A Poetic "Distance": Defamiliarisation in Simon Armitage's Early Works
Şiirsel Bir "Uzaklık": Simon Armitage'ın Erken Eserlerinde Yabancılaştırma

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Abstract

In the majority of his works, the Poet Laureate Simon Armitage has depicted the components of the simplicity surrounding his life, thus "zooming" in to the engaging perspectives of the otherwise unnoticed nuances. However, simply seeking nostalgic elements in descriptions that manifest Armitage's experience through the representations of the physical environments he depicted would be a reductionist reading of a much more profound reservoir. Attempting to explore the underlying postmodern manifesto, this study provides a stylistic reading of Armitage's early poetry, arguing that by beginning from familiarising toward a defamiliarisation, Armitage generates a definition of *distance* as a function and method, which dynamically changes in both spatial and semantic terms. The poet's postmodern stance might appear controversial as the examples from his early works adopt his autobiographical environment as their setting in an attempt to delineate an organic affiliation with his poems. More notably, they draw direct associations that link particular meanings or historical significations to the locations cited in the poems. Regarding their construction as a postmodern manifesto, Armitage's analysed poems include postmodern elements such as decentralisation and deconstruction. The poems illustrate that these elements both defamiliarise Armitage's close environment appearing in his works and exemplify the construction of postmodern poetry. Following their representation accordingly, the study will particularly investigate Armitage's definition of distance to provide a basis for comprehending the later semantic and stylistic alteration and will be limited to Armitage's early works from 1980s to the millennium, with a close reading of the concept.
Keywords: Simon Armitage, postmodern poetry, distance, familiarisation, defamiliarization.

Öz

Eserlerinin çoğunda Devlet Şairi Simon Armitage, hayatını çevreleyen basit unsurları betimlemiş, böylelikle başka türlü dikkat çekmeyecek ayrıntıların ilgi çekici yönlerine yakınlaşan bir "zoom" hareketi içindedir. Ancak bu eserlere Armitage'ın kişisel yaşantısına dair nostaljik bir yaklaşımda bulunmak, bu çok daha derin bir rezervuara sahip şiirleri kısıtlayıcı bir okumaya maruz bırakacaktır. Bu çalışma, biçimsel bir okuma yöntemiyle Armitage'ın erken eserlerinin altında yatan postmodern manifestoyu incelemeyi amaçlar ve Armitage'ın yakınlaştırmayla başlayarak yabancılaşmaya doğru, işlev ve yöntem olarak hem mekânsal hem de anlamsal bakımdan dinamik şekilde değişen bir *uzaklık* kavramı geliştirdiğini savunur. Şairin postmodern duruşu tartışmalı görünebilir; çünkü erken dönem eserlerinden örnekler, şiirleriyle kurduğu organik bağı ortaya çıkarma girişimiyle Armitage'ın otobiyografik çevresini bir bağlam olarak almıştır. Daha önemlisi, belirli anlamları ya da tarihsel imlemleri şiirlerde geçen mekânlarla ilişkilendiren doğrudan çağrışımlar çizmişlerdir. Postmodern manifesto niteliği bakımından Armitage'ın incelenen şiirleri, merkezsizleştirme ve yapısöküm gibi pootmodern ögeler içermektedir. Şiirler, bu ögelerin hem Armitage'ın

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eserlerinde görülen yakın çevresini yabancılaştırığını hem de postmodern şiir oluşumunu örneklediğini gösterir. Buna bağlı olarak ögelerin temsilini izleyen çalışma, şairin daha sonraki anlamsal ve biçemsel değişimini anlamada bir temel oluşturmak için özellikle Armitage'ın 1980'lerden milenyuma kadarki erken eserlerindeki uzaklık tanımını, kavramı yakından okuyarak inceleyecektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Simon Armitage, postmodern şiir, uzaklık, yakınlaştırma, yabancılaşma.

Introduction

The concept of distance does not only set a theme in literature, but it can also operate as an organiser of the relationship between the text, its author, and the addressee. Its latter function, therefore, indicates a dynamic agency appearing in the textual structure as well as the content through different aspects of change. In his comprehensive analysis of Armitage's poetry and fiction, Ian Gregson dedicates a chapter concerning the poet's "changes of place," in which he emphasises the influence of Armitage's biography over the content of his poetry. Accordingly, he points out the need to pay attention to the poet's geographical journey and how this spatial transaction resonates with his approach to the environment. Armitage was born in the town of Marsden, West Yorkshire, in 1963, where he spent his childhood. After receiving his degree in geography from Portsmouth University in 1984, he continued his career in the same field. Several critics attribute Armitage's particular stylistic "zoom" into the details of his environment to his academic knowledge of geography, which is also reflected in Armitage's conception of land. After another four years, Armitage returned to school and received a master's degree in social work from Victoria University, Manchester. His master's thesis here focused on the impact violent television programming has on young criminals (*Simon Armitage Official Website*[1]). In 1994, he was employed in Greater Manchester as a Probation Officer. Writing poetry meanwhile, his first collection of poems, titled *Zoom!* (1989), was published. The collection displayed sharp attention in terms of literary scope, and it was quickly followed by *Kid* and poem-turned-film *Xanadu* in 1992. By 1994, Armitage decided to fully engage with writing. Accordingly, *The Dead Sea Poems* (1995), and *CloudCuckooLand* (1997) got published as a proof of his devotion to poetry. In his early works published between the 1980s and 2000s, he adopted plain and colloquial language tuned into daily life, which created a familiar, natural, and approachable sense. Engaging in a more postmodern style, his later works master this particular tone in historiographic, metapoetic, and topological senses. In one of his recent works, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (2018), for example, he reworks the fourteenth-century romance from a responsive, humorous, and suggestive stance. In *Magnetic Field: The Marsden Poems* (2020), on the other hand, he presents his home village while eliciting and exploring a poetic vision that refashions the land's history in relation to how it has been effected by British economy and radical changes. While these recent works disclose Armitage's postmodern stance in various ways, this study shall focus on the poet's early works to trace the foundations of Armitage's poetry. Therefore, the study will be limited to his works produced and published before millennium.

While the indicated works feature postmodern elements in-Armitage's poetry, his works have been equally influential for the ensuing era. Commenting on Armitage's appointment as the Poet Laureate in 2019, Matthew Hollis points out the influence of poet's style and content over the contemporary literary trends as follows:

> His boyish, fresh-faced poems made an unmissable impression upon the 1980s: political, tough-minded, astute, funny, realist and surreal in opposing measure. They persuaded readers that no barrier should curtail their adventure, no dogma and no gatekeeper. They spoke to the experiences of our streets and our schoolrooms and walked around in the lives about us, marking a place for popular and literary cultures alike, freeing our vernacular from the locked cupboards of received learning. (*Faber,* n.p.)

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[1] https://www.simonarmitage.com/biography/

Hollis's remarks relate the poet to a particular engagement with space that defies boundaries while addressing the subjective experience of daily urban life by refashioning them with the "vernacular" that synthesises the "popular" and the "literary cultures." In this respect, Armitage's early works primarily serve as a cultural mediator between the twentieth-century society and the postmodern intellect, diverging from the nostalgic and glorifying, pessimistic discourse of modernism. What Armitage initiates with *Zoom!,* and later continues in the mentioned works, however, is a simultaneous distancing of the poet in postmodern terms and the poems' objective directed toward the familiar landscape that is reminiscent of Armitage's childhood. To this end, Armitage provides spatial introductions to set a familiar context, whereby he reveals autobiographical information. In doing so, he defines a particular location to himself as a mediator-author, to the content of his works, and to the audience who becomes a part of this experience. Hence, the entirety of the context with its spatial elements essentially sets the objective, later to be distanced.

Armitage's postmodern stance might appear controversial as the examples from his early works adopt his autobiographical environment as their setting in an attempt to delineate this organic affiliation and, more notably, draw direct associations that link particular meanings or historical significations to the locations cited in the poems. This effect of familiarisation urges us to question its use and function in Armitage's poetry, which is considered postmodern: Why does Armitage attempt to introduce particular locations, people, or instances familiar to him, while a postmodern stance would demand detachment from direct association that reduce the meaning according to Derrida's poststructuralism (Gül 92)? A chronological analysis of his poems concerning the content and form simultaneously highlights a gradual distancing by which the familiar is pronounced in the *past.* Accordingly, I shall argue that Armitage uses familiarisation as the first step of his poetic "strategy" (Gregson, 2011, p. 80), ultimately directing the reader to defamiliarisation[2]. In doing so, Armitage provides a developmental account of the postmodern theory in literature with a new account of a dynamic *distance.*

As an example of how Armitage sets a familiar context and gradually zooms out as a method, "Snow Joke" in *Zoom!,* directly opens with an intimate question addressing the audience: "Heard the one about the guy from Heaton Mersey?" (Armitage 1989, p. 2) With a tone that assumes acquaintances, the poem invites the audience to a shared story that discloses Armitage's memory. The poem constitutes six stanzas, each connected to the other within a story framework. The narrative introduction *flows* by introducing "the guy from Heaton Mersey's" "[w]ife [is] at home, lover [is] in Hyde, mistress [is] / in Newton-le-Willows and two pretty girls [are] / in the top grade at Werneth prep." The particular places mentioned are located in different parts of England. The poem goes on to tell an incident "the guy" experiences during a troublesome night "and the story goes he was stuck within minutes" in a snowy night after "snubbing the police warning-light". In the third stanza, the speaker gives details about the character's state of mind, as near the end, people find him "slumped against the steering wheel", fighting "in the pub over hot toddies / as to who was to take the most credit". Through psychological details and nuances about the cited situation, the poem both drives us to get familiar with the environment it depicts and the organic relationship between characters by a way of revealing intimate exchanges between them. This particular familiarisation 'locates' the piece of work through direct associations, thus, indicates howthe poem will distance itself.

One way of creating this distance in Armitage's early poetry concerns integrating the title into the poem. As an example of this, "Why Write of the Sun" in *Zoom!* eliminates the boundary between the title and the body by uniting them. Thus, the poem constructs a single sentence constituting the first three lies. Beginning with the title, the speaker asks, "Why write of the sun" when it only lingered with its impression and instead left its place for drizzles, winds, and thunderstorms. For each weather phenomenon, the speaker tells a different story "they"[3] experienced in specified locations while directly addressing the audience: "Take the week of the cottage in Anglesey", "[t]ake the camping weekend under Malhalm Cove", "[t]ake

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[2] A working definition of *defamiliarisation* in this paper's conceptual framework would adopt Shklovsky's description of the term in "Art as a Technique" (1917): "to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of new perception -that is, to make a unique semantic modification." (5) In parallel to this approach, Armitage focuses on particular objects/situations from his domestic environment to provide unnoticed ventage points to add their perception.
[3] Throughout the poem, the speaker does not disclose to whom the pronoun "they" refers.

the walk along the Humber Bridge" (1989, p. 16). The tone of the speaker assumes familiarity with the places he recites. Besides, it calls for remembering the incident or the specified locations, like commenting on a shared experience. In doing so, the poem draws the audience closer to the poem and, simultaneously, the poet to the content by using familiarisation as a method to create an organic relationship between these positions.

Armitage's distancing shows that way of avoiding to be limited to a particular time, place, and topic is to set a broader perspective from the microcosm toward the macrocosm. Catherine Coussens notes that Armitage intends to relate his topical material to "the past one thousand years of history" (2008, p. 29). This attempt might underline the universality of human affairs on the one hand. However, Coussens claims that such representation would also emphasise "the randomness, meaninglessness and lack of cohesion of contemporary events, and the predominance of conflict and combat in shaping culture" (ibid). Aware of this effect inherited by modernism, Armitage undertakes the role of a *mediating author* by connecting the raptures with autobiographical references to avert inconsistency. That is, he directs the audience in the meaning-making process by assisting the poem with autobiographical references. In "An Interview with Simon Armitage," the poet shares his contention that poetry is "a way of not finding significance but actually inventing it, inventing significance and sort of proving it to yourself" (*Poetry Archive,* n.p.). On the one hand, Armitage's definition grants the authoritative stance to the agent of meaning-making rather than the poet or the poem itself. On the other hand, he explicitly articulates the principles of Derridean *freeplay,* which will be further exemplified. Notably, this assertion manifests what Gregson puts as the "Armitage strategy" (2011, p. 80), by which the poet sets his unique context that weaves the familiar to the insignificant, mundane, or unnoticed details that function in the act of zooming. In this respect, such stylistic zooming defines Armitage's poetic movement, particularly in his millennium works in which his postmodern discovery transforms into an explicit declaration. As Gregson concludes, the poet's early works "prefigure a key Armitage strategy in which defamiliarising is achieved by zooming and panning, by moving in very small and/or expanding out very wide from everyday experience in order to refresh it" (2011, p. 80). This supports that Armitage initially attempts to *zoom in* and explore the associations between the details in his environment to provide a basis for his next step, namely defamiliarisation.

The poet demonstrates this assertion in "An Ornithology of the Americas" by posing the fundamental problem, which often revives in different collections: "It is difficult to know where to begin" (1989, p. 23). The poem is about "an international team of assorted scientists" who discuss several geographical and ornithological issues "on the morning after a house-warming party" (1989, p. 23). The poem constitutes of two stanzas, which depict several unfinished topics or fragments of loose-end situations, which literally makes it "difficult where to begin." Additionally, while the first stanza specifies a particular morning, time is problematised in the second stanza, which takes place "in the afternoon / after the morning after the night before" (1989, p. 23). While the scattered fragments of descriptions prevent a panoramic representation of the scene, the ambiguity of time adds to the 'difficulty' the poem poses. With this incomprehensible structure and content, the poem questions the 'ontology' of the momentary scene and subtly asks if it is even possible to know where to begin.

Significantly, the last poem of the collection, namely "Zoom!" responds to this inquiry. Depicting an act of zooming out from a microcosm to a macrocosm, the poem may be considered the manifesto of the "Armitage strategy" (Gregson, 2011, p. 80). The opening lines make it clear "where to begin": "It begins as a house, an end terrace / In this case / but it will not stop here." (Armitage, 1989, p. 78). Here, the beginning point is the "house," the domestic sphere, the microcosm that expands outwards without coming to a halt. As its title suggests, the poem illustrates a perpetual act of zooming by shifting the objective from this domestic microcosm to the universal macrocosm. During this journey, the observing eye visits places familiar to the observer, namely the "Mechanic's Institute", "a daily paper / and a football team pushing for promotion" (1989, p. 78). The intimate details in each destination reveal the very close distance between the observer and its history, indicating, again, an organic relationship constructed upon familiarities. However, this panoramic flow goes "before we know it it is out of our hands" (ibid), that shatters determinism and finality. From the beginning, each line moves toward a broader view of the picture, disabling centrality. On the other hand, this particular movement marks the direction Armitage will follow

in his further poetry: "city, nation / hemisphere, universe, hammering out in all directions" (ibid). Herein, the expansion proceeds beyond the familiar lands and titles, accelerating towards eternity until it is "drawn aside through the eye / of a black hole" (ibid), where the physic laws, structures, embodiments, and precisions are transgressed. Maintaining the decentralising tone, the objective of the speaker arrives at a chaotic, unstable, and unidentifiable phenomenon, a "black hole," which is a significant point of reference to foreground the poststructural principles. Derrida regards the logos as the structure of the framework "which is ought to be 'deconstructed'" (Gül 90), and suggests decentralising as one method for this (Cummings 103-107). Cumming explains that Derrida's attempt is to "deny conceptual mastery and definition" (104) in order to annihilate the hierarchical relations between the meanings within a text. He further draws attention to Derrida's philosophy of a "perpetual movement" (105) that prevents centralisation and establishment of hierarchies "conceived as decided, as settled" (ibid). The image of a black hole in Armitage's poem, in this sense, functions as a deconstructive power. By its nature, the black hole exhausts the material it embodies. The structured portrait of the town dissolves into nothingness through this destructive movement. Simultaneously, the depiction of the town in the poem zooms out with an account of a gradually enlargening landscape. As a result, the zooming act indicates the impossibility of finality, both literally and literarily. Thus, while the poem eliminates the literal borders depicted in the image of a "town" with this particular zooming act, the notion of a structured perception is deconstructed within a chaotic context in the end. In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker says that people stop him in the street and ask: "What is this, this that is so small / and so very smooth / but whose mass is greater than the ringed planet?" While the answer seeks a corporeal signifier, the speaker points out an abstract notion, saying, "It's just words / I assure them. But they will not have it" (1989, p. 78). A theoretical approach to these lines delineates the references to inversion of dualisms and binary oppositions.

A Derridean reading of the lines highlights the juxtaposition of "words" and "assurance," supported by the last sentence. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1970), Derrida explains the impossibility of absolute meanings due to the "interplay of signification *ad infinitum* [emphasis in original]" (1970, p. 2). That is, the signified is conditional depending on the conception of the meaning-maker and therefore, it displays a continuous movement of différance, the deferral of the meaning. In this respect, words fail to assure or convey a particular meaning due to their relative nature, thus reject essentialism. As in Armitage's lines, it is words whose figurative mass is greater than the "ringed planet" that indicates a definite structure; however, people "will not have [the meaning]" within this interplay since this particular movement deconstructs the absolute structures. Illuminating this assertion, Derrida propounds "freeplay" of words as "the disruption of presence" (1970, p. 10). He further explains that when an element is present, there is always a signifying and substitutive reference that is inscribed in a system of distinctions and the progression of a chain (ibid). Différance, in this sense, demands the destruction of this chain by eliminating the locus. The shift from the microcosm to the macrocosm towards the "black hole" in "Zoom!" refers to différance in the symbolic register, which, accordingly, opens Armitage's poetry to a theoretical approach.

The resonance between "An Ornithology of the Americas" and "Zoom!" gets even more complicated and dynamic when we recall the first poem of the same collection at this point, "Snow Joke" for, as the "story goes," "there isn't a punchline" (1989, p. 2). Thus, Armitage once more emphasises the eternity and continuation of the *story* he will tell through his poetry, once again emphasising the open-ended nature of his poems. More critically, however, he illustrates the disengagement of the new postmodern perspective and conception from the structuralist approaches. While the two cited notions, eternity and continuation, become his frequent themes, the corresponding poems map the format of his poetic discourse, which turns out to be an invitation to a play with *distance*.

A New Approach to the Concept of Distance in Armitage's Early Poetry

The notion of distance has two essential dimensions in Armitage's early poetry: literal and literary. The literal dimension in this study shall concern the real places in the poems and the function of the images affecting distance in physical terms. The literary dimension, on the other hand, shall disclose the relationship

between the poem and the poet on a theoretical basis. The connecting point between these is that both dimensions demonstrate the poet's gradual engagement with the unstable world he himself creates and his disengagement from the essentialist grounds. In his early poetry, familiar, almost "domestic" environment never loses its vitality as a memory, yet in his latest works before the millennium, Armitage emphasises a distinction between the past and the present, representation and reflection, closure and disclosure. The poet's success derives from his unique style that aptly synthesises these dimensions in a manner that the form and the content of the poems correspond to construct a conception of distance.

Literally, the poems present different meanings of distance depending on the context in which they are recited, beginning from his first collection onwards. In "Why Write on the Sun," distance appears as a measurement, functioning in a natural context: "All we had to time the distance to the waves / was a spent match" (1989, p. 45). Here, time is not expressed in Newtonian terms but as *la durée,* or the "lived time," as Bergson distinguishes (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* n.p.). In this respect, time appears subjective based on individual experiences, in other words, the *sensed life*. This representation delineates again an organic understanding of the distance, further exemplified through the same conception: "I'd wait, guessing your distance by the sparkle of a cufflink" (1989, p. 45). In this approach, distance does not set or specify a particular or universal measure but rather originates from the natural context bearing relativity since it is based on individual perceptions.

In addition, such organic use of the term with autobiographical connotations and/or subjective impressions simultaneously establishes a likewise organic relationship between the poem and the poet. Accordingly, the poet infuses the poem as a persona who sets the poem's discourse. In doing so, he familiaries his authorial position to the audience by disclosing the environment through his experience and perspective. This method exhibits what Shklovsky explains as "habitualisation," which is an intrinsic tendency to get familiar with the repeated action/thing "to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (1988, p. 20). In this regard, the nuances and/or unrecognised *components of simplicity* are fashioned as habits within the poetic discourse. They do not appear by their peculiarities but instead integrate into the natural continuation of the historical flow. According to Gregson's findings, Armitage uses this technique to make perception habitual and automatic as the poet "deliberately focuses on familiar material" (2011, p. 80). However, by providing this material from his experience as the poet and the poem's persona, Armitage proceeds beyond an "anecdotal" (Hulse, as cited in Gregson, 2011, p. 81) discourse, thus, achieving an organic relationship with his work.

Moreover, concerning the literal use of distance to familiarise the context, Armitage frequently includes a conjunctive image in his early works. "On Miles Platting Station," appearing in *Zoom!*, is a notable example of this usage. The poem depicts a train's departure from a station. Within the portrayal, the "bridges," "cables," "train," "station," "tunnels," and "roads" literally refer to real constructions in real places:

> […] In the breeze
> a broken cable mediates between the stanchions
> and below the bridge a lorry has jack-knifed
> attempting to articulate an impossible junction. (1989, p. 56)

The "mediators" that expose an "impossible junction" are still connected with "cables" striving to maintain the continuation. In this poem about a lifetime journey, the people also share the experience of the same continuation. The conjunctive images accompany their journey as "they hold their breath the length of the tunnel" (1989, p. 56), and see "how Ancoats meshes with Beswick, / how Gorton gives onto Hattersley and Hyde, to where / Saddleworth declines the angle of the moor" (ibid). In this representation, Armitage cites the exact names of the places he personally witnessed to create a realistic setting. Notably, his geographical map is not interrupted by any border, either "meshing with" another land or "giving into" each other, nor does it illustrate an absolute image. Each destination adds to the continuation of the journey. As Shiny Brook "spills like a broken necklace into their village"–the portrait morphs into a fluid form until it turns into a story narrative about the police who "have new evidence tonight". The last stanza is dedicated to this five-

line story, which is only suggested by three actions after the mention of the evidence: "and they lift it from behind the windbreak, cradle it / along their human chain and lower it carefully down / into Manchester" (ibid). Significantly, the words that function as conjunctions create a context of continuation and thus, give into each other in the end. In other words, the previous contextualisation of the free-flowing image of the station enables this brief narrative to infuse into the whole poem without structural fragmentation. In this sense, with Armitage's particular use of spatial references, the poem's structure communicates with its content, disclosing the familiar images and portrayals to construct the context of a story.

While conjunctive words or/and units provide continuation, another scene depicted in "The Bears in Yosemite Park" illustrates the fluidity of interwoven images: "A crocodile of hikers spills out / into a distant car park as the rain permeates / our innermost teeshirts" (1989, p. 60). The acts of "spilling" and "permeating" diffuse both the "distant"'s and the "innermost" sides, thus, dominate the whole scene. This fluidity extends to the other poems in the same collection. In *"Phenomenology,"*

> [t]he tires burst the puddles and the lamplight
> spills like a moment from the past: only
> to settle backwards, become distant and
> still further distant in the long darkness
> behind. Always we are moving away. (1989, p. 14)

The image of a spilling lamplight and its motility dominate the scene in the poem and these characteristics are associated with "a moment from the past," which, however, is not static, gradually "become[ing] distant." In this respect, Armitage creates a non-teleological poetic universe based on dynamism and continuation, within which everything is mobile, "always moving away" without an attempt towards a definite end. As the people in the poem keep driving, the narrator recites their experience "[i]n the tunnel," the end of which is tied to "tomorrow," "when the sun comes up", thereby, again, creating the sense of continuation. According to this conception, as Armitage declares in "Robinson in Two Cities" from *Kid*, "[a]ll routes end here" -near the station (1992, p. 57). While the line marks an ending route, the cyclic portrayal of city life, with streets "from nowhere to nowhere", "junctions / and ring roads" depicted in the following stanzas, indicates the continuation of this route. Besides a constant act of "shunting traffic", "outpacing elevator-cars", cities that "each outpointing the other" add dynamism to this portrayal. According to the context of the poem, therefore, the station might be interpreted as an image denoting movement and mobility, adding to the dynamic setting of the poem. Since the speaker states that they are always moving away (1992, 14), the ultimate ending of all routes might simultaneously imply the beginning of the following continuous tour, in which the destination becomes an unending process. A similar dynamic depiction of a station proceeds in "The Metaphor Now Standing at the Platform 8" in the same collection, fortifying this argument. The movement begins with the title incorporated into the first line: "The Metaphor Now Standing at Platform 8 / will separate at Birmingham New Street …" (1992, p. 40). With a single exception, every line throughout the poem bears a verb. However, this mobility and dynamism are not projected to a particular finality; "no one goes nowhere" in the station until the passengers realise that that "[t]his is a metaphor [the speaker] is running here" (1992, p.41). The speaker thus reveals that the dynamic portrayal of passengers in various occupations stands for a continuous process central to the poem. As the speaker shows, "life is not a destination but a journey" (1992, p. 40). The finality he achieves in this journey is the eternity of the repetitive "metaphorical" route.

In literary terms, continuation, eternity, and fictionality reflected by the structure serve as verbal conjunctions and transitions, orchestrating the distance between the poem, the poet, and the audience. Armitage uses two representative methods to designate distance in this respect: story narratology and metafiction. The story frame appearing in several poems, sometimes fictional, connects the real places to Armitage's real-life experiences. In these stories, Armitage brings different perspectives and incidents to connect them through a narrative in the form of a poem. More critically, however, he claims the position of the poem's persona, blurring the borders between the author and the narrator. Hence, this affiliation as a

poet with his work becomes a subject of his postmodern play, gradually presenting an increasing distance and leading to the second method, the use of metafiction.

Armitage begins his story with his first collection *Zoom!* (1989), until *CloudCuckooLand* (1997) and *Killing Time* (1999), which are distinguished from the previous collections for their particular engagement with defamiliarisation. Therefore, these works shall be exempt from Armitage's early works' otherwise common narratology strategy. Concerning the narrative technique, Armitage either structurally employs dramatic monologue or explicitly points out an ongoing story, interfering with transitions such as "[b]ut as the story goes" (1993, p. 15), "[a]nyhow" (1993, p. 15), "[s]o it goes" (1993, p. 15), phrases used in narrative discourses. In *Kid*, he creates a fictional addressee, namely Robinson, to vindicate the stories denoting his childhood. The repetition of the word "then" in this collection adds to the continuation of the narrative tone in the subject poem's content while connecting the successive poems such as "The Snow": "Then it was gone," "[t]hen watched / a thread of smoke" (1992, p. 25), or in "With the Tennessee Walking Horsesliking Horses," "[t]hen at night" (1992, p. 34), "[t]hen it runs, follows the dints" ("Without Photographs", 1993, p. 28).

While this narrative transition is one strategy Armitage uses to familiarise the audience with the content, another literary technique he adopts to serve continuation is diffusing the title in the body of the poem:

> *The Bears in Yosemite Park* [title indicated]
> are busy in the trash cans, grubbling for toothpaste
> but the weather on Mam Tor has buckled the road
> into Castleton. … (1989, p. 60)

Rather than separating the initial line, the poem directly begins with the title, which is also a necessary complementary unit of the poem. That is, the poem, in its entirety, constructs poetic imagery without structural separation. Then, the poem continues describing the neighbouring environment of the park while meandering through other animals and specified places, posing a continuous and coherent narrative: "Killer whales pair for life; / they are calling across the base of the ocean /as we sprint for the shelter of the Blue John Mines" (1989, p. 60). Each phenomenon simultaneously adds to the narrative flow regardless of its relation to the others. However, the depictions do not emphasise the peculiarities of these phenomena. Thus, the poem presents a natural impression while the observers "know the routine" (1989, p. 60), the cited events depict the habitual circumstances frequently witnessed in Yosemite Park. "Back in the car [the observers] peel off [their] sticky layers / and the stacks of rain / are still collapsing sideways …" while the "bears in Yosemite Park / are swaggering home" (1989, p. 60). The juxtaposed instances thus mesh into one another, weaving a pattern that displays the observers, the bears, and the killer whales successively. "This is life" expresses the narrative voice in the end: "Killer whales are nursing their dead / into quiet waters and we are driving home / in boxer-shorts and bare feet" (1989, p. 61). Here, both the killer whales and people appear in their most natural states. Although the contexts and subjects of these separate instances may vary, their simultaneity still connects them within the routines of life. More specifically, through naturalisation, they become the habits of the particular environment, indicating the technique of habitualisation.

While the Armitage strategy begins with the habitual familiarity towards alienation in the poet's early works, the developing postmodern tone brings about literary awareness. The poem "You" from *Book of Matches* exemplifies the metafictional stance of Armitage's poetry, and thus, illustrates his second method, the use of metafiction:

> *You* [title indicated]
> Hold the page like a work of art,
> see for yourself, comb through it twice, three times,
> look for your likeness in the lines but find
> someone else (1993, p. 15)

The poem directly speaks to the addressee, the audience, "holding the page like a work of art." In doing so, it not only declares its existence as an artistic work but also reminds the audience that they are also a part of the poetic creation. Moreover, the poem indicates a double distance of reality in Platonic terms: the representation in the "work of art" creates another person, "someone else," instead of aiming to disclose a "likeness." The poem thus assigns a figurative distance between the artistic work and the perceiver in reality. In addition, it suggests that art should be regarded in its own terms without an attempt of associations. It should be free of the symbolic bonds that assume essential definitions. Here I should note that this interpretation bears apparent contradictions with Armitage's first method articulated as familiarisation, by which I referred to developing organic associations between the artistic work and the poet as its creator. However, this alteration in the conceptual position is not controversial to my argument since familiarisation is proposed as the initial step that provides a basis for immediate defamiliarisation. This assertion finds a concrete ground in "From the Middle Distance" appearing in *Zoom!:*

> I am found out
> down south, holes pecked out for eyes and a mouth,
> a scarecrow planted in a true square mile
> of fallow ground.
> Who set me up,
> Hammered this stake from the nape of my neck
> To my left foot, down through the hips and ribs?
> I think you did. (1989, p. 37)

The poem is set "in the flat of the land," where the speaker stands waiting to feed the black birds with his body. Assuming that this speaker is Armitage as the poet, he adopts an accusing tone directed at the reader. Notably, he describes himself in the passive voice as he is "found out" "holes pecked out for eyes," "set up," and hands tied, implying his impotence in this context. A stake is hammered to stabilise his body, and he is tied by his hands, deprived of free movement in literal terms and of the ability to produce from a metaphoric interpretation. In this position, the speaker is confined to an ineffectual situation that exhausts his productive and creative authority. Significantly, he points out "you," the audience who articulates the lines in the actual reading process, as the responsible force for his confinement. In that, he directly accuses the reader -the meaning-maker simultaneously- of assigning a fixed, stable position to him, which is a result of essentialism. In the last stanza, the speaker declares, "that's how I stand" while "the black birds hang, waiting to feed / from the one tall thing in the flat of the land" (1989, p. 37). In this depiction, the hanging position of the black birds implies stability, that they may stand for the definitive signifiers that feed on the speaker's body, the creative power of the poet until they exhaust the meanings of the words, which are supposed to be subjects of freeplay. Thus, a metaphorical interpretation suggests that the poem primarily declares metafictional awareness through direct accusation, then expostulates essentialist approaches that necessarily assume a well-defined stability represented by the corporeal stance of the scarecrow. The title of the poem, on the other hand, prepares the audience for the last step of the Armitage strategy, which is defamiliarisation. The use of metafiction to trigger literary awareness and remind the position of the audience indicates another layer of distance established between the poem and the reader: This is the middle distance before achieving complete freedom enabled by detachment from assumptions, definitions, and absolutions.

"You" and "The Middle Distance" thus imply the forthcoming process of defamiliarisation of the poem and the audience, simultaneously inviting the two to Armitage's intimate "play" illustrated in "Simon Says" included in *Zoom!*. The poem is set in a train station, depicting a game between two people who are not personally introduced:

> They sat on the floor
> to play this game: he puts his hand against
> his drawing pad and makes me trace again and again

with a crayon the outline of its simple shape.
We share a smile. I have to leave. (1989, p. 37)

The game illustrated is based on specifying the other person through drawing, which is related to symbolic representation. It is worth noting that an outline and a particular shape are assigned to the drawn person, reflecting the signification process proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). Illuminating the "nature of the linguistic sign" (1916, p. 65), Saussure explains the relationship between the sign, signified, and the signifier, and thus, introduces us the Saussurean Structuralism, which is based upon binary oppositions, direct associations, and specifications. In this respect, the drawing act in "Simon Says" tracing the hand "again and again / with a crayon" until it specifies the "outline of its simple shape" (1989, p. 75) is intended to establish the Sussurean triangle: the drawn outline stands for the sign, the hand working on the drawing indicates the signified, and the act of drawing becomes the signifier. However, the poem's attempt to accomplish a Saussurean signification process comes to expose that this symbolic *drawing* will never achieve completion as the persona "[has] to leave" (1989, p. 75). This absence implies the impossibility of finality. Hence, the emphasised dynamism and motility in the general tone of the poem prevent absolutism and certainty. In Derridean terms, specification and signification are always deferred by the "disruption of presence" while the shapes hastily move and leave the station (Derrida, 1970, p. 247-265). While Saussurean Structuralism necessitates a center for the signification process to be accomplished, Derrida contends that "the center could not be thought in the form of a being-present […] but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitution came into being" (1970, p. 249). Illustrating this argument, the game in the poem is set on a train whose departure is imminent with an implication of continuous movement -of time, space, and people. Significantly, the opening scene of the poem is "set on the floor," indicating stability and absolution, whereas the second stanza begins with a "set off" that drives the content to the inevitability of departure and the destruction of a locus:

but only for a second as he sets off
down the train, pictures of perfect hands slipping
from his folder, waving for a moment in the air
then landing by the shoes of other passengers. (Armitage, 1989, p. 75)

In this last scene, Armitage makes a farewell to a nominal "perfection" that is achieved due to the constant motility of the context in its entirety. The absolute, perfect hand drawings "slip" and "wave" in the air, demonstrating a fluid action. Finally, they fall under the "shoes," being stepped on and passed over. In this manner, they symbolically fade into.

In his last two collections published in the subject period, *CloudCuckooLand* Armitage stylistically begins to detach from his familiar tone and evokes a distance by posing different perspectives of a subject. The poet speaker in this collection does not necessarily seek a semantic "bridge" to connect the content and the form but appreciates differences and the process of *différance.* In the two-stanza poems, the speaker presents imagery of different subjects or situations depicted while witnessing them. To illustrate, "The Swan, emphasises relativity by two images of a swan according to separate perceivers, namely the poet and Alison Claire. "For Alison Claire", the swan is a "bird as it fell from the earth, spinning / down to the feathery nest of its grave" (1997, p. 43). Rather than giving a prescriptive definition, the bird appears to Alison Claire by its poetic effect reflected through rhyming endings ("spinning," "singing"), identification of the bird's falling with Alison's deterioration toward the bird's "feathery nest of grave" (ibid), and personification of the "long-necked song." "Elsewhere," however, the speaker "tells the story of … the swan in the stars in the north-north-west, / in the hour after dusk, standing up on its head" (ibid), posing a different conception of the swan. In the latter perception, the swan appears "in the stars in the north-north-west / in the hour of dusk" (ibid), gradually moving away from the speaker. The previously poetic tone shifts to an instructive one, deferring the meaning of the concept. In other words, the figurative image of the bird in Alison Claire's perception comes to signify a different understanding of the swan depicted in an astrological

discourse. By juxtaposing these two varying conceptions of the swan, the poem intrinsically foregrounds relativity and *différance*.

While the two-stanza poems in *CloudCuckooLand* present different meanings or perspectives of a single image, *The Dead Sea Poems* appears as a relatively experimental work, including varying styles, tones, and forms. As an example of Armitage's defamiliarisation, "From the Middle Distance" from the latter collection focuses on the distanced relationship between the artist and the product through the image of a scarecrow. The speaker begins with a passive situation, indicating that he is "found out / down south …" (1995, p. 6) followed by the passive verb phrases "holes pecked out" and "a scarecrow planted" (ibid). The passive tone continues in the second stanza addressing the person "[w]ho set [him] up, / hammered this stake …" (ibid). The speaker thus introduces himself as an object whose image is constructed through texternal impacts. In this representation, he assumes both the role of the passive subject of the poem and its creator by his poetic delivery. As the responsible party for situating the scarecrow as such, the speaker directly addresses the audience with the line in the middle, "I think you did." He then accuses this agent reader of, cueing the broomstick "through the cuffs and sleeves", lashing "the upright to the crosspiece at the heart", and "then [tying] the hands" (ibid). This confined situation intensifies the passivity of the speaker standing motionless in the middle of the "square mile" depicted. An identification of the scarecrow with the poet-speaker notes that the scarecrow's tied hands may indicate an artist's deprivation of his creative agency, taking that hands are active in the sense that they function in producing things. On the other hand, the agent reader's activity correspondingly and simultaneously reflects on the stated verbs. With the hammer in its hand, the reader metaphorically constructs the poem through the image of the scarecrow. Thus, the poet speaker gets detached from the poetic and textual production the poem poses. Since the act of construction is granted to the addressee, this implied distance marks the artist's defamiliarisation from his work.

Conclusion

The analyses of examples from Armitage's selected collections until the millennium thus portray a gradual adoption of postmodern style in poetry, beginning from familiarising the environmental context towards semantic and structural defamiliarisation. Within this process, Armitage literally and literarily "plays" with the notion of distance to manifest the postmodern principles: initially, reducing the distance between the images and the persona through familiarisation sets the basis for how these objects/moments can be separated from their related context to construct a poetic recognition. Within this process, Armitage uses conjunctive words that connote joining, merging, or association to set a context emphasising continuation. Therefore, the notion of distance in the poems that employ familiarisation refers to intervals, which are ultimately filled by the infusion of a familiar scene, situation, or a conjunctive phrase. However, in Armitage's postmodern strategy, familiarisation is followed by the second step of defamiliarisation, whereby distance becomes a play between the form and the content. The use of metafiction adds to delineate the distinct positions of the addressee and the poem as a literary product. As the figurative and literal distance increase, each poem becomes an eternal journey of meaning-making for the persona, the audience, and the poet himself. In this respect, Armitage echoes his lines while addressing us: "Madam, life is not a destination but a journey" (1992, p. 40).

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