

***ANIMAL FARM: A SATIRE ON COMMUNISM THROUGH
'DEFAMILIARIZATION'***

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Abstract

The term, 'Defamiliarization', coined by one of the earliest practitioners of Russian Formalism, namely Victor Shklovsky, in his essay "Art as Technique" tends to throw light on the special use of language in the works of art, unlike the use of language in our day to day life. He along with the other theorists of this Russian Formalist school argued that the very complexity of our existence remain unheeded due to the repetitiveness of the works in our day to day life. That's why they held that the different sort of language or the propensity of the artists to present the familiar things in unfamiliar ways to persuade the readers and the spectators to perceive in turn will enable them to see the familiar things in a new light. So the technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, and to increase the difficulty and the length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

This paper, entitled "*Animal Farm: A Satire on Communism through Defamiliarization*" would strive to explore that how George Orwell by defamiliarizing the Russian Communist Movement through a beast fable in his novella *Animal Farm* endeavors to bring out the underlying unnerving details of power politics and the corruption which pervade the every nook an corner of the communist movement. This paper would also attempt to throw light on how this use of the technique called 'defamiliarization' persuades the readers to unravel these diverse scales of corruption and how these dominant forces always turn the weak ones as eternal scapegoats, which in turn intensifies Orwell's attempt to satirize Communism.

“History consists of a series of swindles, in which the masses are first lured into revolt by the promise of Utopia, and then when they have done their job, enslaved over again by new masters (Meyers 131).”

The term ‘Defamiliarization’ was coined by Victor Shklovsky, one of the most accomplished practitioners of Russian Formalism in his dawn breaking essay “Art as Technique”. Unlike the symbolists he tried to perceive and define the techniques which are relentlessly employed by the writers to create specific effects. He saw literature from mechanical perspective. For him the object is not important but the way it is presented is important. This itself marks the difference between Russian Formalism and New Criticism. Though the New Critics also focused on the use of language in poetry but they also fuse aesthetic form with moral and cultural significance. Whereas the Russian Formalists intended to explain how the aesthetic effects are produced by literary devices.

Among the Formalists Shklovsky was the first who focused on the technical aspects which play an indispensable role behind the production of the work of art. He considered literature as a special use of language which achieves its distinctive quality by deviating from and distorting practical language. Shklovsky praises Hardy for employing this technique deftly in his works. HE held that “If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously then such lives are as if they had never been” (Shklovsky, 5). So to let the readers perceive the essence of it the author should present those familiar things in such a way that it would appear to be a bit unfamiliar. An artist’s role is to capture the sensation of life, so that the conventionality of our perception is put into question. So through the work of art the readers should be able to see the familiar things (which they could have ignored in their day-to-day life) unfamiliar. So the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. Shklovsky also proclaimed that the way the familiar things are presented in an unfamiliar way, similarly the unfamiliar things should be presented in a familiar way. The work of art should enable us to see the world afresh. According to him to present familiar things in an unfamiliar way an artist should present things in a difficult way so that it can leave space for readers’ perception, which in turn will enable them to see the familiar things in a new light. So the technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and the length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Thus to make the perception of the reader prolonged the artist should delineate the familiar things in a difficult as well as in a protracted way. This process of protraction gives rise to another key tenet of formalism i.e. “laying bare”

So the projection of objects in the work of art in a different way tends to enable us to stop recognizing the familiar objects automatically. So the purpose of a work of art is to change our mode of perception from practical and automatic to aesthetic.

George Orwell, one of the major exponents of ‘defamiliarization’ has employed the technique called ‘defamiliarization’ in his novella *Animal Farm* to project a satire on Communism. His choice of satiric beast fable is reminiscent of the Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels*. In *Animal Farm* the eviction of Mr. Jones, the owner of the farm was caused by the mesmerizing and captivating speech of Old Major, a prize winning boar. His dream of a free life of the animals of the farm and more seminally the song ‘Beasts of England’ where he envisioned the freedom in the lives of the animals which is redolent enough when he says: “Rings shall vanish from our noses /And the harness from our back, /Bit and spur shall rust forever /Cruel

whips no more shall crack” (7). So the dream of freedom and a scope for the animals to get rid of human suppression which have been clearly pointed out by the old Major when he says “Only get rid of man, and the produce of our labour would be our own” (5), have led them to a sudden insurrection against Mr. Jones which finally resulted in the eviction of Mr. Jones. But after the death of the Major, followed by the long discussion pigs have been considered as the cleverest of the animals and the inventiveness and aptness of speech of Snowball have been prioritized over the robustness of Napoleon, another Berkshire pig. So after appointing Snowball as the leader of the animals he first declared ‘The Seven Commandments’, to be followed in the farm, where he clearly mentioned that:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings is a friend
3. No animal shall wear clothes
4. No animal shall sleep in bed
5. No animal shall drink alcohol
6. No animal shall kill any other animal
7. All animals are equal (15).

So in these seven commandments Snowball has focused on the equality and unity among the animals of the farm. If we take it into broader sphere then all those commandments maintain a strong affinity with the tenets of Communism, which has been intensified in their act of hoisting a green flag where green suggests the green fields of the England and making a sign with a hoof a horn which stands for the Republic of the Animals which can only take place after the eviction of the human race. So if we closely look into those facts that what is rightly reverberated through it is that the animals in the farm have been given the hope for a better future when they will be free from the oppression of human beings who stand as the representative of totalitarian state. So Orwell in his novella *Animal Farm* has delineated some applications of Communism through the acts of the animals. So the novelist here has brought forth the notion of communism, which is a familiar as well as well known fact to the human beings through the acts of the animals which is a bit unfamiliar act of presentation.

Orwell in *Animal Farm* has subtly explored the Soviet Myth through the lives of the animals under the rule of the Snowball and Napoleon. Orwell has fused his artistic and political purpose in this book so deftly that the animals appear to be completely suitable on the literal level. With the ramification of the novel the satiric effects which the author intended to project come to the fore and become conspicuous enough. Thus it is reminiscent of Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels* as the Yahoos work like slaves for the Houyhnhnms, the other animals of the farm do it for the pigs, the self proclaimed leaders. The horses “milk their cows, and reap their oats, and do all the work which requires Hands’ whereas the pigs sent buckets and milked the cows fairly successfully, their trotters being well adapted to this task” (15).

Major’s speech in this novella is a perfect exhibition of orthodox Marxism which resembles with the last paragraph of the Communist Manifesto (1848) where the Communists:

Openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at the Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKINGMEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE (Meyers 133).

So through the speech of old Major Orwell has tried to portray the flavor of Marx and Engels, the writers of this book as well as the pioneers of communism. When the old Major envisioned the time when the animals will be free from shackles of human beings which is clearly reflected through the lines “Rings shall vanish from our noses” (7) and ushered in uniting all the animals of England so that the revolution can take place which may lead them to a life of freedom, from the slavery of human beings it is resonant among of Marx and Engels’ dream of an egalitarian society, free from the constraints of existing social order. So it can be rightly perceived that Orwell here has employed the ‘defamiliarization’ technique to bring out certain aspects of Communism. But till this point he has not been satiric in his approach as he has been pointing out the vision of an egalitarian society of early communists through the speech of the old Major. But with the unfolding of the plot the satiric effects become more and more flagrant enough with the degeneration of Communism because of the tainted nature of the leadership at later stages. This satiric effect has also been met with the projection of lives of the animals under the rule of Snowball and Napoleon.

The naming of the animals also suggests Orwell’s realistic and political motifs. Orwell has chosen the familiar names of the people, associated with Russian Revolution and attributed them to the animals, which he projected implicitly through the acts and lives of the animals of the farm. The way of depiction is not direct enough and the readers are compelled to pause and think about these familiar things, which enable them to perceive the revolution in a new light, which may unlock the different dimensions of it. The imperious Major may signify Marx and Lenin because of his military, dominant and persuasive nature. Self sacrificing and stupid Boxer, the horse may stand for the working class people or the proletariat who toil hard for the illusion of a better future propounded by the leaders, Mollie, the white horse suggest folly and her inclination towards vanity and luxury may suggest the ultimate motif of the leaders of the Russian Revolution. Squealer, the pig who brings out the orders of Napoleon, and eulogizes and justifies his actions may refer to the valuable representative of the later Communist leaders. Mr. Whymper the pig’s agent suggests a toady. Pilkington, the owner of the neighboring farm represents the capitalist exploiter of Churchill-England. His old fashioned farm may stand for the old capitalist society. His acquaintance with Napoleon, the leader of the animals of the farm may signify the deliberate attempt of the capitalists to destroy Communism. Frederick another owner of a neighboring farm who is very much cunning and conniving in nature signifies the cunningness of Hitler. His act of deceiving Napoleon by paying through the bank notes which are forgeries and sudden attack to the Animal Farm may stand as a symbol for the breach of contract between Hitler and Stalin (the Hitler –Stalin non aggression pact of August 1939). The attack and the subsequent defeat of Frederick resembles with the Hitler’s defeat in the Battle of Stalingrad which is regarded as the turning point of Russian campaign which has reached its height dramatic effect when the enemy “saw that they were in danger of being surrounded, Frederick shouted to his men to get out while the going was good, and the next moment the cowardly enemy was running for dear life” (64).

But Orwell’s use of ‘defamiliarization’ technique to associate the animals with some of the key figures of the Russian Revolution, some important capitalists, autocrats and proletariats has reached its consummation with the association of Napoleon with Stalin and Snowball with Trotsky. Only through the characteristics of these two the theme of satire on Communism has gained profundity as well as momentum. The personality and their activities are completely antithetical in nature and they never come to any sort of agreement which recurs again and again

in the novella. The appearance as well as the inventiveness of Snowball maintains a stark affinity with Trotsky whereas Napoleon, the pig who is fierce looking, “not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way” (9), resembles Stalin’s characteristics. Napoleon never comes up with any new ideas, but he is the first to raise voice against the inventive ideas Snowball, though after the expulsion of Snowball, he adopts those plans and claims them to be his own. At first he distorts and then changes the history. He sends him to exile, then brings forward the wrong allegation against Snowball, that he is plotting with the foreign enemies against them and finally proclaims his death sentence. He exploits the sentiments of the other animals as well as gains support of them by tyrannizing them with the ferocious dogs, who seem to be his bodyguards. After each act which may appear to be against the notions of equality among the animals, he sends Squealer to explain the cause to the animals, and Squealer simply ends with the notion of not bringing back the human beings, which is the common ground for all the animals of the farm. He wins elections unanimously, names cities after himself and replaces the cult of old Major (signifies the tomb of Lenin) with his own one. The song ‘Beasts of England’ was replaced by a song in praise of Napoleon, where he is regarded as “Friend of fatherless! /Fountain of happiness! /Lord of swill-bucket! /...Comrade Napoleon” (57-58), by the rest of the animals because of fear. Among all these incidents the most predominant one is the naming the windmill, which is the product of a long hard work of all the animals after his name- ‘Napoleon Mil’. So all these incidents clearly point out how the concept of equality is deliberately shattered and the prevalence of fear among the animals, except the pigs in the farm. So under the rule of ‘Comrade Napoleon’ the notion of dictatorship comes back in full swing which stands as a sharp contrast to the tenets of Communism.

But on the other hand Snowball’s appearance as well as his activities reminds us of Trotsky’s white hair and beard, and the fact that he melted before Stalin’s opposition. Snowball is a brilliant speaker, though sometimes unimpressive to others, but he is more vivacious and inventive than Napoleon and a much great writer. In 1921 Deutscher writes about Trotsky that besides being the army chief and serving the Politbureau:

He was busy with a host of other assignments each of which would have made a full-time job for any man of less vitality and ability. He led for instance, the society of the Godless...He was at this time Russia’s chief intellectual inspirer and leading literary critic. He frequently addressed audiences (Deutscher 28).

These activities of Trotsky are clearly identifiable with Snowball who,

...also busied himself with organizing the other animals into what he called Animal Committees... He formed Egg Production Committee for the hens, the Clean Tails League for the cows, the wild comrades Re-education Committe... and various others, besides the instituting classes in reading and writing (19).

Snowball’s reading of Military history, his deftness in organizing others, power to lead others as well as his aptness in taking decisions leads him to gain victory in the ‘Battle of Cowshed’ by defeating Mr. Jones and his men. This ‘Battle of Cowshed’ closely resembles the Civil war where the Foreign Powers tried to invade Russia. Here Mr. Jones and his men represent Foreign Power, whereas the farm epitomizes Russia. So this process of ‘defamiliarization’ continues throughout the novella.

The conflict between Trotsky and Stalin has also been defamiliarized, through the dichotomy between Snowball and Napoleon. When Snowball comes up with the idea of windmill which will reduce the work of the animals Napoleon focused on the increase of food production, and has also opposed the idea windmill by pronouncing that if they waste their time in establishing the windmill, then they will end up in starvation. This incident is reminiscent of Trotsky's emphasis on manufacturing, industrialization and expansion of Socialist Sector economy which was eventually implemented by Stalin after the first five-year plan of 1928, which ushered in collectivization of farms and industrialization.

The ideological dispute between Trotsky and Stalin can be associated with that of Snowball and Napoleon. While Trotsky presented his idea of 'Permanent Revolution' Stalin proposed the idea of 'Socialism in One Country'. This ideological duel between Trotsky and Stalin is resonant enough in the ideological conflict between Snowball and Napoleon:

According to Napoleon, what the animals must do was to procure firearms and train themselves in the use of them. According to Snowball, they must send out more and more pigeons and stir up the rebellion among the animals on the other farms. The one argued that if they could not defend themselves they were bound to be conquered, the other argued that if rebellion happened everywhere they would have no need to defend themselves (17).

Trotsky-Stalin conflict took a crucial turn in mid-1927, after the breach of contract between Soviet and British trade unions and Russian ambassador to Poland was assassinated. Trotsky and the opposition raised voice against Stalin for these political and military failures, but before they could bring this issue to the Party Congress and evict Stalin from the power he removed Trotsky from the party. This crucial upheaval in Soviet History has been perfectly presented in *Animal Farm* in the final defeat of Snowball, when everyone knows about the actual result of the vote, but Napoleon's ferocious dogs attack Snowball and lead him to exile.

Though ostensibly it may seem that Orwell speaks in favor of Snowball, but if we look into the incidents of the novel minutely then we can perceive that he has also satirized Snowball. Snowball is the first one whom sows the seed of dictatorship, when the pigs secretly mix the milk in their mash and when it gets revealed to other animals Squealer justifies the act by saying that: "It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back. 'Surely there is no one among you who want to see Jones come back?'" (22).

So under the rule of Snowball the seed of inequality was first sown and the other animals have been deceived which gets intensified and becomes spiteful under Napoleon's rule. This sort of deviation from the tenets of Communism was much resented by Orwell, who told one of his friends that Trotsky-Snowball was potentially as big a villain as Stalin-Napoleon, which takes a violent turn with the ramification of the novel.

The three most important Russian political events that are most extensively allegorized in *Animal Farm* are mowing down of Stalin's forced collectivization (1929-33), the great purge trials (1936-38), and the end of diplomatic relation between Germany and Russia, with the invasion of Hitler in 1941. After "Snowball's expulsion the animals were somewhat surprised to hear that the windmill was to be built after all" (36). But the animals remain silent out of the fear of the dogs. This sort of fear continues till the end. After sometime Napoleon stops appearing in front of other animals and sends Squealer to explain the motives behind his activities to others,

while he himself takes refuge in luxury. Though his activities stand as a sharp contrast to equity among animals and sounds ignominious, such as when pigs have started sleeping in beds and when Napoleon utters to sell a certain number of eggs, but finally Squealer succeeds in motivating them by pointing out that no animals want Jones back. He also justifies the act of sleeping in bed by saying that it's just a pile of straw and the rule is against sheets. So the fourth commandment is modified by adding "No animal shall sleep in a bed 'with sheets'" (65). This sort of modification of commandments and justification of luxury of pigs goes on whose foundation was laid down under the rule of Snowball and the idealists like Boxer who suggests working class people stupidly accepts everything in a false hope for a better future under the rule of those who propound the very principle of equality. These animals like Boxer keeps on proclaiming "Napoleon is always right...I will work harder" (15).

But in the regime of Napoleon the dream of a better future is completely shattered as he resorts to the dictatorship. Again through the dictatorship of Napoleon, Orwell has brought forth the dictatorship of Stalin in an unfamiliar way. The incidents which take place under Napoleon's rule has their relation with Russian history and through the projection of these incidents the theme of satire on Communism gets more and more vibrant enough and comes to the fore.

The first demolition of the windmill, which Napoleon blames on Snowball, is the failure of the first five year plan of Stalin. After declaring the building of windmill as the first priority he announces to sell a 'stack of hay and part of current year's wheat crop' and suggests selling the eggs of the hens for the need of more money. After coming to know about Napoleon's intention, the hens go for a protest and "made a determined effort to thwart Napoleon's wishes. Their methods was to fly up to the rafters and there lay their eggs, which smashed to pieces on the floor" (47). Their way of protest was resonant enough of that of muzhiks in 1929 when they protested against the forced collectivization of farms by slaughtering their cattle and burning their crops, which received a rigorous response from Stalin and ended up in "years of appalling hardship, culminating in the Ukraine famine of 1933, in which a number estimated at not less than three million people starved to death" (Meyers 140). In the case of the hens also Napoleon has stopped rations of the hens and after five days the hens come back to their boxes but during that time the nine hens have already met their death. Napoleon's behavior towards the hens stands as an epitome of his repudiation of the Communist ideals, though he supposedly follows these ideals. This act of dissembling gets intensified with the unfolding of the story. His allegiance with Frederick and Pilkington is symbolic of Stalin's alliance with the capitalist countries like Britain and France. This incident has also its root in one of the Deutscher's book where he describes how:

He (Stalin) kept his front doors open for the British and French and confined the contact with the Germans to the back stairs...It is still impossible to say confidently to which part of the game Stalin then attached the great importance: to the plot acted on the stage or to the subtle counter plot (Deutscher 434).

Similarly Napoleon has kept friendship with Pilkington and at the same time has secretly kept in touch with Frederick. But his dubiousness backfires when he discovers Frederick's banknotes are forgeries and the subsequent attack on the farm by Frederick and his men.

In this novella Orwell has employed a very subtle way of satirizing the application of Communism. Throughout the novel he has never turned violent, except for the time when Napoleon has led a miserable butchery of animals in suspicion of keeping in touch with

Snowball secretly. The animals are petrified by the merciless act of Napoleon as “In old days there had been scenes of bloodshed equally terrible, but it seemed to all of them that it was for worse now that it was happening among themselves” (53). Thus the sixth commandment that is ‘no animal shall kill another animal is violated and is subsequently modified as ‘No animal shall kill another animal without cause’. This sort of hypocrisy and deviation from the ideals have been consummated in the pigs’ attempt to keep a specific place for brewing up of alcohol, despite the shortage of food and starvation of other animals. This hardness in the lives of the animals except pigs symbolizes the perpetual plight in the lives of the working class people, even in the Communist rule, which is nothing but an another form dictatorship. That sort of deviation from the seven commandments can signify the nature of the later communist leaders especially of Stalin whose acts reflect a wide chasm between the Communist Ideals and their applications. This corruption has reached its climax towards the end of the novella when Napoleon has changed the name of the farm and has resorted to its earlier name, i.e. ‘Manor Farm’ and has held a party with the neighboring farm owners and other people from nearby places. Finally it deserves mention that the miserable death of Boxer who has worked harder and harder to lead this revolution to a greater extent and to bring a better future for all of them may suggest the ultimate predicament of the idealists who are the backbone of any revolution and the final acts of Napoleon also signifies the act of the so-called Communist leaders of resorting back to the tenets of earlier Capitalism.

So it’s quite evident enough that Orwell has not adopted a violent mode to satirize the applications of Communism. Rather he has employed a sort of subtle and implicit way of projection, to achieve that end of applying ‘defamiliarization’ at a greater degree. He has very deftly brought out the whole history of Russian Revolution, through the simple story of the lives of some animals in a farm, while the relation between them can only be perceived through a minute and careful reading of the entire text as well as the texts on Russian Revolution.

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