

An Analysis of George Eliot's Narrative Techniques in Adam Bede

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Abstract

George Eliot's Adam Bede is a literary landmark that revolves around the social life in 18th century England. George Eliot uses various techniques for narration in the novel that makes it unique and even more interesting for the readers. The novel is well equipped with different narration techniques, like hymn singing, long speeches, use of third person narration, indirect speech, showing and telling and the list goes on even further. A large number of novelists use various narration techniques to narrate their novels in a realistic way. They use quite a number of methods to present the novel in an interesting way to the readers. Thematic expression and structural composition also hold an equally important place and both need to go side by side to produce and impeccable work of literature.

Keywords: narration, structural composition, techniques, speech, thematic, realistic, social.

Introduction:

George Eliot, originally born as Mary Ann Evans, was born on the 22nd of November, 1819 at Arbury Farm, Chilvevs, Coton, Warwickshire. The daughter of the manager of the estate, Eliot spent the first twenty years of her life here and moved to the Coventry later due to some family circumstances. She started her career by writing articles and later moved to translating works and through this process, she became a wonderful writer. In 1859, she published her first novel, Adam Bede, under the pseudonym, George Eliot. It was her first successful novel and earned her the place of an excellent sociologist in the 19th century English Literature. She also earned the title of Victorian Novelist. Her creative ability has earned her the deserved praise and appreciation. Eliot is an impeccable writer and excels in producing and beautifully expressing the inner and the outer world of her characters. She usually writes about the lives of laymen, country people and their homes, works and occasions. Her stories are woven around normal people and the incidents in their lives.

Narration Techniques:

Adam Bede is a thought provoking and significant novel and attracts interest due to its social background. Set in the village of Hayslope, the novel revolves around Dinah Morris, a person who is socially committed and carries the theme of the novel, she is visiting her uncle,

Mr. Poyser, in the village; Seth Bede, who is a carpenter and in love with Dinah, but gets rejected by her; Adam Bede, the protagonist, also the brother of Seth, he is in love with the seventeen year old niece of Mr. Poyser, Hetty Sorrel; and the rich landlord, Squire Donnithorne, whose grandson, Arthur Donnithorne, is in love with the selfish Hetty Sorrel, but Hetty doesn't love him and only likes him because of his power and money. While Dinah rejects Seth, his parents, Thias and Lisbeth Bede, are adamant that they want her to be their daughter in law. Both Arthur and Adam give in to temptations and end up committing sins, but Adam confesses for his wrong doings and follows the dictates of his conscience, remaining patient, submissive and unyielding. The novel idealizes Dinah and Adam and the latter plays a significant role in the end of the story. The novel sparks interest owing to its social background and the various aspects that add further details to it. George Eliot is not a feminist but rather a socialist and moralist.

If we pay attention to the narration techniques in the 18th century female writers like Jane Austen, we find a third person narration and free indirect discourse that guides the readers to the minds of the characters, like in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. This free indirect speech is distinguished from normal indirect speech by stating the lack of introductory expression, "She said", for an example. It appears that the subordinate clause carrying the content of the indirect speech is taken out of the main clause itself. Free indirect speech is a better way of conveying the world of the characters more directly than natural indirect speech. This is also evident in the works of Charles Dickens. On the other hand, George Eliot does not create many episodes where the characters are displayed through narration or telling. She lets the readers see the images of the characters in front of their mind's eyes. She describes her characters in a completely different way. The description of Dinah Morris is something like, "*a small oval face of a uniform transparent whiteness with an egg like line of cheek and chin, a full but firm mouth, A delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brown reddish hair.*" The description of George Eliot is very realistic and does not remind one of the conventional way. She describes the protagonist, Adam Bede, as, "*a muscular man nearly six feet high with a back, so flat and a head well poised. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that was likely to win the prize for feasts of strength. Adam was a Saxon.... keen glance of the dark eyes, prominent and mobile eye brow, mixture of Celtic blood, his face was larger and roughly hewn, expression of good humor and honest intelligence.*" Such descriptions of the characters in the novel help the readers to create a realistic image. While describing the younger brother of the protagonist, we can see a contrast narration, "*Seth's broad shoulders have a slight stoop. His eyes are grey; his eyes are grey; his eyebrows have less prominence and more repose than his brother's confiding and benign. His hair is not thick and straight like Adam's, but thin and wavy, allowing you to discern the exact contour of a cornel arch that predominates very decisively over the brow.*"

Use of the Characters in a Different Way:

George Eliot's descriptions of the characters are like mirrors that reflect a person. Shri uses phrases like "You see" and "Allowing you" to suggest that someone is behind the narration of the story. For example, *"I can't pretend that Seth and Diana were anything less than Methodists."* Every work of art has a theme of artist which should be revealed in a pleasant way and understood by the readers in an easy way. This calls for the need to give more importance to thematic expressions as well as structural composition. To express her views and themes on morality, human values and religion of humanity, George Eliot concentrates on both the aspects to produce an impeccable piece of writing. She uses present tense and first person narration to introduce herself to the readers and express her purpose of writing. After she starts the story, the narration passes on as the third person in the past tense; *"I understand to do for you reader. I will show you the roomy workshop as if it appeared on the 18th of June in the year of 'our' lord 1799."* In the second paragraph she states, *"the afternoon sun was warm."* George Eliot does not only narrate the story or express it but she also defines the conventions, cultures and climate of the background of her story, England in Adam Bede, to the readers. As a writer, she writes to her society. Her novels are of the sort that give the outsider readers an opportunity to learn about the environment and society of a new place. In Adam Bede, she describes the afternoon sun as warm, if a person from an equatorial country reads this, they realize that the sun in England is warm whereas in their countries it is burning hot in the afternoon.

Role of Hymns:

George Eliot uses the technique of using singing as a means of pleasing the audience. This technique has a two-fold service; the first being that a singing song is pleasant to hear and secondly that it gives away knowledge about the characters, emotions, present situation of the society and so on. The first hymn is found in the first chapter's first page:

*"The workman sings the song aloud,
Awake, my soul, and with the sun
The daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth...."*

This song is heard about the sound of plane and hammer. George Eliot uses this to describe a work man who wants his soul of work in the morning and be active as the sun is shining upon them. Another hymn says;

*"Let all thy converse be sincere,
Thy conscience as the Monday clear."*

This hymn states that a worker should work according to his conscience and comprise the duty consciousness. At the ending of the first chapter, another hymn comes takes place,

*“For God’s all seeing eye Surveys
Thy secret thoughts, thy works and ways.”*

This is not only a song for pleasure or a hymn that praises the glory of the Lord, but it is rather a song of thought provoking. It suggests that God is not simply the creator of miracles or the one who blesses everyone with whatever they want, but he learns our secrets, thoughts and plans and estimates how people work and the path they choose. He gives his devotees not what they want but what they deserve based upon their thoughts and actions. Hymns are an indispensable part of this novel and everything in it revolves around hymns and songs. Seth Bede expresses his love for Dinah Morris through a hymn. *“In darkest shades, is she appear, my dawning is begun; she is my soul’s morning star and she is my rising sun.”* While Seth is walking back home, he keeps reciting his favorite hymn and this helps the readers gather more information about his character.

*“Dark and cheerless is the morn,
Till thy mercy’s beams I see
Till thy inward light impart
Glad my eyes and warm my heart
Shining to the perfect day.”*

Long speeches:

The novel uses the dramatic technique of long speeches. By delivering a long speech through a particular character, George Eliot provides adequate visual knowledge for the readers to see the speech as a drama. The novel is filled with various speeches that can be absorbed as if the readers are sitting in the audience of the drama. Some of the most important speeches in Adam Bede are, the speech delivered by Dinah Morris in the second chapter; the speech delivered by Arthur Donnithorne in the twenty fourth chapter and the one delivered by Irwine in the same chapter. The delivery of long speeches gives the novel an interesting dramatic shape and sense. This is a useful technique to help the readers absorb the message more easily and understand the theme in a more efficient manner. In the second chapter, the speech that Dinah Morris delivers is very long and more like a sermon. She is an orphan and the niece to the Poysers. Dinah is the central character of the novel and carries the theme of the novel as a socially committed young Christian lady. She has ardent faith in God but her religious views differ from that of the other characters in the novel. And it seems like they are

the views of the author herself and that the voice of Dinah is that of George Eliot. Her speech begins as,

“Dear friends, let us pray for a blessing.... Savior of sinners...open their eyes to my message...thou will come again to judge them- Amen.”

Here, Dinah says that God is watching upon all of us and he will judge us for whatever we do and finally, reward us with what we deserve based on our deeds. Further, she goes on to say to the people of the village,

“The spirit of the Lord is upon because he has appointed to preach the Gospel to the poor.”

She explains the importance of social commitment to the people. She also expresses and understands Jesus Christ as a social reformer. She says that Jesus Christ spent away most of his time trying to do good to the poor and the destitute; he was kind to little children and was a comfort to the people who lost their relatives or friends, he spoke with affection and tenderness to the poor sinners who regretted committing those sins.

Significant Role of Letter Writing:

The technique of letter writing finds a useful role in the novel. A letter serves the purpose of a device of communication. The novel, Adam Bede, is full of various letters and the readers are presented an opportunity to be able to understand the events and the emotions of the characters in an easier way. The first letter that we find in the novel is addressed to Dinah Morris by Seth Bede. We find this when, in the thirtieth chapter, Seth tell his brother, Adam Bede, *“I wrote to her a fortnight ago.”* Dinah also writes a letter to Seth in the twenty ninth chapter and addresses him as ‘my dear brother’ in a very long letter that is aimed at thanking Seth for his invitation to Dinah to stay in his country. Dinah Morris goes onto politely decline his invitation saying the she works in the mill and she finds joy in the hills. She also expresses that she has more attachment to the people there. The letter is quite lengthy. Dinah writes about the real world, her concepts of love, blessings, sorrow, joy, and other aspects of life. She concludes this letter of hers by saying ‘your faithful sister and fellow worker in Christ’.

Another significant letter in the novel is the one written by Arthur Donnithorne to Hetty Sorrel. This letter helps the readers absorb the content in a kind of showing technique and provides life and knowledge to the novel’s story line. In the thirty first chapter, Arthur Donnithorne writes to Hetty that he can not marry her. The letter is very unpleasant although Arthur remains soft, gentle and lovable. This is a very emotional letter and the readers might get heavy hearted reading this and their eyes might get teary. This letter beautifully expresses the feelings of the characters. In the letter, Arthur often says, ‘Dear, dear Hetty, the fault has

all been mine.’ And he concludes the letter by saying, ‘Your affectionate friend, Arthur Donnithorne.’ This letter is very heart touching and emotional. Irwin also writes a to Arthur in the forty fourth chapter. Arthur finds out that Hetty Sorrel is in the prison and he rushes to try and save her. The letter is very much connected to the readers and they feel an urge to ask Arthur to go faster to provide help and support to the poor and innocent Hetty to reduce her punishment. In the fifty fifth chapter, Adam gets married to Dinah and leads her out of the church. Irwin meets his friends and relatives after the prayer and says, “a bit of a good news to cheer Arthur...I shall write to him the first thing when we get home.” This shows how the novel again involves the role of the letters as Irwin promises to write another letter.

Conclusion:

Thus, we see how George Eliot has adopted a wide number of techniques, both in writing and narration, to produce the novel in a more realistic way. George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* is an excellent work of literature and the way that it has been structured presents it as a theatre ready novel and it comes out like a stage play and the characters feel very alive. George Eliot can be identified as the creator director for the novel who makes the characters act on the stage in order to point out the evils of the society and the need and ways to reform it. It also helps us get a deeper and wider understanding into the society and its conventions and working. All the readers and critics can agree that George Eliot’s narrative techniques are an excellent work. Her characterization, her themes and her efforts are worth appreciating.

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