



The Lyrical Mode as Narrative Technique in Andre Gide's The Immoralist

Abstract

This paper presents a study of one novel by Andre Gide, The Immoralist as the Lyrical novel. Gide has experimented Lyrical Mode of writing prose in his novels. This paper depicts the wonderful experience of studying imageries and symbols used in prose. Till now many research deliberations have been carried out on various topics like postmodern novels, colonial novels, etc. but no research on Lyrical Novels. It can be an interesting way of exploring use of this technique in other novels as well. Present study will give new dimension to look at a novel. This is unexplored area so far and there lies effectiveness and usefulness of this study to evaluate prose form with different perspective.

Keywords: *Lyricism, Lyrical Novels, Imagistic, Symbolist, Inner Conflict*

Emergence of Lyrical Mode of writing Novels:

In the later part of 19th century, many experiments were carried out in the field of literature. While symbolist poets worked in the field of poetry, novelists like Andre Gide, Emily Zola and Gustave Flaubert carried of experiments in the field of novel form. This experiments of using different imageries and symbols in writing, writing poetry in prose and making prose more poetic gave birth to the form of Lyrical Novels.

Ralph Freedman has carried out a beautiful study on the form of Lyrical Novels saying that, "The concept of the Lyrical Novel is a paradox." While reading the novel, the reader looks for characters, actions, and ideas and moral choices dramatization. But lyrical novels shift the reader's attention from character and action to 'formal design' where instead of the usual scenery of fiction, the writer gives texture of imagery and characters appear as personae for the self.

According to Freedman, what distinguishes lyrical from non-lyrical writing is a different concept of objectivity. Non-lyrical novel separates the experiencing self from the world whereas the lyrical novel seeks to combine man and world in a strangely inward, yet aesthetically objective form.

The lyrical novel fuses elements of the lyric with those of the narrative and requires a special analytical perspective and performance translation. Many of the questions asked of traditional narrative fiction fail to reveal tensions inherent in a genre that combines qualities of poetry and prose.

The lyrical novel, a generic designation used by professor of literature Ralph Freedman, appears as a semantic contradiction. Lyrical poetry connotes a personal experience of feelings and attitudes conveyed in a relatively brief and patterned style. In contrast, the word "novel" usually identifies a story told through a narrator and a character in a longer, less discernibly patterned manner. The combination of these two generic appellations, the lyric and the novel, implies a way of looking at the world that differs from the traditional novelists' seemingly objective viewing. In non-lyrical writing, the novelist is concerned with depicting the protagonist as part of, but separate from, the world in which he or she exists. The action of the novel typically involve the interaction (and frequently confrontation) of the character with the world created in the novel. Lyrical fiction, by contrast perceives human conduct as "independent design in which the awareness of men's experience is merged with its objects" the lyrical hero or the heroine converts his or her world into self-analogues and, through merging exterior milieu with interior vision, creates a lyrical perspective equivalent to a poet's persona.

The lyrical writers are not only interested in questioning human conduct and make them just perform, but they also design stage where men's experiences are merged with their objects. Experiences

normally teach us to master the object but when Michael, the protagonist of *The Immoralist* tells the story everything about himself, his experience, his object (to love an Arab boy, and not to love his wife) everything is merged, so without moralizing or dramatizing he shows the purpose behind his life – that he is an immoralist and he would never have learnt had there not been Marceline. Everything came to light after their marriage and while traveling in Europe.

This paper addresses **Research Questions** like:

1. What is Lyrical Mode of writing Novels?
2. What are the features of Lyrical Novels and how are they employed in selected novel?
3. How do lyrical novels differ from that of traditional way of writing prose?
4. How characters of lyrical novels project themselves in the minds of readers?
5. How use of imageries and lyricism appear in the minds of readers?

➤ **Objectives of the Research**

1. To study emergence of Lyrical Mode of writing novels.
2. To study Andre Gide's **The Immoralist** with lyricism as its major narrative technique.
3. To study the imagistic and symbolic mode as the centrifugal forces in this novel.
4. To study structural conditions of lyrical fiction like the shaping of plot, character, point of view, place and time.
5. To study the effect of lyricism on the minds of reader.

Features of Lyrical Novels:

To differentiate lyrical fiction from narrative, firstly pure lyrical qualities must be separated. In a narrative, there is a story and a story teller. The story teller explains or justifies that his narrative is a story. (Prose form) lyrical fiction has to do with single (set of) emotion(s) and the images that this emotion brings to mind.

Lyrical poetry has a flow passing through creating rhymes and themes and making qualitative progress and this is how in poetry 'lyrical objectivity' is exemplified, whereas in lyrical novel such type of qualitative progression exists along with narrative. In Lyrical novel the objects arouse sensations – new, fresh unimagined, pure sensations which awaken the same new fresh, pure desires and that leads to the images of utopian pleasure. Gardens where all desires are gratified – when the progression of the novel is patterned. Thus, we get the portrait of a hedonist.

The Immoralist with lyricism as its major narrative technique.

The novel describes a journey of self-discovery by which a young man becomes increasingly aware of his homosexual inclinations. The immoralist consists of major characteristics of a lyrical novel:

A character in Lyrical Novel is a diarist, the confessor, or first person narrator. The immoralist is told entirely by the chief protagonist to a group of friends who may be able to help him. On the very first page he says: "I am going to tell you my life simply, without modesty and without pride, more simply than if I were talking to myself." pp.13 (*The Immoralist*)

Michel also presents his world as he sees it and so lends it a specific color and shape, distorting or even displacing it. His function in the novel is also self-reflexive. He shares his experience and enacts them through a progression of images and thereby he renders himself as a symbolic vision.

Actions through concealed indications and clues

It is important to remember that Michel never engages in a homosexual act. The drive, like so many other forces within him, remains hidden under the weight of all the taboos he has been taught since early childhood.

It is significant that all these actions have immoral overtones, but do not directly incriminate him. It is highly unlikely that he would be prosecuted for poaching on his own property. He takes great precautions in his spontaneous, demonic outings not to become technically liable to prosecution. He

merely wants to savor the excitement of the furtive thief in the night, the acceleration of the pulse which springs from committing an act which he considers from his upbringing to be immoral; the perverse pleasure of doing the forbidden--provided he will not suffer any consequences.

Any form of self-scrutiny which ultimately aims at self-justification reveals an underlying sense of guilt even if that guilt is never fully expressed. Michel's unwillingness to tell the Swiss doctor that he was the source for Marceline's physical infection is a veiled recognition of his guilt: "It pains me to say that I myself should be condemned for that, if I would have cared before, Marceline never had been sick." (p. 103 of Text) He was not only the source of her physical infection, but of her spiritual despair as well.

Everlasting desire as the unquenchable thirst and Life and Death as constant symbols in the novel.

The most striking compositional feature of *The Immoralist* is its structural symmetry. The central theme of obsessive and destructive individualism which shows Michel's inner chaos stands in direct contrast to the manner in which the novel was composed.

In case of Gide's 'The Immoralist', Michael's married life with Marceline becomes an emotional episode in his life where gradually he realizes that fragile and delicate Marceline would not last long against the harsh realities of life that she knew nothing about the reality of the life. She was an epitome of innocence and he (the immoralist) did not serve this epitome of innocence. He is distraught and broken with the sense of guilt. Irony is that what Marceline's life could not bring to fore has been brought forth by her death. Now she is dead and realization dawns upon him

Images that attack on art, culture and society:

The motifs of shadow, night, sleep, and silence support the theme of his consciousness of death and at the same time illustrate his rebellion against the fact of non-existence, for death is the very opposite of life and extraneous to the experience of living. The motifs of shadow, night, sleep, and silence are merely ominous approximations to the state of non-existence the mind can neither grasp nor visualize and therefore violently rejects. But the mind cannot fully grasp the reality of life either, as shown in Michel's need to feel and touch himself. Yet, paradoxically, he can more fully sense the reality of life in those moments when he can simultaneously face the fact of death.

The linking phrase "that Death had touched me" is used in this context to show that a confrontation with the reality of death brings about recognition of the value of life:

"What is important is that Death had touched me, as people say, with its wings. The important one is that I came to think it a very astonishing thing to be alive, that everyday shone for me, an un-hoped for light. Before, I thought, I did not understand that I was alive the thrilling discovery of life was to be mine". (P. 25)

Imagination expressed underneath the storyline

Gide, like a true Lyrical novelist represents himself in an object. He portrays his inner experience and by doing this act he transmits the object that expresses him into manifestation of his 'infinite self' – the visible work of art.

We also see imagination expressed underneath the story line. In Michel there is a series of indecisiveness concerning the meaning of the revolt, or as to the basic impulse guiding the revolt. It comes from some diabolic source; it is a courageous quest for one man's personal value. It provoke a question, is the hero amoral or immoral? Is he guided by an ideal of purity or by a diabolic possession? Gide never clarifies the tone of equivocation. Ambiguity is the atmosphere in which he is most at ease. Michel fails in his quest if we accept as definitive discouragement. His self-styled liberation ended in tragedy, or, at least, defeat, because he was unable to rid himself completely of his love for Marceline. By his turning away from her, by renouncing any active sense of responsibility for her, Michel causes her suffering, and, ultimately, her death. And yet, it is because of Marceline, because of his attachment

to her, which is never completely eradicated, that the Immoralist fails in his experiment in human conduct.

Internal Struggle and Conflicts that brings poetic impression

The best example of his **internal struggle** lies in his ambivalent attitude toward possessions which we can trace through the entire novel. Only at the beginning does he show a complete indifference toward possessions which is illustrated by his ignorance of the fact that he was rich. When indifference becomes intentional it is no longer indifference, and the theft of Marceline's scissors shows more than mere unconcern about property, it shows an unbalanced willingness to lose it. During this brief period of domestic bliss Michel seems to have forgotten his hedonist cult, but the tranquil conformity is only apparent.

In Paris for the winter Michel begins his extravagant expenditures in a desperate attempt to squelch any wanderlust by tying himself down with possessions. Possessions become the bars of his cell in his deliberate attempt to imprison his latent restlessness and rebellion against conformity. In this context Gide inserts an observation on farm life which, on the surface, has nothing to do with Michel, but which becomes an image of Michel's imprisonment and his attempt to foil his natural longings.

Human intervention and constraint frustrate natural instinct, and the ducks must comply with their northern cage. Gradually, Michel himself will grow restive in the self-made prison of his Paris apartment, and the lure of the south will become stronger. The niche he enters in Parisian society becomes a straightjacket which inhibits his personality, and each additional tie adds weight to the chains which bind him to an identity he no longer feels as his own. Ménéalque's example of non-conformity, his luxurious indifference to public opinion and mores, arouse envy in Michel, and it is Ménéalque who points out the blatant contradiction in Michel's behavior. On the one hand Michel willingly lets a little Arab kleptomaniac steal from him, and on the other hand he fences himself in with one possession after another.

Inner conflicts to bring lyricism.

Michel's inner conflict is illustrated by Charles' condemning rebuke: "one ought to take one's duties seriously and not play with them....or else one doesn't deserve to have possessions." (p. 130) Apart from the specific incident Charles refers to this remark illustrates perceptually the psychological dilemma. We assume that the domain of our minds is our property, our estate, and that we can do with it what we will. But we cannot protect both, the guard and the thief, the conscious intentions and the subconscious forces, without falling victim to an untenable conflict which leads to destruction.

Gide's Thematic Concerns for the Novel that supports lyricism.

The Immoralist is Gide's autobiographical and one of the most remarkable novels. There are many themes of the novel like morality in immoral life, total liberation of the soul from the social and moral bondage, indulgence into the homosexual relations, psychological journey of the protagonist etc, but these themes hardly enter into struggle with each other. The novel seems to contain layers of meanings. Through a deceptively simple structure and thin thread of the story line Gide makes one of the important statements of life. On the surface, The Immoralist is the portrayal of the individualist, who breaks free from his past, his education and from his environment and lives authentically.

The central theme of The Immoralist is seen in almost all the works of Gide and that is dissolution or breaking up with heterosexual relationship and indulging into the homosexual relations. The story is narrated by Gide without concealing anything.

The central theme of The Immoralist is repressed homosexuality. Gide's narrative further explores themes of life versus death, mind versus body, and the process of self-discovery.

Lyricalism through Symbols and Images

The writer of the lyrical novel mirrors the world as he sees it, in a way making it 'self-reflexive'. Self-reflexive means to think back or think over the nature of our sensations, desires and gratifications. Sensations give us thrill, when something thrills us we like it, we want to possess it and gratification gives us the sense of having possessed something but all this is temporary – for the time being – what about the eternal questions of life ?

The writer concentrates on the physical, visible (visual) dimensions of objects because they make impression or get imprinted on the mind. They arouse strange sensations etc. The writer aims to give effects of lyrical poetry by giving color, shape, distorting and displacing the events, using various scenes, characterization, time and action - renders objects sensations and ideas with immediacy. E.g. battle scene in War and Peace.

The lyrical perspective is created by the concealed author, who manipulates both the narrator's limited vision and the lover's poetic scenery. Use of storytelling, figures and scenes, movements of time, creating characters with disturbed mind or grotesque poetic world - all these are the ways to manipulate the narrative genres and to make narrative lyrical. Prose allegories, poetic idylls, picturesque use of fairy tales, dreams, distortion and fantasy - all these subvert the novel and replace narrative with lyrical objectivity. Although all these manipulation is there, the basic tone is to create the solitude of man with his seemingly basic emotions.

Whether Michael or Siddhartha or Mrs. Ramsay – a character in The Lighthouse, the hero in the lyrical novel becomes the receptacle to experience at the same time he is symbolizing agent. He embodies objects and other minds and spiritualizes them through the intercession of art. But unlike the active heroes of realistic novels and portraits of manners, these symbolic heroes seek a spiritual image through their modes of awareness. In short he is an aesthete. Ready to perceive the beauty of the object, he likes to devour the object mentally, thereby showing how it has the capacity to reach to the core of desire, so hero becomes important in that, something is intended through his character-symbolic in that sense –he stands for something – that is an aesthete, beautiful, moral, immoral new aesthetics regarding new man or woman.

The artist represents himself in an object. He portrays his inner experience and by this act transmits the object that expresses him into manifestation of his 'infinite self' – the visible work of art.

The hero as an aesthetic image of nature leads to the technique of mirroring. Since the self is the point at which inner and outer worlds are joined, the hero's mental picture reflects the universe of sensible encounters as an image. Literature of medieval age never projected openly the physical, sexual dimensions of desire. After the later part of 19th century, when the writers began to perceive the dichotomy (difference) between the body and the mind at the root of the idea of self, they also held environment responsible for this. In Gide's novel, in very exotic, remote locales of Europe and Africa, man and woman are alone where because of the complete self –effacing, submission of wife, the man finds himself enjoying new freedom, far away from society which arouses in him homosexual instincts. When the writer goes into the inner recesses of his hero's mind, this is what he finds.

Thus, the magic of spiritual awareness unfolds a picture of infinite reality which is hidden to the ordinary glances.

The use of theme, scenes, characterization, action in time, and corresponding techniques everything is in congruence to bring the lyrical tone to the novel.

Structural Conditions of Lyrical Fiction

The major difference between lyrical poetry and narrative is that narrative has events in time sequence. The novel's form is made up of a pattern of these sequences which acts both through cumulative motion of 'lyrical process' and through several juxtaposed levels of awareness.

The characters of most of the novels pass through predetermined plots and encounter various images. In case of *The Immoralist* by Andre Gide, predetermined plot means after meeting with an object, there is an arousal of desire, that leads to the gratification of desire, then if encountered with another object, another arousal is there, and again gratification. Marriage – desire for woman's body, warmth and love all these give gratification. Woman supplies all these. For Michael confronting another object is meeting Arab boy who arouses desire also leads to gratification. But when Marceline is ill slight aversion comes to all these.

But main distinction comes where novels have narrative progression while poetry has 'lyrical progression', that means, narrative develops into theme by various actions and time, while lyrical progression creates constellation of images.

In most of the conventional novels external world is projected and characters play in frame of time and action. As against that, in lyrical novels, such a world does not exist through actions but in form of poet's vision. Poet's vision is Tolstoyan. Art is not for gratification and what gratifies is not art and the figure is same for love. It is an irony of life that if only we try to gratify ourselves with desire we begin to understand the hollow nature of desire, that desire merely consumes us and kills or destroys us.

The theme does neither concentrate on moralizing and nor on dramatizing, nor only men and time are described, but the experience of men and purpose for which he lives is emphasized through comprehensive use of places and events.

Lyrical is the form that transcends causal and temporal movement of narrative within a frame work of fiction. We may call it a kind of hybrid genre of writing that uses novel to approach the function of poem. Paul Valery, in his 'Poetry, Language and Thought' differentiates between Prose and Poem. He says that we can learn this difference only through examining the language of prose and poem. Making the distinction between the two, he says that in prose, we use end oriented language. For example, someone says, 'come!' and the person comes. The purpose is served. And with that everything ends. Whereas in poem, the poet tries to immortalize his emotions, so he employs the language whereby he can create levels of meaning. So, Valery compares prose and poetry with walking and dancing. Prose is like walking. It has end oriented movements whereas dancing is like poetry in that dancer tries to immortalize her emotions through her bodily movements. In short, when we want to explain, argue, and put across our ideas we make use of the form of prose, whereas the poetry has to do with mystical experiences of life.

Most of the fiction has various elements of novel, romance, confession, and satire, but lyrical fiction has no such boundaries of types and methods. Another way of putting it is to say that since it is hybrid genre it partakes the elements of novel, romance, confession and satire. Gide seems to be employing lyrical form of writing novel because for him novel is a free form and probably he finds more space and scope for both speculation and imagination in lyrical fictions having no boundaries.

Scene and images are blended with the use of prose in such a way that it creates different rhetoric of images. Lyrical novel rather exploits the expectation of narrative by turning it into its opposite lyrical process.

Effects of Lyricism on the minds of the readers

In itself the lyrical novel comprises of all these genres of various stages of the course of narration. They (Lyrical novels) are not determined by any preordained form but by poetic manipulation of narrative types which writers have found readymade or have constructed within an existing frame of novel. Gide does this through Michael's confession. While confessing, Michael is now no longer conceited libido suffering from superiority complex. All the worms that were there in his mind have vanished. Reflection has led him to repentance and repentance has purified him. So his confession instils the sense of purity in the listeners and readers.

Sometimes internal conflicts and a precarious balance of different techniques create poetic effect. Much of the time, the novel reads like a slight romance or the story of a conjugal life where only tender emotions matter. Harsh realities and brutal facts of life are kept at distance as though it is a love story.

Somewhere a point comes where it looks like both as a narrative and a lyric. The lyric is always considered as spontaneous expression of a feeling. The reader takes the poetic form as if looking to a portrait or a picture and experience the totality of it juxtaposed in various complex details.

Conclusion

Even before we proceed with Gide's style of writing, his narrative thrust, it is necessary for us to make it clear that Gide is a Noble Prize winner writer. Such writers are very difficult to comprehend fully, because they are the writers of mainstream literature. Their canvas is big and their appeal is highly unique and universal. Apart from this, Gide is highly interested in experimentation. Each of his work is an experiment in its own right. It cannot be said that he has finished his experiment and found out finally a technique or style of writing. Each work looks back to the previous work for the inspiration and looks forward for paving way for another work yet to come. So no work is complete for him. It is complete only in the sense that it completes the argument it began with. We should try to examine Gide's *The Immoralist* in the light of this view.

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