowing it" [1]. In other words, the process of defamiliarization involves pretending to see the object for the first time and concentrating on the impression it delivers in a visualized form, which should simultaneously avoid being either literally or perceptually prosaic in an artistic form while presenting. One of the most important processes of defamiliarization is to give a sensation of being perceptually separated from the daily life and tags that people are familiar with. Erik Martin provides "estrangement" as an alternative term for understanding the essence of defamiliarization in "Alienation/Defamiliarisation/Estrangement (ostranenie)": "show life and things as they really are" [2]. For instance, when defamiliarizing a garbage truck, the first step is to jump out of any related concepts concerning vehicles, and then the garbage truck is supposed to be a big, rectangular, dirty, can-like metal "thing". By applying the defamiliarization technique, the image of the garbage truck is presented from an "estranged" perspective. Defamiliarization is to give a different pattern of reality to inspire the introspection of stereotypes of daily objects and doctrinal impressions people usually hold on them, to get rid of the influence of "automatized rational recognition," and to seek the original perception of reaching a "natural" object [2]. Poetic defamiliarization, to expand on the previous concept, is to apply this technique in the poetic field. However, poetries are created in different periods, from the very first appearance of literal material to contemporary society, while the concept of defamiliarization shows up only after the twentieth century when Shklovsky mentions it, and therefore poetries that contain defamiliarization techniques are usually modern ones, though some other poetries given in different eras might be suitable for analysis of defamiliarization as well. Poetic

language offers a great platform for defamiliarization to develop, as poems are naturally organized with quaintness and elegance. Shklovsky cites Aristotle to imply that poetic language should be fabulous and strange in the first place [1]. Poetic language is fabulous, so that "poetic definition should as well work in a fabulous way. On the other hand, defamiliarizing an object is different from simply making it "undecorated" or "uncivilized". Defamiliarization is a rhetorical method that should avoid creating prosaic language, especially when it is applied in the poetic field.

### 3. Analysis of *Bat* by D.H. Lawrence

D.H. Lawrence's stroke has been long recognized as idiosyncratic. His works could always render alienated and estranged perspectives regarding familiar objects that show up in people's daily lives. Alan Golding provides an aesthetic description of Lawrence's poems as "shedding an old skin and growing a new" [3]. Lawrence is good at describing the intrinsic features of something or someone on which the extrinsic figures are universally established by society, as a process of which would be how defamiliarization works. "Obscurity, incommunicability, untranslatability" that make readers feel "alienated and lost" are sensational impacts delivered by his verses [4]. *Bat* given by Lawrence provides an example of applying defamiliarization on an ugly, sometimes even unpropitious animal that most people may not feel comfortable with. The very first visualization of the bat is proffered in a defamiliarized form. In the fifth stanza, Lawrence gives a pattern of the visualization of the flying tracks of the bat as a "circle swoop", "quick parabola", and "A dip to the water" [5]. Notice that Lawrence does not introduce the concept of the bat the first time but chooses other words suitable for depicting the visual effect brought by the bat flying in the air. This flyable, estranged "thing" gives swoops and parabolas above the background environment that already turns dim as dawn approaches, and Lawrence's similes of bat's flying tracks vary constantly to indicate that this "thing" is full of power and agility. Lawrence mindfully avoids mentioning the word "bat" directly in the first place because it may help to refer to any doctrinal concepts of the bat, such as physical shape, living habits, or other traits that could be used to perceptually build up the figure of the bat. On the one hand, it helps to oppress the emotion temporarily and lead to a burst of laud later in the ninth stanza; on the other hand, the concept of "bat" is, therefore, a defamiliarized term that is visually presented to be a blurred figure flapping in the air as Lawrence's words flow.

Then, Lawrence applies cognitive defamiliarization to the posture and appearance of the bat. In the eighth stanza, Lawrence marks the uniqueness of the bat's gestures. The "dark air-life looping" distinguishes the bat from birds, which show up only in the daytime [5]; "Missing the pure loop" implies that the flight of the bat might change abruptly, which delivers an intense pattern of the bat drastically flying in the air of darkness [5]; "Twitch", "twitter", and "elastic shudder" after that help to strengthen the pattern of intense flight, and the tone of the poem tends to be more and more drastic and excited progressively [5]. The special shape of the wings of the bat, as one of the most distinctive features of the bat, helps to strengthen the contrast between the concept of brightness and the bat. Bat, in traditional views, usually symbolizes night and darkness, but Lawrence here uses the serrated wings of the bat "against the sky", which usually symbolizes day and brightness [5]. Surely, due to their nocturnal habits, bat bears the stereotype of darkness. Lawrence is not afraid to mention or present such a stereotype that usually inspires a negative impression. He praises, by contrast, this symbolization as the uniqueness and beauty of the bat, as the symbolization of bat, which used to be dark and even unpropitious sometimes, is perceptually defamiliarized at the same time when Lawrence gives his praises. Lawrence then applies a simile of "A black glove thrown up at the light" on the bat to further against the concept of brightness [5]. Gloves are artificial objects that are usually thought to be "possessed" by humans instead of animals. The separation between man-made objects and the bat is weakened to further argue against the stereotype of the bat, as Lawrence implicitly encourages the resistance of "hegemony of the banal world, monotonous syntax, static psychology"

in a post-modern way that encourages flexibility of ideas and perspectives [6]. Humans usually regard themselves as highly civilized and apart from any other animals, and they judge other animals recklessly by their habits and appearances, such as bats. Lawrence's defamiliarization that "the brittle, mechanical superficiality of modern life" challenges such an anthropocentrism idea by offering new perspectives of appreciating the aesthetic homeliness of the bat [7].

#### 4. Analysis of *The Fish* by Elizabeth Bishop

*The Fish*, given by Bishop, gives a defamiliarization of fish in a perceptual way that proffers "figurative, poetic image" to visually defamiliarize an object [8]. Bishop firstly applies defamiliarization to the skin of fish. She applies a simile of "ancient wallpaper" to the dark skin of a fish, and she repeats it twice to strengthen the "pattern" of it [9]. To speak from a psychological perspective, self-talking is a "subconscious" indication of thoughts and perceptions [10]. Bishop uses the unconscious repeat of words of the protagonist to deliver a sensation of loneliness as the protagonist stares at the fish in her hand, pondering, telling the story to no one but himself/herself. The defamiliarization of fish is then based on such a "precondition" of loneliness. Wallpaper is something that comes from human society. Bishop's abrupt comparison between fish and wallpaper fails to drag them closer but strengthens the sensation of alienation between them. Besides, fish usually serves as a kind of food or a commodity in traditional view. The protagonist gives a detailed description of the appearance of the fish, which is supposed to be a "familiarized" thing that does not deserve so much attention normally. As her perception keeps flowing, she sees "shapes like full-blown roses", which is a defamiliarized form of the pattern of lines stretching out on the surface of the body of fish [9]. Rose is another simile that seems to be physically estranged here, as the pattern of lines on the fish skin is usually rhombus-like and closely settled one after the other. It is hard to link that rhombus-like pattern with a rose, which is a kind of flower that comes from a completely different environment from where a fish would come from, and its external form is complex and elegant would be distinct from the rough, rhombus-like pattern on the fish skin. Those two abrupt similes mentioned above indicate that, on the one hand, the protagonist is deeply absorbed in his/her perceptions; on the other hand, the protagonist is now perceptually alienated from his/her surroundings with no attention paid to the surrounding environment. Bishop intends to defamiliarize not only the appearance of the "fish" but the perception of the protagonist, as the object being alienated here is the weird perception that unexpectedly combines lines on the fish skin with wallpaper and rose.

After that, Bishop dives deeper into the body of fish with imagination defamiliarizing the inner arrangements of fish. Bishop applies defamiliarization to the body of a fish from outside to inside as if she is dissecting the fish as follows: "Coarse white flesh" [9] is the general view of the fish's body; "feathers" [9] is a simile of the dissected flesh of the fish; "dramatic reds and blacks" and "peony" [9] are defamiliarized fish organs. Naturally, human sight cannot penetrate the flesh of a fish to see its organs inside, so the protagonist is just diving further into his/her perception. The simile of peony drastically defamiliarizes the figure of fish, which strengthens the sensation of loneliness, as the protagonist's imagination gets much away from the universal concept of fish that defines it as something for usage—to eat or to trade. Bishop's defamiliarization reinforces the idea of ego and the incomprehensibility of perceptions, both of which contribute to the pattern of loneliness indicated by a person murmuring to a fish silently by herself. Seeing the entrails of a fish could lead to discomfort, and they have little value in human society as people always prefer having only the meat of the fish on their dinner table, so the entrails are usually an ignorable part of a fish. However, Bishop is to "riding vision of habit of prejudice" [11] with surrealist imagination, as she gives detailed descriptions and aesthetic similes such as peony and feather to the entrails of a fish to defamiliarize

those entrails traditionally viewed as discomfiting and valueless to inspire a new perspective of appreciating the aesthetic homeliness of this creature.

## 5. Conclusions

Both Lawrence's and Bishop's poetic defamiliarization represent modernist introspection that calls for the re-recognition of ordinary objects. World War I, which has long been recognized as one of the most significant driving factors of the thriving of modernism, delivers not only unprecedented horror and lost feeling but another extensive re-recognition of human society and individual scattered perceptions. Modernist and late modernist writers, such as Lawrence and Bishop, capture such an unfamiliarity brought by the Industrial Revolution and war trauma, and they use defamiliarization to search for the reality hiding behind prejudice from human society. Though Lawrence and Bishop give approaches to defamiliarization from different aspects, as Lawrence's comparison of bats with swallows and other objects tends to happen in a materialistic way while Bishop's surrealist imaginations are abstract and perceptual, they both encourage a re-consideration of traditional ideas bounded with daily things: bats and swallows, entrails and flowers, brightness and darkness, homeliness and hideousness.

Moreover, both Lawrence's *Bat* and Bishop's *The Fish* are anti-anthropocentrism based on perceptual defamiliarization of animals. Lawrence appreciates the agility of bats by comparing them with artificial objects such as gloves and umbrellas that minimize the distinction between animals and humans, while Bishop praises the beauty of the entrails of a fish, usually viewed as valueless and ignorable. They propose a new perspective of appreciating esthetics, similar to the opprobrium of traditional esthetics contemporarily prevailing in films and digital games among Western countries. Literally speaking, anthropocentrism is the belief in the superiority of humans, but it can be then interpreted as a representation of hubris that believes in the validity of every thought generated by human society. The idiosyncratic perspectives of aesthetic appreciation given by Lawrence and Bishop challenge the validity of traditional estheticism with metaphors given by animals and perceptions generated upon them.

The main contribution of this paper should be offering a perceptual approach to Lawrence's and Bishop's works by interpreting the defamiliarization of animals. It should simultaneously lead to an inspiring path of analyzing iconoclastic elements including in defamiliarization techniques from modern poetries. A major limitation of this paper is that it only deals with two samples while considering the massive number of modern poetries, and therefore, it could be more comprehensive if more poetries are included. Future studies might consider including more samples to consummate the pattern of poetic defamiliarization.

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