

Q. Write, after Victor Shklovsky, the relation between Russian Formalism and Defamiliarization. Ans- Viktor Shklovsky is one of the main voices behind a way of thinking about literature that today is known as Russian Formalism. Russian formalism was an influential school of literary criticism in Russia from the 1910s to the 1930s. It includes the work of a number of highly influential Russian and Soviet scholars who revolutionized literary criticism between 1914 and the 1930s by establishing the priority and autonomy of poetic language in the study of literature.

Russian formalism exerted a major influence on thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Victor Shklovsky and Yuri Lotman who are widely considered the founders of modern literary criticism. Formalism fundamentally altered the way literature was understood. Prior to formalism, literature was largely interpreted based on its ideological components, historical interest or as a reflection of the author's mentality. Formalism made the literary text, and the artistic strategies of the author, the focus of its study. The result is an appreciation for the creative act itself.

For this reason, it is right to say that Russian Formalism was concerned more with the notion of literariness - what makes a text "literary" - than with the concept of literature itself. Indeed, this was the concern of Viktor Shklovsky's critical work. In his well-read essay "Art as Technique" (which is also known as "Art as Device").

By Defamiliarization, Shklovsky argues that literariness is simply the product of a particular use of language - it is our language of the everyday defamiliarized. That is to say, literariness is the result of working language so that it "makes strange" or interrupts our habituated or automatic perception of the word. By interrupting our automatic perception of the word in this way, the reader is forced to make extra effort in determining the meaning of the text and in so doing, Shklovsky argues, our wonder of the world is re-enlivened. He puts it like this:

"Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war ... Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony." ("Art as Technique")

So, the writer's job is to recover "the sensation of life" - that is, to render the world unusual or unfamiliar to the extent that the reader experiences the world anew. To return to his own example, it is to make the reader experience the artfulness of the stone rather than simply regard the stone as object. If one could sum up defamiliarization in a single sentence then, it might look something like this -

"Defamiliarization is a technique by which the author can re-enliven the naturally inquisitive and literally awesome gaze of the child in the reader."

Perhaps the most important implication of thinking of the literary in this way is that literature itself can never again settle down. Clearly, those literary devices which once unsettled the reader will at some point become naturalized, just as the repetition of an inspiring metaphor means that it will eventually become a worn cliché. If literariness is a product of "making strange" then literature will always have to search out new ways of defamiliarizing the reading experience. Understood like this, literary history becomes the domain of discontinuities and interruptions rather than the smooth "progression" that some of the more conservative critics would advocate.