

The Concept of Defamiliarization: A Study of Shirley Jackson's “The Lottery”

Asst. Prof. Jinan Abdulla Shafiq (PhD)

Ministry of Higher Education / Al-Iraqia University - College of Education
for Women/ Department of English

Jinan.a.al-azzawi@aliraqia.edu.iq

Abstract:

Curiosity is what drives man to seek unfamiliar things. When things happen regularly, they go straightforward to thought and man will turn a blind eye to it. Accordingly, most familiar things make us feel numb. To challenge our senses and surroundings, man seeks to strangeness. What makes the familiar strange is called Defamiliarization.

Defamiliarization is achieved through the narrative technique which leads the reader to shift his viewpoint and disruptor his expectations so as to create a new sense of perception. Shirley Jackson, is a Modern American short story writer, best known for her dark humour and her horror style within domestic life. “The Lottery” is one of her distinguished short stories.

“The Lottery” sets on the 27th of June, in a small English village, the exact day of the annual lottery. It is a traditional festival done to guarantee good harvest. Surprisingly, the prize is to be stoned to death. Often “The Lottery” is either analyzed Psychologically according to the characters’ behaviour or regarding to sociological aspects. The current study presents a narrative technique that twists the usual expectations.

To fill the gap, the study concentrates on the defamiliar, title, setting, plot, portrayal of characters, symbolism and the tone. By using Victor Shklovsky’s Defamiliarization technique, the author shocks us with her friendly tone to present a horrific brutal ritualistic tradition. The study aims to shock the audience to force them criticise social behaviors and to challenge the notions of blind obedience to traditions.

Key Words: Defamiliarization, Human Sacrifice, Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery”, Victor Shklovsky.

Findings:

1. One should not accept barbaric religious customs and traditional beliefs without knowing its actual meaning of it.
2. Some social behaviours need to be challenged and not to be obeyed blindly.
3. If some mundane actions are familiar, it does not mean it is accepted and should flowing from one generation to another without deep thinking.

Introduction:

Defamiliarization or ostranenie is a key concept in Russian Formalism. It is a way to force the reader to alter his/her habitual perception and normal responses of things to see them differently. It involves seeing common things as novel or uncommon.

It is an artistic technique of presenting common things to the audience in an unfamiliar way to make them have a different awareness and new perspective and see the world differently (Shafiq, 2017, p.13). It encourages readers to look at thing with fresh eyes that leads them to have a new sense of appreciation. The term “Defamiliarization” was first coined in 1917 by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky in his essay “Art as Device” (Shklovsky, 1991, p.24). Defamiliarization is achieved through various techniques; through language and imagery by using unconventional syntax and grammatical structure to make the ordinary looks extraordinary. This is also done by using figures of speech to draw unexpected comparison; and by using descriptions to make familiar objects or concepts look different (Mandelker, 1983, p.337)

Defamiliarization is also done through changing the cultural practices that look normal in a way that leads the audience to question their validity or strangeness (Shafiq, 2010, p.79). This instigates them to pause a little and examine their assumptions about certain subjects matter to create a new awareness (Selden, 2005, p. 65).

The objectives of the paper, is to pin the point to a certain dimension of terrorism that is associated with religious behaviour of some extremists. The cruel behaviour is causing bloodshed and the victims are weak and defendless. Such ideologies are presented clearly through Jackson’s short story “The Lottery”.

Shirley Hardie Jackson (1916-1965) is an American novelist and a short story writer, well-known for her macabre and psychologically unsettling stories. She is best known for “The Lottery” (1948). Jackson often describes herself as “a practicing amateur witch” (Temple, 2018), and the power of her short stories proves that. In her short story “The Lottery”, published first in 1948 in *The New Yorker*, the major traditional elements common to short stories are defamiliarized both in form as well as in content. The title, setting, plot, characters, the narrative technique and the language (through tone, symbolism, syntax) are all defamiliarized (Freimuth, 1977, p.101).

‘The Lottery’ is a festival day, in which the villagers participate in stoning each year. Though it is a traditional ritual, yet they forget the original purpose

of doing so. Accepting the lottery though its brutal, without questioning it, is actually strange and unfamiliar to accept. And that is the core of the study of this research.

Methodology:

Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian formalist believes that the things we get familiar to in our daily life, makes man stop feeling it as it should be, for he/she gets used to it. Re shaping it is what changes our familiarity to it and makes us notice the things again. Shklovsky calls it Defamiliarization, and he clarifies that in his *Art as Technique* (1916) via art as an example, by saying:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make an object unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Shklovsky, 1916, p.16)

Shklovsky proceeds to arouse the passive thinking is by awakening our awareness to the things that we already have in a new perspective. Defamiliarization as a genre fiction is not limited to Russian literature only, but it became a world literature (Shklovsky, 1916, p.23). Actually, Defamiliarization is a key concept in formalist literary criticism.

To illustrate the artistic feature of any art, one needs to make his readers break the indolence thinking, to induce the aesthetic feelings.

“Defamiliarization” includes using strange images, perspectives and plots to bridge the gap between aesthetic thinking and aesthetic purpose. And that is the literary creativity that Shklovsky is looking for (Bell, 2005, p. 56). The scope of Defamiliarization is not restricted to art only, it can be found in other fields such as: drama, cinema, paintings, and advertising also.

The current study, through literary analysis, connects shklovsky’s Defamiliarization technique with the action of human sacrifice of the short story, to a raise the question of how creepy it can be to apply societal traditions blindly. The study stresses a new look at traditional issues that are considered familiarly accepted in a new unfamiliar way. The idea is not to accept ideas as they are, but to have a vision of what is the actual meaning of it and where is it leading us to.

Literature Review:

Many did write about “The Lottery” as the short story inspired a lot of researchers.

Dr. Seyed Mohammad Hosseini-Maasoum analyses his study “The Feminist Analysis of Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery; A Dominant-Discourse-Control Framework” (2012), from a feminist point of view. He portrays the relation between male and female, besides presenting the problems that women face in the society due to the patriarchal domination.

As for Aizaz, Gul (2021) “Intersecting Oppressions: A Marxist-Feminist Critique of Class Struggle and Gender Subjugation in Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery”. He exposes the class subjugation and gender oppression through a Marxist – Feminist analyses.

Applying Segmented Discourse Representation Discourse Theory (SDRT), Zhou, Yi (2024). “A Coherent Analysis of The Lottery by Shirley Jackson Using Segmented Discourse Representation Theory”. Analysis the language of the short story by using the discourse theory to explore the depth of the theme and of the characters.

As Qasim, Mohammed Saad (2024) in his study “Mob Mentality in Shirley Jackson's The Lottery”, he investigates the story according to the theories of Gustave Le Bon, in a psychological way. Le Bon believes that any individual usually acts emotionally in a crowd more than logically.

Defamiliarization theory is applied mostly in linguistic studies and in literature typically in stories that contain animals to shed light on human conventions. George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* (1945), declaring how authority leads to corruption. Likewise, in Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* (1903), in which the story is viewed from an animal’s point of view. The dog (Buck), who is the narrator, illustrates the cruelty of humans towards each other and towards animals.

By using Defamiliarization as a medium to analyse ‘The Lottery’, one will be able to see the strangeness of following blindly brutal traditions, and how the power of mentality of a group can create a pressure on individuals to imitate. The technique adds weirdness and makes us see the story in a unique way.

“The Lottery”

Shirley Jackson states Defamiliarization in that short story from the title; “The lottery” provokes familiar feelings of either repulsion or vanity depending on the reader’s experience with lotteries in their lives. Usually, the winner in any lottery takes money, however, that is not the same thing in Jackson’s story. We would not expect it to be a horror story. Lotteries are

usually happy events in which prizes are distributed among the winners. It is a form of gambling in which the prize can be an amount of money or a gift. A lottery involves setting number tickets and giving prizes to the holders of the right numbers that are drawn at random. Lotteries then are events whose outcome is to be determined totally by chance.

“The Lottery” is a story about a tragic event that involves violence and death. The villagers of a small American community follow an annual tradition known as ‘The Lottery’ which is intended to ensure a good harvest and purge the town of bad omens. Though the event seems festive, it is clear that no one of the villagers want to win. Tessie Hutchinson does not seem to pay attention to tradition until she is chosen to be stoned to death. At that moment she begins protesting and regards the whole matter as foolish and unfair. The story ends with the residents of the village, including the members of her family, begin throwing rocks at her.

The lottery involves each family drawing a slip of a paper from a black box. The individual who draws the slip with a black dot is the selected member of the community who is stoned to death by other town people.

The story criticizes the idea of the blind adherence to tradition and the dangers of ignorant conformity to social values, though tradition is usually seen positive: “Societies have certain practices reflecting their beliefs and values. ...positive traditional cultural aspects of any society are reflected by these practices... passed down by their ancestors, ...because traditions and cultural practices form their identity.” (Msuya, 2020, p.46). The story also explores the potential for cruelty with societies that seems civilized. In this story Jackson deplores the notion of the group mentality; the dominance of the collective over the individual.

The title of the story which at the first glance seems ordinary is quite contrary to what is expected. The sense of horror is intensified next by the setting. The events begin in a normal day:

The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny’ with fresh warmth of a full summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and bank, around ten O’clock...(Jackson, 1948, p.5)

The reader then gradually moves from the normal atmosphere at the beginning of the story. Through the hidden foreshadowing used by the writer, the reader feels that the tension increases and that the situation is no safer once the reader knows about the true purpose of the lottery. This setting is

contrasted with the horrible end of the story. This picturesque setting at the beginning of the story contrasts strongly with the horrible violence of the conclusion.

The story takes place in a beautiful summer day and ends with death. Even when the children begin gathering stones, the reader expects it only a playful behaviour such a setting is familiar in a comic or romantic story. Such a fine weather and social gathering might lead the reader to see something positive. The question of death in lottery makes it different from a common story but definitely not different for both the narrator and the villagers: "Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones." (Jackson, 1948, p.6)

Jackson's characters in "The Lottery" are far from the realistic familiar neither to critics nor to readers of narrative works. They are so Defamiliarized to the extent that they behave as robots or zombies. They are senseless and emotionally dead.

The children, who are supposed to be innocent, take an active part in this bloody event. They would arrive first to collect stones, make them a pile until they are ordered by their parent to stop:

The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of classroom and the teacher, of books reprimands (Jacksons, 1948, p.5).

Those children are raised to participate in such a bloody event and to respect tradition without question. The children are soon called away to begin their role in this tragic event:

Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly having to be called four or five times (Jackson, 1048, p.6).

The villagers, the school boys, Tessie family members act as if hypnotized. For them, the bloody event seems too common and it has become so normal for them to see someone stoned. Then they go home to have lunch and precede in their life. There is a detached point of view that makes the story more grotesque.

But in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took only about two hours, so it could begin at ten O'clock in the morning and still be through in time of allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner (Jackson, 1948, p.5).

This behaviours of the characters intensify the feeling of horror and lead the reader to realize that the villagers do not even care that one of their villagers is about to be murdered.

What is more horrific is that even the members of one family do not care about the tragic end of one of them. What is horrifying is that the children could laugh when they know that it will be one of their parents that draws the marked slip. At the end of the story, Mr. Hutchinson, the father, pulls the slip of paper from his wife's hand to show the people that she has the right ticket. He does not plea for her but puts up a blank face and does not show any sign of sympathy. Furthermore, he becomes one of those people who begin to throw the rocks at his wife to kill her.

Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal – company office. Bill Hutchinson held it on and there was a stir in the crowd (Jackson, 1948, p.20).

In the story, the characters discuss the question of stoning Tissie as discussing anything else in life. What is strange also is the reaction of Mr. Summers who says "All right, folks" and then preceeds "Let's finish quickly" (Jackson, 1948, p.20).

The employment of symbolism, like the title, the setting and the characters, is not familiar. It is used defamiliarized so as to intensify the sense of horror.

The question of the Lottery itself symbolizes the dangers of blindly following social and moral codes of community. The village square represents the façade of a peaceful community but it hides the violence and oppression of a dark society. The black box in which the slips are kept stands for the tragic end for some of the villagers since it contains the fate of 'winners' inside. The stones are used as the tool of the violent murder at the end.

Mr. Summer's name is Defamiliarized since summer is connected with positive meaning, such as resurrection, renewal, but here his name is connected with death and violence.

Childhood usually symbolizes hope, purity and innocence "The Children had stones already. And someone gave little Davy Hutchinson few Pebbles"

(Jackson, 1948, p.21). It is horrifying that the children could laugh when they know that it will be one of their parents that draws the doomed slip.

The tone that usually reflects the author's attitude and feelings, is also unfamiliar. In a horror tale like "The Lottery", we expect the tone to be pessimistic, sentimental or angry, yet it is not.

The tone in this story remains detached and calm all the time. There is no shift in the narrator's voice. The reader goes from reading about a small village on a sunny summer morning to witnessing the town's people execute a member of their own community. This is done without the slightest variation in tone on the author's part (Qasim & Mahmood, 2024, p.10), Burrow asserts: "Jackson's works were complex, combining horror and humor with themes of ostracism and repression" (Burrow, 2017)

The tone that expresses the character's attitude is like that of the author remains cold, indifferent and unchangeable to the end of the story.

'They do say', Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, 'that over in the north village, they're talking of giving up the lottery'. Old man Warner snorted, 'Pack of crazy fools' he said. 'listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for them... There's always been a lottery', he added petulantly ... 'some places have already quit lotteries', Mrs. Adams said 'Nothing but trouble in that', Old man Warner said stoutly. 'Pack of young fools.' (Jackson, 1948, p.14).

Consequently, the study argues that traditional predictable sacrifices are acts of violence. They illustrate deeper matters within human being.

Conclusion:

A Defamiliarization is a concept which belongs to the formalistic approach. It leads the reader to see things with fresh eyes, and give new meanings to old things. It encourages creativity in analyzing things.

In her "The Lottery", Shirley Jackson effectively adopts this technique of Defamiliarization, which is also known as "ostranenic" as an effective literary device to present familiar things in an unfamiliar or a strange way to redirect the reader's perception and understanding.

Common elements that are usually associated with writing short stories are employed in a way that audience would not expect. The notion of a lottery, the nature of the plot, the function of setting, the portrayal of the characters and their reaction to events, the tone and the familiar meanings associated with some symbols are all defamiliarized to give a contradictory form and content to what readers expect from a short story. In "The Lottery" the writer

intends the reader to see the extraordinary as ordinary and re- evaluate things with fresh eyes. This technique, to a large extent, intensifies the sense of horror in this story.

In conclusion, Jackson’s “The Lottery” has the power of Defamiliarization, in making the unfamiliar seems as familiar, to disturb the reader’s expectations. By making the setting a small town, no one expects violence to be their mundane.

Societies sometimes apply certain practices for their beliefs and values, that they are passed by time from one generation to another as part of their identity. Raising a awareness of potential cruelty is what the story declares. Accordingly, to irritate the social traditions and norms, Jackson intends to awaken her readers to the cruel risk of normalizing brutality.

The plot twist in the story, is detached from sensitive manner, strips relief from its readers and imposes them to reconsider comfort of the familiar, unopposed beliefs and cultural performs. In forming strangeness in their ordinary practices, Jackson manages to arouse the question of what is accepted as “normal”, and strips the veil of the harsh reality under the name of traditional and cultural practices.

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مفهوم إزالة الألفة: دراسة في قصة شيرلي جاكسون "اليانصيب"

أ.م.د. جنان عبدالله شفيق

الجامعة العراقية – كلية التربية للبنات - قسم اللغة الانكليزية

Jinan.a.al-azzawi@aliraqia.edu.iq

مستخلص البحث :

الفضول هو ما يدفع الإنسان للبحث عن أشياء غير مألوفة. عندما تحدث الأمور بانتظام، فإنها تتجه مباشرةً نحو التفكير الروتيني، فيغض الطرف عنها. ولذلك، فإن معظم الأشياء المألوفة تُشعرنا بالتقبل دون تفكير. ولتحدي حواسنا ومحيطنا، يسعى الإنسان إلى اللامألوفة. ما يجعل مألوفنا غريباً هو ما يُسمى بـ"إزالة الألفة". تتحقق إزالة الألفة من خلال أسلوب السرد الذي يدفع القارئ إلى تغيير وجهة نظره وزعزعة توقعاته لخلق إدراك جديد. هذه التقنية السردية تُشوّه توقعاته المعتادة. تُحلل الدراسة الحالية "اليانصيب" من خلال منظور إزالة الألفة. تدور أحداث رواية "اليانصيب" في السابع والعشرين من يونيو، في قرية إنجليزية صغيرة، وهو نفس يوم اليانصيب السنوي. إنه مهرجان تقليدي يُقام لضمان حصاد وفير. والمثير للدهشة أن الجائزة هي الرجم حتى الموت. ولسد هذه الفجوة، تُركز الدراسة على الجانب غير المألوف، كالعنوان، والمكان، والحبكة، وأسلوب تجسيد الشخصيات، والرمزية، والجو العام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عدم المألوف، التضحية البشرية، شيرلي جاكسون، "اليانصيب"، فكتور شكوفسكي.