

# The Application of Defamiliarization Theory in In a Station of the Metro

Li Zhang\*, Meixiu Guo\*\*

\*(English Department, North China Electric Power University, No. 689 Huadian Road, Hanzhuang Township, Lianchi District, Baoding City, Hebei Province, China, North China Electric Power University Campus 2

Email: lizhang25@126.com)

\*\* (English Department, North China Electric Power University, No. 689 Huadian Road, Hanzhuang Township, Lianchi District, Baoding City, Hebei Province, China, North China Electric Power University Campus 2

Email: 1041027527@qq.com)

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## Abstract:

Defamiliarization theory is an important theory put forward by Shklovsky, the representative of Russian formalism. It emphasizes the use of some writing techniques to create a distance between the reader and the work, so that the words or scenes that were familiar with daily life become strange and strange, bringing a fresh feeling to the reader. In a Station of the Metro, which is known as Pound's representative work, makes full use of the defamiliarization theory, and perfectly interprets the characteristics of the "defamiliarization" theory in terms of poetic language, poetic image, poetic form, cultural integration, etc. The use of these defamiliarization techniques has brought readers a unique new experience, has also achieved the position of In the Metro Station in poetry, and has also become an important driving force for the sustainable development of the poetry market.

**Keywords —unfamiliar, poetry, Pound, In a Station of the Metro.**

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## I. DEFAMILIARIZATION THEORY

Russian formalist literary theory is one of the most influential and widely used literary theories in the 20th century western literary theory. Formalism literary theory is the medium that connects the development of literary research from the outside to the inside. At the same time, theories such as British and American New Criticism and Reception Aesthetics are all inspired by formalism literary theory. The reason why the formalist literary theory has such great influence is, to a large extent, that the formalists put forward their core concept - defamiliarization. As the core content of formalism, defamiliarization supports the research of formalist literary theory. Russian formalists put forward the theory of defamiliarization, which successfully shifted the vision of literary criticism from external research to internal research. The defamiliarization theory defends the literariness, emphasizes the self-discipline of literature, and publicizes the attribute of literary language itself, so that literary creation returns to the aesthetic law. It also enables literary research to break away from the shackles of sociology and become a pure literary research. From the aspects of the background, basic connotation, function and influence of the defamiliarization theory, this paper expounds the theory in an all-round way, probes into the aesthetic significance of the defamiliarization

theory, and can grasp the connotation and extension of the defamiliarization theory in an all-round way. Since formalism was introduced into China, it has had a certain impact on literary creation and theoretical research. The language form and syntax structure of the experimental novels in the 1980s have a distinctive defamiliarization color; The trend of thought that attaches importance to language and problems has emerged in the construction of modern Chinese literary theory, which provides a lot of useful thinking for the construction of contemporary Chinese literature. The theory of defamiliarization is widely used in the field of art. Both in drama, film, television programs and translation and other fields have tried. Since the theory of defamiliarization was put forward, its influence in the field of creative practice and theoretical research has never stopped.

. Defamiliarization is a very famous theory in western literary theory proposed by Russian formalism representative Shklovsky. Its central idea is to inject fresh blood into literary works through various means to make readers feel fresh. Its essence.

It is to liberate people from the narrow world and get rid of the restrictions they are used to, so that people can constantly find new things even when they are faced with things they do not see. This theory has a profound influence on later

generations, and also provides a new perspective for readers to better understand literary works.

## II. POUND AND AT THE SUBWAY STATION

Ezra Pound is a very important figure in the 20th century English and American literature, especially in the history of English and American poetry. As a representative figure of imagist poets. The imagism he advocated has three principles:

- A) *No matter subjective or objective, deal with things directly*
- B) *No idle words*
- C) *The rhythm is not rigid and mechanical, paying attention to fluency and musicality.*

At the Subway Station is his representative image poem, which coincides with the central idea of "defamiliarization" advocated by Russian formalism. The whole poem is short and pithy, without superfluous words, and is mostly the superposition and juxtaposition of images.

The poem was written one day when the poet walked out of the Paris subway station. He caught a glimpse of several beautiful women and children in the dark, yellow and humid subway station. He thought about how to record them vividly, so he wrote a poem. However, the author was not satisfied with the voluminous record, so he simplified and simplified, using 14 words of multiple images to present a warm picture to the world directly, So "In a Station of the Metro" was born.

## III. POUND AND AT THE SUBWAY STATION

The transformation of the language style of American poetry in the 20th century is unprecedented in both depth and breadth. Starting from the New Poetry Movement at the beginning of the 20th century, the stylistic style with the theme of breaking the laws of traditional poetry and advocating a free style of poetry has established the direction for the development of American poetry in the 20th century. In this process, in the huge system of American poetry in the 20th century, many schools have changed. Behind the different language styles of each school, two clues can be clearly seen in the overall "defamiliarization" process of language styles: one is the diversity of styles, the other is the experimental characteristics of language. The basis of its diversified characteristics is that different groups of poets begin to speak. The general clue of language change is from tradition to anti tradition, and from rules to breaking rules. As a representative figure of the Imagist School, Pound's overall defamiliarization of language style is extremely reflected, especially in the song "At the Metro Station". I will demonstrate and analyze from several aspects:

### A) *Less is more*

Intuitively, the whole poem is surprisingly short, like an aphorism rather than a conventional poem. In quantitative terms, this poem has only two lines and only 14 words in total, which is quite different from traditional poetry. These unconventional operations actually conform to the second of the three principles of imagism: no idle words, concise sentences. This is also the most successful part of this poem: to express the richest meaning with the least words can be said

to give full play to the characteristics of this subject matter of poetry.

### B) *Vocabulary selection*

There is no verb in the poem "In a Station of the Metro". But in our language cognition, verbs are the core of a sentence and the basis of meaning expression. If there is no verb, the sentence will have no soul, which will also deepen the reader's difficulty in understanding the sentence. But Pound omitted all verbs in order to practice frugality. There are only fourteen words in the whole poem, and there are only seven pronouns except prepositions and articles. These seven words, like the Big Dipper, shine brightly in the night sky. They not only present the picture of the "spoon" that the author wants to express clearly to the readers, but also show the cultural charm behind the seven stars to the world through the tip of the iceberg. The appearance of the Big Dipper makes the night sky unique. The use of these words also makes this poem strange to readers.

One of the most worthy words to discuss, that is, the brightest star in the night sky, is apparition. Just as we cannot avoid discussing the green light when discussing *The Great Gatsby*, we cannot avoid discussing the word apparition when discussing *At the Metro Station*. The word "apparition" contains the meaning of ghost, specifically referring to the appearance of special scenes. The reason why appearance is not used is to distinguish it from ordinary words, to achieve the ultimate principle of keeping a sense of distance, and to better fit the meaning of poetry. Moreover, through understanding the writer's background, we can see that Pound is a talented person who is proficient in many languages. He happens to be walking *In a Station of the Metro* in France, so French words will naturally appear in the poem, and the French words are very consistent with the atmosphere of the whole poem. So it is not difficult to think that apparition here is probably a French word. Apparition in French means appearance. In French, feminine nouns usually end in e while masculine nouns end in the opposite. And this word is a special yin and yang noun, which does not end in e. Its corresponding word, "petal" in the next line, is written in French as *petale*, which is also a special yin and yang noun, but on the contrary, it is a masculine noun ending in e. These two special words will instantly fill the sense of alienation and strangeness, giving readers a new language impact.

### C) *Color contrast*

Pound, who was in the French subway station, said later that in such a romantic country, the first subconscious reaction was not words, but to record the beauty of the moment with paint. The most striking feature of this painting is its strong color contrast. The image in the poem plays the role of pigment. "Ghost" gives a pale and dim hazy color; The colors of "wet" and "black" branches highlight the "softness and ruddiness" of petals and faces. Therefore, these images form a strong contrast in color.

### D) *Description object*

The goal of the "New Poetry Movement" was to break the tradition and adapt to the needs of the new era. The influential schools in this period included "Imagist School", "Whirlpool

School", and "Chicago Poetry School". A comprehensive study of these poetic schools shows that the "New Poetry Movement" has had a great impact on the transformation of the language style of American poetry. First of all, the new poetry movement advocated replacing traditional poetry with free style poetry. Free style poetry took the musicality of poetic language as its rhythm, broke the organizational principle of traditional poetry in structure, and used more image overlapping and out of body techniques; Secondly, the scope of language style has been expanded, and colloquial language close to people's life has been adopted. In addition, new means such as continuous writing and collage are introduced in poetry skills.

In the process of breaking through the old and establishing the new, the most significant difference between the new and the old is the change and breakthrough in poetic language style. The simple and direct language expression of new poetry has become an important effort for American poetry and even American literature and culture to consciously get rid of British influence and develop the poetry tradition with American national characteristics.

"With the development of large industry and the rapid development of modern science and technology, the language of English poetry is also facing great challenges. The words dominated by language are constantly being replaced by modern scientific and technological vocabulary." Pound said so. Indeed, with the development of the industrial revolution and the progress of science and technology, some novel content inevitably appears in the poem, such as the subway in this poem, which is an image that will never appear in the poem before the industrial revolution. The appearance of such novel words not only reflects the poet's progress with the times, but also enables readers to have a deep resonance while full of freshness.

#### IV. DEFAMILIARIZATION OF POETIC IMAGES

As a representative of the Imagist School, Ezra Pound perfected the use of images. Ezra Pound once said, "Image is a compound of instant emotion and reason." In poetry, the author's unique treatment of images also increases the reading difficulty of readers, breaks the reading habits of readers, and makes the distance between readers and poetry wider.

##### A) *Image superimposition*

The superposition of images means that one image is overlapped by another image, and both of them constitute an organism, which also contains the characteristics of the two images. At the Subway Station is an excellent example of image superimposition. The upper and lower lines of this poem respectively display the corresponding images. Taking petals and faces as examples, the author does not impose his subjective feelings on these two images, but connects them through the readers' thoughts. On the one hand, it preserves the mystery of the author and the poetry, and respects the objectivity of images. On the other hand, it leaves more space for readers to think and extends the distance between readers and poetry. On the surface, the face and petals seem to be unrelated, but in fact they are closely related. First of all, the

description of the face is indistinct, crowded; This is just in line with the petals. Secondly, the background of the face is a dark and humid subway station, and behind the petals is a wet and dark trunk. The background tone of these two images is also consistent. Therefore, the two images naturally overlap and collide with each other to create a new spark.

##### B) *The juxtaposition of images*

Image juxtaposition refers to the juxtaposition of many images, especially different images, to form contrast or other logical relationships. These images together constitute a unique picture, giving readers a vivid sense of display. There are four images in this poem. Two images are combined to form two pictures, one of which is real and the other is imaginary. The dark branches and dark crowd set off bright petals and beautiful faces. This coexistence of contradiction and symmetry highlights the darkness and depression of the industrialization of modern life and urbanization, as well as the transience and fragility of beautiful things. The author takes the reader's imagination to connect the juxtaposed images into a picture, and feels the deep meaning hidden under the image from the picture.

#### V. DEFAMILIARIZATION OF POETIC FORM

Ezra Pound believes that traditional poetic forms, such as epic or long narrative poems, can no longer accurately express the emptiness and fragmentation of modern people's hearts and the lack of faith. The tidy sonnet seems to be out of tune with the mood of modern people. Therefore, if they stick to the clichés of Tennyson in the Victorian era or Arnold's rational preaching, the poets will dig their own graves and draw on their own ground. They will put today's affairs under the yoke of yesterday, and confine the content in the cage of form. Even if there are lofty sentiments, it is difficult to express them.

Reading this poem carefully, we can find that it has no rhythm. It is completely in accordance with the rhythm of modern free verse. It is full of aesthetic feeling of music rhythm, which is quite different from traditional poetry. The first sentence is mainly composed of the apparition of these faces and in the crowd. Pound used a polysyllabic word apparition and these with long vowels, as well as faces and crowd with double vowels, so that readers can have a stable and soothing feeling when reading. In the second sentence, petals on a wet, black rough is a phrase with strong musicality. We can also notice that Pound mainly uses monosyllabic words in this sentence, and the main words mainly contain short vowels, which makes it easier to read.

In fact, this situation is not only modern, nor is it the patent of poetry. As early as the Renaissance when drama was popular, Shakespeare, the great playwright, had already broken the shackles of form on drama. He no longer followed the Three Unities, abandoned the restrictions on drama such as time, place and background, and turned to non rhyme style, giving more freedom to the content of drama. This breakthrough not only brought the audience a feeling of strangeness and novelty, but also established Shakespeare's

position in the history of literature and promoted the development of drama.

## VI. DEFAMILIARIZATION OF POETIC FORM

### A) *European Creation Background*

The poem was written in Pound's subway station in Paris, France, not in his own country. Since the Industrial Revolution, transportation has become more and more convenient, the world has become smaller and smaller, and the distance between people has become shorter and shorter. This has promoted the development of globalization and the integration of national cultures. Therefore, many writers' writing backgrounds have been transferred from their own countries or countries with great influence to foreign countries, such as developing advanced Europe or mysterious East Asia. The author updates the scene, so that the readers will be brought into a new country, thus creating a strange feeling. In fact, this situation is very common and typical in the history of American literature. Before the 18th century, as a British colony, American literature was greatly influenced by English literature, and its writing background and style were greatly imitated by contemporary English literature. After the Declaration of Independence was issued in 1776, American literature became more and more local and independent, turning American readers from the perspective of rulers to the perspective of their own nation proudly, which was a process from strangeness to familiarity. For example, Mark Twain, a particularly representative writer with local characteristics, showed the local characteristics on both sides of the Mississippi River vividly. With the development of industrial revolution and globalization, writers and readers are no longer satisfied with the local background. Writers have moved out of the country to bring some fresh feelings to readers. Among them, Henry James is the most representative international writer. His masterpiece *The Portrait of a Lady* tells the story of an American girl's travels in Europe, a new country, a new perspective and a new experience for readers. Pound's poem is set in a subway station in France, giving readers a novel experience.

### B) *Influence of Oriental Literature*

In a letter to Gaudier Brzeska, Pound wrote: "A long time ago, a Chinese man said that if a man could not say clearly what he wanted to say in a twelve element poem, he had better keep silent." Later, he used a more short Japanese haiku as an example: The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: A butterfly.

It is not difficult to see that Japanese haiku has given Pound a lot of inspiration for his creation of *In the Metro Station*, and it is also the driving force for him to reduce the first draft of more than 30 lines to two lines. In fact, in addition to haiku, Pound was also deeply influenced by the Chinese literary tradition. He sorted out the English version of Chinese ancient poetry *Cathy*, which was translated from the manuscripts of the Oriental scholar Fenollosa. One of the inspirations of Chinese poetics for Pound was the non associative juxtaposition mode of poetry. As we know, one of the characteristics of Chinese classical poetry is the dual format.

The grammatical connection naturally falls off, and the sentence pattern presents a connectionless juxtaposition suspension structure. But once it is put into English, it becomes a huge problem, because there is no similar connectionless structure model in English tradition. Even though "hero couplet" generally only says five syllables are the same and two sentences are rhyming, sentences still need to be connected grammatically, which is completely different from China's confrontation. So in order to complete the difficult task of translating ancient Chinese poetry, Pound chose the method of word for word translation. To a certain extent, Pound accepted the Chinese connectionless sentence pattern and used it to construct his own pattern of phrase juxtaposition. The establishment of this mode is of great importance to Pound's poetics, and it is his first step to break the closed and static image poetry and move towards openness, flexibility and flexibility. In a letter to Quinn written by Pound in 1917, he said, "China is fundamental, Japan is not, and Japan is a special interest", emphasizing the fundamental influence of Chinese literature.

Ezra Pound, who has absorbed the mysterious tradition of oriental literature, has brought unspeakable shock to American readers. The poem "At the Subway Station" breaks the long and obscure poetry style formed by Tennyson, Arnold and other poets in the Victorian era. The spring and autumn brushwork is subtle, "people", "faces", "petals" and "branches" describe images as poetry itself rather than as a lyrical background, and the English language is condensed and reorganized, The novel length of poetry brings people a sense of unaccustomment, and at the same time, it also induces readers' infinite association.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Through the above analysis, we can know that the defamiliarization theory is fully embodied in Pound's *In the Metro Station*. This brings readers a new experience, and through analysis, we can see that Pound applies the defamiliarization theory not only to the language and form of *In the Metro Station*, but also to the deeper experience of poetic imagery and cultural integration. These bring readers a sense of novelty and distance, which makes readers have to admire the author's literary heritage. At the same time, they also provide a broader vision for the development of poetry in later generations and broaden the road of poetry creation. The perfect integration of defamiliarization theory and poetry genre is the result of continuous innovation in literary practice, an example of continuous improvement in the quality of readers, and a microcosm of the changes of the times.

The technique of defamiliarization makes the tension of poetry far greater than 14 words, and also brings new creative inspiration to many writers. Shklovsky's research on literary value focuses on the aesthetic feelings of readers. The essential difference between literary and artistic works and political commentaries and other works is whether they have aesthetic feelings. The value of literature is to let people recover their sense of life through reading, and produce aesthetic pleasure in the process of this feeling. The essence of

the means of defamiliarization is to try to increase the difficulty of feeling the artistic form and lengthen the time of aesthetic appreciation, so as to achieve the purpose of prolonging the aesthetic process. However, overemphasizing defamiliarization will inevitably widen the distance between the expression of works and the appreciation of readers. When this distance is infinitely expanded, it will cause the separation of literature and art from life, thus making literature lose its function of observing life and become a meaningless castle in the air. In the silent period of American poetry, Pound absorbed the essence of traditional oriental poetry by virtue of his profound mastery of multi lingual skills and open mind, recreated the language and form of poetry, making his imagist poetry shake the British and American poetry world, and also in line with the defamiliarization technique proposed by Russian formalist Shklovsky. Although the poem "At the Subway Station" selected in this paper is short, its poetic characteristics and text tension are far beyond these 14 words, which is enough to show that Pound's "taking doctrine" has brought about extraordinary aesthetic value due to the collision between eastern and western cultures.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thank you to North China Electric Power University for providing me with funding in the field of books and materials. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Zhang Li for her guidance and to the research team for their financial support.

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