Chapter IV

Russian Formalism and the Dialectics of Poetic Language

Victor Shklovsky's 1914 essay on Futurist poetry, "The Ressurrection of the Word" marked the beginning of Russian Formalism. It was established as a full-fledged school of poetic theory but came to an end in 1930. The two groups of the Formalist school – the Opojaz group (The Society for the Study of Poetic Language) and the Moscow Linguistic Circle – were primarily interested in Russian Futurist poetry and in bringing poetic language into the field of linguistics. The Moscow Linguistic Circle had linguists like Roman Jakobson as members and the Petersburg-based Opojaz group, led by Viktor Shklovsky, had members like Boris Eikhenbaum, Osip Brik and Yury Tynyanov.

After the disintegration of the Formalist School in 1930 under intense political pressure, its ideas continued to survive in the Prague Linguistic Circle founded by Jakobson in 1926. The Prague Linguistic Circle included members like René Wellek, Jan Mukařovský, N.S. Troubetzkoy and many others. Though the Formalist movement could not be established as a solid theoretical group, its influence on the Anglo-American critical movement in the 1950s and 60s has been enormous. Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, the Parisian structuralism in the 1960s, and especially the work of Todorov and Genette, looked back to Russian Formalism as a theoretical source.

The Russian Formalists, for the first time, tried to accord an independent position to literary studies. What they tried to do was to develop the very notion of the study of literature, or literary theory, not simply revising the previous schools of criticism. These critics changed the concept of genetic approach to literary studies. The genesis of a literary work had become the focus of most of the existing schools of criticism. So the study of literature had largely been a collective study of aesthetics, philosophy, psychology, history, sociology etc. In such crticism the study of literary aspects had become secondary and been relegated to the margins with the adjacent disciplines taking the centre-stage. But all this changed when Formalists developed their theory of literary studies.

The study of literature in terms of biography, ethnography or history had made literature secondary to other disciplines. The Formalists did not even agree to the symbolists' definition of art as "thinking in images." For them this definition also reduced the scope of literary studies as an independent and specific discipline.

Both the Russian Formalism and the New Criticism are concerned with the effort to establish literary studies as an autonomous faculty. But Formalists were more inclined to a scientific approach than the New Critics who tend to move toward a humanistic understanding of a literary structure. The Formalists are opposed to the view that literature has a mimetic/ expressive function. They are more concerned with "literariness" than "literature." Literariness is what makes literature possible. So they were more interested to explore the system that makes literary discourse possible than literature itself.

The Formalist theory of literary study was even more radical and systematic than that of the New Critics. While the New Critics speculated and explored the relation between literature and life, art and value, the Formalists saw literature and life, art and value as opposites. Some New Critics like I.A. Richards were also concerned with making literary studies scientific with the help of physiology, or neuro-psychology, which the Formalists considered non-literary. Unlike the narrow textual approach of the New Critics, the Russian Formalists were innovative and anticipated the developments of literary studies in the 1960s which were based on modern linguistics.

The Russian Formalists aimed at establishing literary studies as an autonomous genre. As Eikhenbaum remarks, Formalism is "neither an aesthetic nor a methodology" but is "characterised only by the attempt to create an independent science of literature which studies specifically literary material." So for the Formalist "the question is not how to study literature, but what the subject matter of literary study actually is ?"[1]

The Formalists work on the concept of "differential specification," their definition of literature being different from the sets of other things. The study of literary science is to examine the set of differences that distinguish literature from other objects. This differential set is known as "defamiliarization" or "making strange" *(ostranenie)*. The term *"priem ostranenie"* ("device of making strange" or alienation/estrangement) which has its origin in Aristotle, has undergone a process of development through its use in the neoclassical "baroque" poetics, German romantic literary theory and finally in the Russian Formalism in its new incarnation.

Defamiliarization is a device which makes strange the habitual perception in ordinary language. Shklovsky says that when every object of the world becomes familiar to us we become habituated to that object. Our everyday life then becomes a life of "prose perceptions," which means, things become known but not perceived. The process of perceiving this world becomes so automatic that the objects no longer register upon our senses. "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war." Against this prose perception there is the world of art which, Shklovsky says, "exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known."[2]

The end or purpose of art is not what Shklovsky suggests here to experience the "artfulness of an object"; he is more interested with the way art accomplishes this purpose. This technique is a process which transforms perception into a transcendent activity. In this process of defamiliarization the worldly object is taken out of the area of prose perception and placed in the arena of art. The technique of art is to make objects '*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. As Shklovsky says, "*Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*"[3] (Shklovsky's emphasis). It draws our attention to the artifice of the literary text. Art, according to Shklovsky, defamiliarizes the usual or habitual things. For instance, walking is an ordinary and habitual activity, which is defamiliarized in dancing. The usual,

everyday activity of walking is refreshed and perceived anew in dancing. According to Shklovsky, "A dance is a walk which is felt even more accurately, it is a walk which is constructed to be felt."[4]

So also is poetry different from ordinary language, because ordinary/practical language is made strange by art. The language of poetry is "oblique," "torturous," "difficult" and "attenuated." The physical sound of words used in everyday language, when defamiliarized, becomes prominent; this formal prominence is the basis of poetry. This is what Shklovsky says, "Poetic speech is *formed* speech, because defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found."[5]

The Russian Formalists focussed primarily on the analysis of poetic language on the basis of the difference between the poetic and everyday language. What distinguishes literature from practical language is its constructed quality. Poetry exercises a controlled violence upon practical language, which is thereby deformed and compels our attention to its constructed nature. For them, literary studies consist of the study of especially the poetic language, as themes are inconsistent and tend to be centrifugal. Poetry is highlighted only when it is studied in the context of what is not poetry. The notion of literariness, which is central to the Formalist school, is achieved by the process of differentiation. It also gives literary studies a scientific status, which helps in understanding the coherence of the system.

The poetic language is different from the practical/communicative language. The language of poetry and the practical language have very

different functions. The practical language is used for communicative purpose, whereas the language of poetry has no such practicality. The Formalists' sharp differentiation between the poetic and the practical use of language has helped in evolving a scientific basis for the study of literature. Jakobson sees the difference between the poetic and practical language in terms of their autotelic and heterotelic natures respectively.

The poetic language effects a two-fold shift of perception, as Tony Bennett rightly says, "Literature offers not only a new insight into 'reality' but also reveals the formal operations whereby what is commonly taken for 'reality' is constructed."[6] The poetic language is distinguished from the ordinary language not because of the difference in structure or vocabulary but because the use of the formal devices like rhythm and rhyme transforms the ordinary into something special. The technique of defamiliarization acts upon and is realized by the formal devices. But the term "formalist" is a misnomer, as Eikhenbaum said, because it was used as a pejorative term by its opponents. According to Eikhenbaum, "they were not 'formalists', but, if you like – 'specifiers'."[7] For, "the formalists' preoccupation with form derived from their preoccupation with the specificity of literariness and never constituted an end in itself."[8]

In subsequent developments of Formalism the opposition between the habitual and defamiliarization was seen as no longer located outside literature. It was no longer a differentiation between ordinary language and poetic language, but one located within literature itself. For Shklovsky, form itself is the defamiliarizing element which can also prove to be an automatizing factor at times. He says, "There is 'order' in art, yet not a

single column of a Greek temple stands exactly in its proper order; poetic rhythm is similarly disordered rhythm... should the disordering of rhythm become a convention, it would be ineffective as a device for the roughening of language."[9]

The literary devices which are meant to defamiliarize automatized perception do not succeed in doing so. They need to be constantly renovated to produce conditions for defamiliarization. For the Formalists the literary tradition is not a seamless continuity but rather a discontinuity giving scope for the constant regeneration of formal devices for the renewal of the system. The concept of "literariness" gives a systematic inflection to the study of literature, going beyond the intrinsic study of the individual text.

Shklovsky believed that the new literary production always deliberately deviates from the poetic norms of the preceding literary movement. Jakobson's and Tynyanov's notion of the "dominant" is similar to Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization; it allows the "foregrounding" of the dominant device in the literary text pushing the other devices to the background. The same happens in case of literary evolution; the prevailing canonical forms and genres are replaced by new forms, which in turn would become canonized and, likewise, be replaced by still newer forms. Some elements in a literary work have a defamiliarizing effect, and these elements are foregrounded against the group of elements which are in the background. "Since a system is not a free interplay of equal elements," Tynyanov comments, "but presupposes the foregrounding of one group of elements ('a dominant') and the deformation of others, a work becomes literature and acquires its literary function through just this dominance."[10]

The distinction between "device" and "function" becomes prominent in the Formalist rhetoric while considering literature as a system with a coherence and unity, and where the function of the devices is decided between defamiliarization or automatization. Since differentiation is no longer seen outside literature, there exists a more tolerant and flexible relationship between the literary and non-literary, helping the Formalists to maintain the "literary" nature in their enquiry. Literary studies, for the Formalists, remains a science with "literariness" as its object, which is achieved by the technique of differentia between defamiliarization and automatization.

The two related concepts, the principle of perceptible form and the idea of the structural significance of literary content, developed by the Russian Formalists are first taken into consideration by Victor Shklovsky. Shklovsky's argument depends upon the distinction between "automatized" and aesthetic forms of perception. He says, "If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual it becomes automatic."[11]

Literature transforms our habitual mode of perception in two ways. According to Tony Bennett, "First, particularly with regard to poetry, literature was said to effect a semantic shift in relation to prosaic language by playing on and subverting the conventional relationship between signifier and signified, opening up the web of language into a play of multiple meanings excluded from ordinary speech. Second, literary works were said to defamiliarize the codes and conventions of previous traditions which,

although they had once themselves served as a means of perpetual dislocation, have since atrophied to become the source of perpetual numbness."[12]

The object exists as an image of the real world but, unlike the supporters of mimetic theory, Shklovsky believes that the meaning of the image should be seen in its relation to the work as a whole, where it functions as a structural device, a technique of formation, and not as a representation of the world of experience. So he writes, "poets are much more concerned with arranging images than with creating them,"[13] because it is not the content of images but the way they are placed and organised in the whole network of relationships that is important. As Shklovsky writes, "The meaning of a work broadens to the extent that artfulness and artistry diminish."[14] Based on the opposition of form and meaning, Shklovsky defines his concept of poetic language. To him meaning is the function of prose utterence, it is the process of abstracting the essences of words rather than their sensible form. The poetic utterance is opposed to this. "The language of poetry," Shklovsky observes," "is... difficult, roughened, impeded language. ... We can define poetry as *attenuated, torturous* speech. Poetic speech is *formed speech*. Prose is ordinary speech – economical, easy, proper... of the accurate, facile type, of the 'direct' expression of the child."[15]

For Shklovsky defamiliarization is found almost in every form of art. He goes on to say:

> An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable
> complexities of life which are revealed through it; its
> purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to
> create a special perception of the object – *it creates a*
> *'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means*
> *for knowing it.*[16]

He does not consider any literary text as an end in itself, to be read for its own sake and on its own terms; rather he thinks that a literary text is sought as a mode for justifying or verifying the exemplification and development of the concept of literariness.

The Formalists' claim that the purpose of literary criticism is not to view literary text as something "already there" or "pre-given," but to study what makes literature different from non-literature. Tony Bennett argues for the Formalists:

> This difference consisted in the tendency of literary
> works to defamiliarize experience by working on and
> transforming the adjacent ideological and cultural forms
> within which reality is dominantly experienced. The prime
> task for literary criticism became that of analysing the
> constructional devices whereby this effect of
> defamiliarization was achieved. The object of the
> Formalists research was thus not the concrete object of
> literary texts themselves but the *abstract object of the*
> *differential relation between literary texts and non-*
> *literary texts*, a problematic (in the sense defined above)
> that was entirely the product of their own theoretical
> procedures.[17]

Literariness achieved through the technique of defamiliarization is not limited to the intrinsically formal properties of the text alone; it has an inherently relational basis with factors working outside the domain of literature. To view a text as literary, the context of the non-literary has to be brought in.

The literary devices defamiliarization depends on are not merely formal devices used to decorate a text. The effect of "literariness" depends instead on the function of these literary devices in the text, the devices used in some texts help in bringing wonderful effects of making strange the conventional themes whereas in others they are not equally effective. In some cases, the same device has different functions in different texts. The function of the devices not only determines the effectiveness of texts in their efforts to defamiliarize the conventions, it also helps in distinguishing the literary from the non-literary. For example, the poetic language is distinguished from the prosaic language not because the former uses poetic devices like metaphors but because both use metaphors for different purposes. Elrich remarks:

> If in informative prose, a metaphor aims to bring the
> subject closer to the audience or drive a point home, in
> 'poetry' it serves as a means of intensifying the intended
> aesthetic effect. Rather than translating the unfamiliar into
> the terms of the familiar, the poetic image 'makes
> strange' the habitual by presenting it in a novel light, by
> placing it in an unexpected context.[18]

Shklovsky's distinction between the ordinary and the poetic language is reformulated by the Prague Structuralists, especially by Bohuslav Havranek and Jan Mukařovský. For the Prague structuralists the distinction exists between the utterances whose language is automatized and those where it is foregrounded. In foregrounding language is deautomatized, like a poetic metaphor.

The concept of foregrounding pushes linguistics to the brink of poetics. Mukařovský observes, "In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself."[19]

Though literariness is the distinctive feature of literature the Formalists accept the position where literariness co-exists with other elements. But by redefining the literary work as a "hierarchical set of artistic devices," rather than a "sum total of all devices," they very cleverly have brought in the concept of the dominant where the co-existence of the elements was seen as one being subordinated by the other. It is always the literery factor that dominates other factors in a text. Roman Jakobson defines the "dominant" as "the focussing component of a work of art which rules, determines and transforms the remaining components."[20] To illustrate his definition, he points to three different periods of the Czech poetic tradition where the three devices-- rhyme, syllabic scheme and intonational integrity -- are present but each becomes dominant at different points of time, a fact which, he believes, is always historically determined and

depends on the concept of the "dominant." This definition includes both a historical approach and a linguistic analysis, moving beyond the synchronic/ diachronic distinction.

The concept of the dominant helps in viewing literature in more distinctive terms. This could be seen in the distinction between the literary and non-literary, in the difference between the Renaissance modes of seeing and the Romantic modes of hearing or in the differences in the various literary genres in the same era or in the differentiating qualities of the works of contemporary writers.

In this sense, Jakobson's definition of the poetic work as "a verbal message, whose aesthetic function is dominant,"[21] includes a host of other functions as well. Here pure formalism gives way to a historical approach where literariness is definitely sought but the other function of defamiliarization is seen in a historically conditioned environment. Jakobson thus remarks,

> The reader of a poem or the viewer of a painting has a
> vivid awareness of two orders: the traditional canon and
> the artistic novelty as a deviation from the canon. It is
> precisely against the background of that tradition that
> innovation is conceived. The formalist studies brought to
> light that this simultaneous preservation of tradition and
> breaking away from tradition form the essence of every
> new work of art.[22]

The Formalists also anticipate the futurist concept of the "trans-sense language," i.e., language containing in itself a sense of its

unintelligibility. Shklovsky's categorization of folk-lores, nursery-rhymes, religious rituals in the group of trans-sense language is based on his argument that in these kinds of work sound is more important than sense. From this he infers that in the language used in poetry sound has a more prominent place than sense. By proclaiming the supremacy of sound over sense he makes a deliberate break with the earlier school of symbolists, which took every sound/word of the poem as having a symbolic function.

Paul Valéry, too, believes that the intelligibility of poetic act is not semantic but formal. In poetry, Valery writes, "language is no longer a transitive act, an expedient. On the contrary, it has its own value, which must remain intact inspite of the operations of the intellect on the given propositions. Poetic language must preserve itself, through itself, and remain the same, not to be altered by the act of intelligence that finds or gives it a meaning."[23] For Valéry, the opposition between form and meaning is a way of describing the peculiar dynamism of poetic speech. He gives the example of an oscillating pendulum:

> Think of a pendulum oscillating between two symmetrical
> points. Suppose that one of these extremes represents
> form: the concrete characteristics of language, sound,
> rhythm, accent, tone, movement – in a word, the *Voice*
> in action. Then associate with the other point, ... all
> significant values, images and ideas, stimuli of feeling and
> memory, virtual impulses and structures of understanding
> in short, everything that makes the *content*, the meaning
> of the discourse. Now observe the effect of poetry on
> yourselves. You will find that at each line the meaning
> produced within you, far from destroying the musical

form communicated to you, recalls it. The living
pendulum that has swung from *sound* to *sense* swings
back to its felt point of departure, as though the very
sense which is present to your mind can find no other
outlet or expression, no other answer, than the very
music which gave it birth.[24]

This example implies that though the opposition between meaning and form
continues, there is an attempt to harmonize them. In poetry thus the
semantic components take on structural value.

Valéry's concept of poetic language is different than that of the New
Critics'. The New Critics argue for poetry as a form of signification which
is superior to science. But for Valéry, however, poetry is a form of
signification only to the extent that "the thoughts uttered or suggested by the
text of a poem are by no means the unique and cheif objects of its
discourse -- but means which combine equally with the sounds, cadences,
meter, and ornaments to produce and sustain a particular tension or
exaltation, to engender within us a world, or mode of existence, of complete
harmony."[25]

In poetry, Valéry believes, sounds display meaning not as idea but
simply as sounds because language tends to be self-revealing rather than
being a mere medium. The sounds of words modify the act of speech in
such a way that this activity itself becomes an integral part of the meaning
of the work. Valéry remarks: "It is an error contrary to the nature of poetry,
and one which may even be fatal to it, to claim that for each poem there is a
corresponding true meaning, unique and comfortable to, or identical with,

some thought of the authour's."[26] In poetry there is no "true meaning; meaning is characterized by the condition of indeterminancy."[27]

However, Mukařovský attacks the view that in poetry the maximum foregrounding is achieved by foregrounding each and every component in it. For him, foregrounding is an activity which is selective and systematic because what is foregrounded in poetic utterance is a complex of multiple inter-relationships among linguistic components. He remarks:

> There is always present, in communicative speech... the
> potential relationship between intonation and meaning,
> syntax, word order, or the relationship of the word as a
> meaningful unit to the phonetic structure of the text, to
> the lexical selection found in the text, to other words as
> units of meaning in the context of the same sentence. It
> can be said that each linguistic component is linked
> directly or indirectly, by means of these multiple inter-
> relationships, in some way to every other component. In
> communicative speech these relationships are for the
> most part merely potential, because attention is not called
> to their presence and to their mutual relationship.[28]

In ordinary speech, the manifold relationships among the linguistic components are present largely as a structural possibility, but in poetic speech this possibility is actualized when these manifold relationships are brought to the foreground.

The Formalists choose to call their method morphological so as to differentiate it from other methods like the sociological, historical and to suggest that content is determined by form. Form was considered so important that content was relegated to background and was seen as

something dependent on form in a work's aesthetic structure. Shklovsky in his pamphlet "The Ressurection of the Word" gave an independent position to form and wrote that the "artistic perception is perception in which form is sensed perhaps not only form, but form as an essential part."[29] Five years later, he writes in a revisionist mode, "A new form appears not in order to express a new content, but in order to replace an old form, which has already lost its artistic value."[30] The distinction of form and content was, however, necessary for the Formalists because of their complete opposition to realism in any form. For form to be possible and effective it is important to make use of special artistic devices such as *defamiliarization* and *retardation*.

By nature, defamiliarization seems opposed to the principle of artistic economy which implies that the unfamiliar is explained in terms of the familiar poetic images. In defamiliarization the opposite takes place: the familiar is described in unfamiliar terms. The worldly things are made strange and this principle is the central objective of avant-garde art. Here life and nature are not described in neat packages of predictable images, but the relationship between them is distorted, disrupted and divided through certain unusual poetic devices.

A part of the process of the defamilarization involves the special use of rhythm. Rhythm, the dominant element in poetry, is not just added for poetic euphony; it has a dynamic function. The Formalists never confused rhythm with meter. Rhythm deforms the meaning of a poem and, as Erlich says, "brings words closer to each other, makes them interact, overlap, crisscross, and in so doing, reveal the wealth of this 'lateral' potential

meaning." Quoting Eikhenbaum, he goes on to say, "The play of these lateral meanings running afoul as it does of habitual verbal associations, is the principal feature of poetic semantics."[32]

The Formalists approach prosody in a different way. According to them, prosody must not be a study in phonetics, but should aim at phonemics, which is the study of the linguistic functions of speech sounds and their capacity for differentiating word-meaning. They opposed the sound-meaning dichotomy. The two sets of references, namely, "poetic euphony" and "poetic imagery" are intrinsic to the verse which is a self-contained entity.

Retardation, another device like defamiliarization, means the slowing down of action. The aesthetic process of perception needs to be prolonged for greater enjoyment of art. According to Shklovsky, the readers can sustain their interest in art by reading beyond the "wall of strangeness" built around the art form. The concept of retardation is also found in Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* where the author suggests that a *sahṛadaya* (connossieur) is one who goes beyond the literal to have a full grasp of a literary work in a slow process of cognition. Anandavardhana says this in the context of semantics. While speaking of the factors leading to suggestion, the Formalists have emphasized the formal devices and techniques.

The Formalists are also interested in what was called the "inventive" (*izobretatelstvo*), which means "bold innovation," and various ways of "toying with the narrative." Gogol, Cervantes, Sterne fascinated the Formalists because of their use of this technique. Tolstoy also impressed

Shklovsky for his ironic treatment of events, irony in the Greek sense
"eiron" which means, one who affects ignorance.

Shklovsky brings in the term "defacilitation" (*Zatrulnenie*) while
criticizing the *positivist* thought which believed in the "law of conservation
of energy" where the writer does not exert much effort to express an idea
or a theme. He, on the other hand, gives ample examples from Russian folk
literature to illustrate how defacilitation is used for purely aesthetic
purposes, to deliberately make the subject difficult or to impede the idea by
using difficult words or syntax, turning the conventional mode of narrative
or metre upside down. In Erlich's term, "it is verbal tight-rope walking," or
as he quotes Shklovsky, it is "a unique kind of dancing of the speech
organs."[32]

The concept of "laying bare the device" *(obnazhenie priema)* is a
technique writers use to "lay bare" a literary convention within a literary
text. The glaring example is Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* where Sterne has a
chapter dealing with chapters revealing his stylistic device. Grossvogel
remarks, "structural subtlties that would normally be hidden within the
fictional weave of the weave of the novel Sterne deliberately exposes for the
purpose of turning his book into yet another kind of parlor game which he
plays with his reader."[33] This device emphasizes what the Formalists would
like to say about the content becoming the form.

While discussing the prose narrative, the Formalists apply two terms
– *fabula* and *syuzhet*. The first refers to the "story" or the "raw material";
the second refers to "plot" or the "aesthetically ordered presentation" of the

story. As the poetic language is distinguished from the ordinary language, so also is the story distinguished from the plot in a literary prose narrative. For Shklovsky, the creativity in a literary piece is discernible in *syuzhet (plot)*, the way in which a story is constructed. "Story is," defines Tomashevsky, "the sum total of events, mutually and internally linked, (i.e. the total number of motifs, linked causally and temporarily together)," whereas plot is the distribution and construction of events in order; the plot is the literary examination of the motifs, "an artistically constructed distribution of events."[34] The story is a "stock" or "pre-aesthetic" material from which the plot is constructed.

The connection of Flaubert's desire to write a purely formal novel with the Formalist doctrine has some interesting aspects. Flaubert, in one of his letters, writes,

> What strikes me as beautiful, what I should like to do, is
> a book about nothing, a book without external
> attachments, which would hold together by itself through
> the internal force of its style... a book which would have
> practically no subject, or at least one in which the
> subject would be almost invisible, if that is possible.[35]

The device of tautological repetition leads to retardation where the action does not stop but slows down. If the story material is "a" then a literary work is expressed by the formula : $a + (a+a) + [a+(a+a)] + ...$ etc. For Shklovsky, "the heart of literary device" consists in this formula. It is not just the story element *a* but the formula, as Richard Sherwood says, with all its "elaborations, complications, repetitions of the story so constructed

that the work is truly 'perceived,' the process of perception being heightened by 'retardation' which serves to extend and intensify the perceptive process."[36] Shklovsky's notion of the "evolutionary ability of art" is connected with this device of tautological repetition. What Shklovsky means by the evolutionary ability of art is that each new school which evolves is first parodied and then gives way to another new school. It is only by a constant process of change and contrast that the artistic qualities of each school / art are evident.

The role of the writer as an organiser of materials, "taking one piece and putting it beside the other pieces" and applying selected devices is an important aspect in creative process. In his introduction to his collected essays on prose literature Shklovsky says, "In the theory of literature I am concerned with analysing its internal law. To an analogy in industrial terms, I am interested not in the situation of the world cotton market, not in the politics of the cotton combines, but only in the numbers of the thread and the ways of weaving it."[37] This analogy is significant as it implies that a work of art is constituted by linked metaphors enriching each other in a process of complex relationship. Roman Jakobson's insistence that not literature but literariness should be the actual field of inquiry of literary science stands justified. What Jakobson is trying to say is that it is not the text/literary work itself which is to be analyzed, it is rather the devices employed in the text which help the literary analyst in his examination.

The Formalists believe that poetics is not the study of "chaotic images" in their inchoate relationships, but is concerned with a conceptual

system which can identify devices working in an individual work. So, poetics is concerned with the system of discourse, which is the generative principle of every text.

Shklovsky's early essays like "The Resurrection of the Word" and "Art as Device" addressed some essential Formalist ideas adopted from the previous theories. Here while attacking Aleksandre Potebnya and Aleksandre Veselovsky for their theories, he has also borrowed many ideas from them which he could utilize in his theorization. Potebnya's interpretation of the gradual loss of form in the "journey from poetry to prose" is the starting point for the Formalists to distinguish between the language of poetry and ordinary language. Potebnya's conception that the "internal form"(image) is different from the "external form" (sound) and that the "internal form" (image) is the hallmark of poetic language which decides the external form (sound) is reversed in the Formalist thinking. Shklovesky claims that "external form" (sound) is the actual hallmark of poetic language.

For Potebnya, the difference between poetic and prosaic language was in their *means,* not in their *purpose.* For the Formalists the difference is in the purpose. Content, so important for Potebnya, was dismissed by the Formalists, who replaced form and content with the form and material. Shklovsky went to the extent of saying that the form "creates its own content." Whereas Potebnya emphasized the psychological impact of the author on his writing, Shklovsky speaks of the effect of the text on the reader, focussing on the process of "sensing" the text.

Another aspect of Shklovsky's theory is that it did not accept

Veselovsky's theory of the social role of "epithet in language." On the other hand, he never believed that epithet was a result of the intrinsic evolution in language, which is similar to the Indian concept of rasa and rasa-realization. In response to his own question as to why Ovid recommends *unhurried enjoyment* by creating "Art of Love," he replies that the nature of art itself is like a "crooked road" which turns back on itself.

Another area which gives Shklovsky's theory a distinctive flavour is his difference between *"motif"* (motif) and *"plot"* (syuzhet) in studying prose literature. He defines *motif* as the "simplest narrative unit," while plot is the composition of different motifs. He seems to think that while motif is an essential requirement for the plot, it should not always be linked with real life. Potebnya's and Veselovsky's keen sense of history and of the effect of time on language had a tremendous impact on their theory of language and literature. Shklovsky does not agree to this view.

However, he does not completely reject the relation of motif to real life; he admits that real-life experiences influence, thereby partially admitting the influence of life on art. He accepts history and society as the sources of art, but he thinks that what an art critic or a student of literary studies should do is to identify the artistic quality of art without involving oneself in the extraneous factors which historians, ethnographers or anthropologists are concerned with. To him, literature is not directly influenced by life but can be seen as an index of formal changes taking place in different kinds of literature as a result of changes in society.

In differentiating the poetic from the prosaic language, Shklovsky

interprets the two not as genres of poetry and prose but as two systems of language having two specific functions. The poetic language includes not only the genre of poetry but all forms of literature including prose which are structured for artistic impression; prosaic language is the language used for ordinary communication. So the Formalists account for the differences in genre by the different sets of devices used. Shklovsky mentions that poetry has better "geometricality of the devices" than prose.

The traditional rhetoricians saw figurative speech as a kind of "abuse" or "trespassing" of common utterances or as a turning from common modes of writing and speaking and did not distinguish keenly between ordinary and poetic speech but tried to give "laws" or "formula" of style by which ordinary speech could be transformed. Henry Peacham and George Puttenham viewed ordinary language as an ideal combination of word and thing and literary language a distance between the two where the word instead of pointing to a referential world creates its own verbal world.

But Russian Formalists conceived form as the result of the combination of what they call deformation and organisation. Deformation is a process through out changes are brought about in ordinary language so that they acquire poetic character through defamiliarization. Form is used here in a broader sense that includes also the content. In this sense the distinction between the two – form and content – is abolished. Later they used a more comprehensive term "structure" instead of form to avoid the limited implication of the word "form."

The Formalists criticized the symbolists' overemphasis on visual

imagination. They were also not very comfortable with the Marxist view of the importance of history. They were deliberately anti-historical. Instead, they tried to study the evolution of the different artistic devices which goes through a process of deautomatization and ultimately becomes automatized giving way to newer devices.

They, however, did not completely deny the social function of art. On the contrary, they redefined and broadened its scope by asserting that art makes us see things which we usually tend to ignore. In this way art is related to life.

Jan Mukařovský developed the concept of defamiliarisation more systematically than Shklovsky by trying to include the extra-literary factors. He says that art leads to a "renewed awareness of the manifold and multivalent nature of reality." [38] Art helps us to focus our attention on signs themselves instead of taking them for granted by subverting the conventional sign systems. The Prague school viewed the structure of the individual text as a system of signs. Mukarovsky remarks:

> The mutual relationship of the components of the work of
> poetry, both foregrounded and unforegrounded, constitute
> its structure, a dynamic *structure* including both
> convergence and divergence, and one that constitutes an
> indissociable artistic whole, since each of its components
> has its value in terms of its relation to the totality.[39]

So the aim of literary studies is to identify deviations from existing linguistic and literary practice. This involves the analysis of the language as well

as the content of the text. The concept of the "dominant" provides an important element for analysis of text. As Mukařovský says, all components of the text and their interrelationships" are evaluated from the standpoint of the dominant," which thus "creates the unity of the work of poetry."[40]

Mukařovský's notion of the "aesthetic structure" does not, however, exclude extra-literary factors from critical analysis. He emphasized the dynamic tension between literature and society in a literary text and agreed that the aesthetic function proves to be an ever shifting boundary and not a category. The sphere of art is always changing and is dynamically related to the structure of society. Art and literature are thus constantly being defined as the literary canon is deconstructed.

Mukařovský seems to be influenced by Yury Tynyanov. Yury Tynyanov made two new and significant contributions. According to R.H. Stacy, " the first involves his concept of the dynamic rather than static nature of literary phenomena, i.e., the ever-changing nature of literature, the fluidity of the boundary between literature and life and a rejection of *a priori* definitions (to pay more attention to the importance of the historical and sociological background in the study of literature). For Tynyanov, literature is, 'dynamic verbal structure.' He looked upon literature as a 'system of system' rather than, in Shklovskian terms, a 'sum total of literary device.' He argues for the study of art as dynamic integration, as aesthetic structure, and not as the mere enumeration of coexisting elements, one of the less satisfying aspects of Shklovsky's method."[41]

Mikhail Bakhtin, however, criticized the Formalists for neglecting social and ideological concerns in poetic language. The Marxists and other emerging literary groups like the Bakhtin Linguistic Circle attacked the Formalists

because they failed to provide an adequate sociological and philosophical justification for their theories. In their search for literariness they excluded all that was non-literary. But the distinction of literary and non-literary is problematic. I think Roger Webster is right when he says that "it is dangerous to have rigid categories and boundaries as to literary and non-literary discourse. Literary discourse is a relative category both formally and historically and thus liable to change and open to redefinition. Its formal characteristics emerge by differentiation from other kinds of language, and its historical nature by differentiation from – or compliance with – official and conventional discourses."[42]

Many critics view that Bakhtin's work is not very distinct in approach from the Formalists. Bakhtin's work is historically connected to the aims of the Formalist movement. Though Bakhtin is concerned with novel and Jakobson with poetry one would agree with Ann Jefferson that "Bakhtin and Jakobson share the same underlying assumptions: first that literature is instructive about the nature of language; and secondly, that the function of literature... is to focus attention on the message."[43] So literature is a self-referential use of language and language has multiple components. Bakthin attributes these assumptions to the social and Jakobson to the structural.

Despite the attempt of Jakobson, Tynyanov, and Mukařovský to connect the aims of Formalism to larger social and cultural issues, Formalism remained committed to the notion that "literariness" alone was the aim of literary studies.

Notes:

1. Boris Eikhenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method," in *Russian Formalism*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 102-103.

2. Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalism*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 19.

3. Viktor Shklovsky "Art as Technique," 19.

4. Viktor Shklovsky, "On the connection between the devices of syuzhet construction and general stylistic devices," in *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation,*" ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (New York: Barnes, 1973) 48.

5. Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" 18.

6. Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979) 54.

7. L. M. O' Tool and Ann Shukman, "A Contextual Glossary of Formalist Terminology," *Russian Poetics in Translation* 4 (1977) 20.

8. Ann Jefferson and David Robey, eds. *Modern Literary Theory* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1986) 29.

9. Viktor Shklovsky 24.

10. L.M.O' Toole and Ann Shukman 34.

11. Viktor Shklovsky 11.

[12.] Tony Bennett 55.

[13]. Viktor Shklovsky 7.

[14]. Viktor Shklovsky 19-20.

[15]. Viktor Shklovsky 22-23.

[16]. Viktor Shklovsky 21.

[17]. Tony Bennett 44-50.

[18]. Viktor Erlich Qtd. Tony Bennett 51.

[19]. Jan Mukařovský, "Standard Language and Poetic Language," in *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, ed. and trans. Paul L. Garvin (Washington D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1964) 19.

[20]. Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structural Views*, ed. Ladishav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) 82.

[21]. Roman Jakobson 84.

[22]. Roman Jakobson 85.

[23]. Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1958) 170-171.

[24]. Paul Valéry 72.

[25]. Paul Valéry 147.

[26.] Paul Valéry 27.

[27]. E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP 1967) 44-46.

[28]. Jan Mukařovský 20-21.

[29]. Viktor Shklovsky, "The Ressurection of the Word." in *Russian Formalism : A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (New York: Barnes, 1973) 41-42.

[30]. Viktor Shklovsky 23.

[31]. Viktor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 225.

[32]. Viktor Erlich 178.

[33]. D. Grossvogel, *Limits of the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971) 148.

[34]. Richard Sherwood, "Viktor Shklovsky and the Development of Early Formalist Theory on Prose literature," in *Russian Formalism*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (New York: Barnes, 1973) 33.

[35]. Flaubert Qtd. G. Becker, ed. *Documents in Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) 90.

[36]. Richard Sherwood 36.

[37]. Viktor Shklovsky 118.

[38]. Paul L. Garvin, ed. and trans. *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown UP, 1964) 33.

[39]. Garvin 22.

[40]. Garvin 20-21.

[41]. R. H. Stacy, *Russian Literary Criticism: A Short History* (Syrause: Syrause UP, 1974) 175.

[42.] Roger Webster, *Studying Literary Theory* (London: Arnold, 1990) 46.

[43.] Ann Jefferson, "Literariness, Dominance and Violence in Formalist Aesthetics," in *Literary Theory Today* ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 138.