

The Analysis of Aesthetic Aspects in Ivan Bunin's Prose Narratives*

Lee, Sangryong

Introduction

Bunin's contribution to prose narrative represents a continuation of his Russian heritage, which he upheld through his own conception of realistic art. The stature of Ivan Bunin, while never imposing, has hardly lessened during the years since his creative activity ceased. Although he has been considered as significant as the Russian masters of the nineteenth century, many of Bunin's works have retained their importance as modern classics. For that matter, though his achievement in winning the Nobel Prize¹⁾ has been dismissed by Soviet critics as part of his career in exile, these same critics have come to accord Bunin recognition as one of the major creative writers of the Russian language. Some points of agreement, and some reservations, however, seem to be shared among a consummate descriptive skill have often been acknowledged, his works have been found wanting on deeper issues.²⁾ For some he has been regarded as essentially an aristocratic writer, immune to the everyday concerns "below" him. Others have considered Bunin an epigone of past masters, a quaint specimen from an earlier age. His defenders, however, may point to the subtle and craftsmanlike treatment that the great themes of love and death have

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- 1) He had been mentioned in the press as a possible candidate in each of the preceding three years, and his name had first been canvassed as early as 1922 by Romain Rolland, who had himself received the prize in 1915. cf. I. Bunin, "Avtograficheskaia Zametka," *Russkaia Literatura XX Veka*, no. 2(1915), pp. 331-341.
- 2) The first of many Soviet collections of Bunin's works published in the late fifties and early sixties was a volume entitled *Rasskazy*, which came out in Moscow in 1955 with an introduction by L. Nikulin. These were his first works to be published in Russia since 1928.

received in his works. For these issues, as well as for the virtuosity with which they are handled, Ivan Bunin's work continues to be studied and read.

To this day, criticism of Bunin convincingly asserts that he was, above all else, a meticulous stylist, a sharply discriminating and fastidious practitioner of his craft. However, it implies a certain narrowness of outlook, an excessive preoccupation with formal perfection that allegedly explains the impression of coldness his prose tends to convey.³ Clearly, Bunin is not a writer to everyone's taste; However, it does not justify the assertion that his prose is as dry and detached as he was. Of course, his narrative manner is calmly controlled. The surging emotions of his protagonists are conveyed through a cool, restrained narrative exposition⁴. Far from being narrow and restrictive, Bunin embraced the most essential questions of human existence that have inspired artists over the ages. During more than sixty years of creative endeavor, however, for Bunin the most important thing in his writing was to maintain his aesthetic integrity while achieving the combination of stylistic and aesthetic effects. Therefore, reading Bunin is always uplifting.

I. The Lyrical Perception of Nature

In Bunin's literary world, one of the most artistic effects is achieved in his lyrical narrative. Bunin, by instinct, has a lyrical perception of nature. Therefore, when Bunin's emotion is allowed to arise naturally, his narrative description of scenes and landscapes creates a very authentic atmosphere. The most ostensible features of Bunin's narrative of prose are simplicity,

3) In reference to Bunin's methods of narratives, cf. L. M. Granovskaia, *Iz nabliudeniĭ nad iazykom I. A. Bunina: O nekotorykh osobennostiakh upotrebleniia opredeleniy-prilagatel'nykh*, p. 254. Also, N. I. Volynskaia, *Vzgliady I. A. Bunina na khudozhestvennoe masterstvo*, pp. 59-60 and M. A. Aldanov, *O Bunine*, p. 131.

4) F. Stepun has stated, "Bunin is one of our most passionate writers. That which is perceived in him as coldness is not coldness but restraint." Stepun, "I. A. Bunin (Po povodu 'Mitinoi ljubve')," *Sovremennye zapiski*, 27(1926), p. 323.

directness and lyrical quality. In particular, when Bunin depicts the beauty of nature, his perceptivity is remarkable.

As a writer, Bunin ascribes the source of sensory imagination to an artist's perception of nature. In the words of the young Arsen'ev, the "writer's sight was such that I could see all seven stars in the Pleiades, while I could hear a verst away the whistle of a marmot in a spring field and become intoxicated on smelling the scent of a lily-of-the-valley or the odor of an old book."⁵⁾ This statement tells us that Bunin's inspiration as an artist comes from the sensations of nature.

From the very beginning of his literary career, Bunin expressed a profound sense of personal affinity with nature. He portrayed nature through animation and personification in his poetry. "Open to me your embraces, o nature," he wrote in a poem of 28 March 1886, "that I may merge with your beauty." The yearning of the artist "to live at one in soul with man and nature" is just natural and indispensable, because in nature's midst one feels surrounded by a vast, stable realm that may ease the pain of human solitude and limit it. In discussing the significance of nature in Bunin's work, critic L. Krutikova writes: "From nature, according to the artist, man should learn wisdom, harmony, the ability to bear hardships and sorrows, and most important to feel oneself part of the limitless and eternal."⁶⁾

In Bunin's stories, nature plays a role much more than being a harmonious or contrasting background to the drama enacted by the characters. F. Stepun, discussing the role of nature in Bunin's works, says that nature is not for Bunin just a background for his heroes, as it for Turgenev, but an organic whole with man; in everything Bunin writes, nature absorbs and "dissolves" man.⁷⁾ Sometimes, nature is present in the fiction as the embodiment of the laws of existence that determine the human condition. It represents a reality to which man is wholly subservient and with which human consciousness is usually and unwittingly in fatal conflict. It is present as a rationally "incomprehensible amalgam of beauty

5) Ivan Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii 9 vols*, Vol. 6, p. 92.

6) L. V. Krutikova, "Proza I. A. Bunina nachala dvadtsatogo veka(1900-1902)," p. 98.

7) F. Stepun, *Vstrechi*, p. 110. For another information, cf. Stepun, "Literaturnyye zametki," *Sovremennyye zapiski*, 27(1926), pp. 323-45.

and horror," as a source of blind, implacable forces that demand man's submission and ruthlessly punish his resistance, as shown in "Belaia loshad"(The White Horse, 1908). Sometimes, the beauty and majesty of nature is juxtaposed to the limitations of human life as in "The Gentleman from San Francisco"(1916). But, in any case, Bunin all the time perceives the lyrical quality of nature and it establishes the creation of an aesthetical atmosphere in a story.

Nature is the point of departure in Bunin's portrayal of man, and observation of nature is the primary source of his art and metaphysical speculations. Therefore Galina Kuznetsova writes that "for Bunin, the act of writing almost always begins with nature, with some scene that has flashed through his mind, often a fragment."⁸ A good example is "Sosny" (Pines, 1900). In this story, nature is the model on which Mitrofan's whole life has been based. His life was one of balance and harmony, and he approached the final mystery of death with the same stoic calm he had displayed in life. Mitrofan is the living embodiment of Bunin's conception of the psychological consequences of harmony between man and nature. Here, Bunin's perception of nature shows the lyrical quality through the narrator's description. The reflective narrator interprets the cycle of life and death as a bewildering mystery and breaks off his reflection on Mitrofan's grave and plunges into the woods. There, the narrator feels the eternal beauty of nature, which stills the restless anxiety of his soul. Bunin concludes the description: "The distant, scarcely audible hum of the pines... incessantly spoke... of some eternal, majestic life..."⁹ This lyrical narrative creates a very authentic mood of harmony and peace. Although, in this story, Bunin strives to express his conception of the psychological consequences of harmony between man and nature, Bunin's sensual perception of nature gives this story a more vivid artistic effect.

Another story, which shows one of the most distinctive traits of lyrical quality, is "Antonovskie iabloki" (Antonov Apples, 1900). In this undisputed masterwork, Bunin turns to the past to offer a luminous vision of the vanishing life-style of the nineteenth-century Russian landowner. Bunin

8) Galina Kuznetsova, *Grasskii dnevnik*, p. 24.

9) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 220.

establishes the tone of the work at the outset, in the very first two words—“Vspominaetsia mne...” (I recall...). It is a work of reminiscence. The narrator's personal fondness for the past is dominating. Characteristically, this work has a lyrical and rhythmic quality which heightens its aesthetic worth. Bunin's emphasis on the lingering smell of Antonov apples is redolent of an entire way of life and symbolic of the shared contentment: “When from a long-distant past nothing subsists, ...the smell and taste of things remain.”¹⁰⁾ Also, Bunin's descriptive expression blends the lyrical effect and the sensual reality in this remembrance of things past: “I remember avenues lined with maples, the delicate fragrance of fallen leaves, and — the smell of Antonov apples, the smell of honey and autumn freshness.”¹¹⁾

In this story, the plot of the narrative structure develops through chronologically ordered scenes illustrating the transition from the prosperity of the past to the destructive collapse of the present. But the narrator does not “control” the story with concrete statements. Instead, the sense of passing time is underscored by the transformation of the narrator himself. Over the course of the work, the narrator gradually matures from boyhood to young adulthood through sensing instinctive impressions of nature and recognizing the notion of passing time. In addition, in order to keep this work's artistic effect, Bunin describes the narrator's maturing process through lyrical narrative. The narrator, deeply attached to country life, finds life good even in an impoverished state. He recalls autumn days spent roaming the empty fields, and evenings passed in cozy rooms with his friends. Sensing that autumn turns into winter, and the aura of impending ruin thickens in the empty field, the narrator for the first time in his life feels that this natural way of living is threatened. Therefore, he comments: “That which sanctified here the old life — the gray cross that has fallen to the ground — will be forgotten by all.”¹²⁾

There is another well designed artistic effect in the development of this story. Bunin begins the sketch with a reminiscence of autumn, and

10) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 179.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 179.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 198.

concludes with a vision of winter. It is closely related with the blend of thematic development and lyrical mood. In autumn, even if the smell of the beloved Antonov apples "is disappearing from the landowners' estates,"¹³⁾ still "the estate is surrounded by century-old birches and willows."¹⁴⁾ But in winter, the foliage of the birch has faded, the cross has fallen, and even the icon appears to have wilted. Nothing is left except an empty field with silence. To intensify, however, the thematic effect, Bunin does not apply direct description. Instead, he focuses on the creation of lyrical effects. For example, Bunin utilizes the image of a winter storm to suggest the coming destruction of a familiar order: "The wind has thrown my gates wide open, and swept the road with white snow."¹⁵⁾ This kind of lyrical quality of narrative gives Bunin's prose an authentic perception of nature from the standpoint of harmony and peaceful relationship.

The lyrical mode of narration in "Antonov Apples" vividly conveys Bunin's personal attitude to the transition the scenes record. Through animation and personification the natural world comes alive in this work, displaying a beauty and majesty that make human life seem pale, even insignificant. Bunin frequently affirms the importance of living in close harmony with nature; in nature's midst one feels surrounded by a vast, stable realm that may ease the pain of human solitude. But "Vesennii vecher"(An Evening in Spring, 1914) shows a clearly different function of nature. In this story, the beauty of a spring evening is paralleled by a murder of a beggar by a drunk peasant. Even when Bunin describes a murder scene, however, he makes use of lyrical narrative as a background for the movement of characters. For example, the murder occurs "on a clear evening barely tinged with rose, at that enchanting time when the earth has just been freed from the snow, when, in the little hollows upon the steppes, underneath the young bare oaks, some gray, hardened snow still lingers."¹⁶⁾ Here, Bunin makes use of colorful description to show a vivid scene as a background of murder. The purpose of this lyricism is to make a clear parallelism between the eternal beauty of nature and the egocentric evilness

13) *Ibid.*, p. 190.

14) *Ibid.*, p. 184.

15) *Ibid.*, p. 193.

16) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 254.

of a human being. In spite of a different theme and plot, Bunin's narrative in this story has the same lyrical quality as that of "Antonov Apples". The juxtaposition brings about a heightened effect. "An Evening in Spring" is by no means the only one of Bunin's stories in which details of nature are invested with metaphorically meaningful role. In the short story "Poslednii den'" (The Last Day, 1913), Bunin juxtaposes nature to the feral state of the human mind. But, again he vividly utilizes the lyrical narrative to intensify this vivid juxtaposition. In this story, a landowner named Voeikov loses his composure on the day he leaves his native estate, which has just been sold. Bitter at the loss of his home and the thought that strangers will now occupy it, he orders his remaining workers to hang his six dogs. They do this work willingly, but when they bury the first one, he commands them to dig it up and leave it and the other bodies hanging from trees. Bunin emphasizes by his descriptions of the natural setting Voeikov's wanton destruction of life as a violation of the natural processes of change.

The disintegration of the estate and the execution of the hounds are consistently offset by the signs of nature's rebirth: it is late April, and the estate is filled with signs of new life. As Voeikov's mental state is full of discontent ("Everything was finished"¹⁷⁾, Bunin makes a sharp contrast between him and nature through lyrical description: "In the distance the rooks were making a din in the lower part of the garden. All around the starlings were singing, a nightingale was chattering, and the sun was drying the compressed leaves at the roots of the bushes."¹⁸⁾ Surrounding nature is full of liveliness ("the freshness of young grass," "the calling of many kinds of birds"), but this story's final image is one of senseless death ("the hanging dogs").

Just before a character named Rostovtsev discovers the swinging corpses with their bulging eyes and tongues, Bunin inserts a brief digression: "In the profound silence the chinking voice of a nightingale trying out its low notes reverberated clearly and warily through the garden. The night was mild, light, moonlit, and slightly misty."¹⁹⁾ By means of these short lyrical

17) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 104.

18) *Ibid.*, p. 106.

19) *Ibid.*, p. 110.

interpolations, Bunin creates an eloquent counterpoint to the ugliness of death and desolation in the development of plot. Set in a context of resurgent nature, the social change is allotted its place in the natural order of things, and a record of destruction and disintegration is subtly transformed into a paean to the creative force of life. Bunin deals with this serious theme by dramatic expression, accompanied by Bunin's lyrical perception of nature.

The lyrical quality of Bunin's prose is also a dominating element, when he writes stories which deal with the tangled emotions and primitive lust of a human being. In "Ignat"(1912), for example, Bunin shows us Ignat's fierce love of Liubka, which is poisoned by his jealousy, envy, and sense of inferiority. Ignat is a son of a landowner and Liubka is a servant in the manor house. Ignat has crude, primitive lust, which leads him to lure a "femininely beautiful" dog²⁰⁾ into a barn and later to enter a brief liaison with a local half-wit. Yet the image of Liubka is always uppermost in his mind and he confronts her with his passion, finding her a surprisingly willing partner. But after that, Ignat becomes increasingly suspicious and jealous of her. The climax of the story occurs when Ignat returns home from military service during the winter, to find his wife in a sexual tryst with a visiting merchant. Enraged, he advances on Liubka with an ax, but at the last second she diverts his primal fury toward the merchant, and Ignat "with all his might smashed the butt end of the ax onto the wet towel" that covered the merchant's head.²¹⁾

But again, in this story, the thematic development is not the main factor to create artistic unity and effect. Descriptions of settings and landscape in detail are crucial elements in keeping tension and mood throughout the story. With fast narrative tempo, Bunin depicts the movement of the heavenly bodies and the alternations of night and day. Also, the detailed chronicling of the rotation of the seasons is remarkable. Every stage of development of the story presents evidence of an intriguing concern with time and with the reflections in nature of its passing. For example, Ignat's arrival in the village after his nocturnal walk from the station coincides

20) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 13.

21) *Ibid.*, p. 32.

with "the crowing of the cocks"²²⁾, his vigil outside the house is interrupted by "the second crowing of the cocks"²³⁾; and the next stage begins with the phrase "at the third crowing of the cocks."²⁴⁾ The changing positions of the moon on the fateful last night are similarly noted with punctilious exactitude. Bunin vividly utilizes lyrical descriptions: "The radiant night... was increasing its power and attaining to its maximum beauty and might,"²⁵⁾ and "the power, light, and beauty of the night began to weaken. The moon was turning pale and inclining toward the west. Orion with its three diagonal stars standing low like silver buttons on the south western horizon was now closer and brighter. A shadow fell from the servants' hall over which the moon was inclining and embraced half the farmstead."²⁶⁾

From the aesthetic standpoint, these lyrical descriptions make two kinds of contributions to the artistic unity of the story. First, through them Bunin shows that harmony between man and nature is fatally shattering. Ignat and Liubka respond to their impulsive sensual passion. They are so haunted by their endless lust, that they cannot notice the surrounding beauty of nature. They just follow their instinctive passion. When Ignat waits outside the house, he is so furious that he cannot recognize the time: "He did not notice time. He was wholly absorbed in his passionate desire for his suspicions to be confirmed."²⁷⁾ Through indirect statement, Bunin focuses on the fact that there is a deep conflict between surrounding nature and human lust.

Second, more importantly, those lyrical descriptions contribute to the buildup of tension by retarding the flow of the narrative. For example, when Ignat approaches the manor house where his wife is entertaining the merchant, Bunin pauses to describe the setting in exact detail: "The snow, in some places like satin and in others brittle like salt, crumbly and hardened by the frost, squeaked and crunched at each step, even the most cautious."²⁸⁾ Such descriptions heighten the suspense and strengthen the

22) *Ibid.*, p. 21.

23) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

24) *Ibid.*, p. 32.

25) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 24.

26) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

27) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

tension, retarding the arrival of the impending climax. Also, they provide a subtle counterpoint to the protagonist's fevered emotions. So, the concluding scene of the story in a meaningful way depicts Ignat holding white snow to his head, as if trying to soothe his tormented soul. In *The Life of Arsen'ev*, Bunin's lyrical perception of nature reaches a new dimension. Throughout the work, the sensitive narrator displays his "impressionability," and enthusiasm to cultivate "spiritual beauty." His innate curiosity and sensitivity to the surrounding flow of life are reinforced by a vivid imagination that enriches the raw impressions of life. As the young poet Arsen'ev becomes increasingly absorbed within the beauty and the poetic magic of nature, his imagination widens its limits of recognition with sensitivity. Also, when he attempts to formulate his own vision of life, Bunin describes how Arsen'ev articulates his lively imagination and inborn fascination with the flow of sensory stimuli in surrounding nature. Here, Bunin's lyrical descriptions are so subtle that they provide the possibility to define the spiritual movement of Arsen'ev. For example, when he becomes depressed by Nadia's death, the arrival of spring with its enchanting spectacle of natural renewal makes him feel spiritual rebirth: "And again, again the earth, which eternally deceives us, affectionately and insistently began to pull me into its maternal embrace."²⁸

Arsen'ev suffered through the ordeal of Pisarev's death and burial, however, the beauty of spring again helps sustain him: "And in all there was death, death mingled with aimless life. But suddenly there began to sound in my soul a kind of inexpressibly sweet, joyful, and free song about some remote, inexpressibly happy lands."²⁹ It is a good example of Bunin's perception of natural beauty transforming into spiritual beauty. The vision of human existence that Bunin presents in this work is complex one. Bunin, however, constantly depicts the protagonist as perceiving the beauty of surrounding nature: "above my head the sky opens wide jet black, with white, blue, and red flaming stars."³⁰ These lyrical descriptions of nature cause the eternal beauty to thrive in the loving soul of a sensitive artist

28) *Ibid.*, p. 29.

29) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 46.

30) *Ibid.*, p. 105.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 191.

Arsen'ev.

II. The Aesthetic Quality of Color and Mood

Throughout his literary career, Bunin had paid attention to the artistic effect, which is created by using of colors in his works. Depending on the diversity of themes, Bunin chooses appropriate colors. When he writes stories full of lyrical descriptions, Bunin, as a whole, frequently makes use of bright and serene color. It creates a delicate nuance of atmosphere like the effect of water-coloring. A short lyrical sketch "V derevne" (In the Country, 1898) provides a good example of it. As the narrator, a boy, arrives at the countryside, he is impressed by the beauty of nature. To intensify the aesthetical quality, Bunin makes use of lyrical descriptions full of sounds and smells of the country. Here, however, what Bunin most elaborately articulates is the creation of a scene, which has its own soft tone: "The crests of the snowy cliffs have clear, cold outlines, which are distinct and sharp against the sky; from below, the sky seems a deep, dark blue!"³²⁾ In these descriptions, we can recognize Bunin's perception of aesthetical quality of coloring with subtlety. The artistic effect is similar to that of water-coloring, because it has a soft, light and transparent quality. Artistically, Bunin's lyrical descriptions have natural clarity of bright colors and the unique atmosphere of serene mood, so they cannot go along with the heavy, thick and mixed quality of oil-painting. With subtlety Bunin perceives the artistic effect of utilizing of colors, displaying a beauty and majesty of nature: "As if they were squares of bright, mountain crystals, the ice blocks shine in the sun, twinkling with green and blue tints."³³⁾

In "Petlistye ushi" (Looped Ears, 1916), however, Bunin shows a quite different usage of color. The theme of this story is man's egocentric perversion of sexual passion, which represents an emblem of a general sickness in the world. The protagonist Adam Sokolovich believes that while

32) Quoted from Temira Pachmuss, *A Russian Cultural Revival*, p. 15. In her work, Pachmuss translated many short stories with detailed introduction.

33) *Ibid.*, p. 17.

hypocrisy prevails in society, it treats murder by an individual as abnormal and perverse. Moreover, he finds modern man much more prone to violence than earlier types such as Cain, humanity's first murderer. Therefore, the setting of this story consists of scenes of unrelieved gloom and dissonance, permeated with an air of distortion and death. The city itself seems to be in constant, restless motion, a world in chaos. Bunin emphasizes the gloomy atmosphere of the evil city with using dark colors. The streets at night are shrouded in a murky, cold fog that distorts the faces of passers-by. Bunin uses the words 'tuman'(fog), 'mgla'(gloom), 'temnota' (darkness) to create a hypnotic and dismal tone. Bunin's evocative treatment of tone and atmosphere of Petersburg and his vision of the Nevski Prospect remind us of Gogol, Dostoevski and Bely. In particular, Bunin, like Dostoevski in *Crime and Punishment*, uses yellow color strikingly to represent the lifeless tone and false atmosphere of a city: "With an air of elusive gravity, Adam Sokolovich stood on the sidewalk, gazing at the shadowy figures of people, at a hearse, which bore away amidst all this bustle a squalid, bright-yellow coffin unaccompanied by mourners."³⁴

Bunin's narrative about the urban environment concludes without any expression of moral outrage. But it is very dry and dark: "He stood on the Anichkov Bridge, staring gloomily at the dark water, at barges gray with dirty snow; he rambled along gloomy Nevski, carefully scrutinizing lusterless goods in the store windows."³⁵ and "From the poles of street lamps carbonic-black shadows fell into the smoky haze."³⁶ In Bunin's use of color, the prevailing tone is very gloomy and dreary. So we can anticipate Sokolovich's crime, which reflects the character of his society — cruel, perverse, in the grip of moral decay. The use of the urban environment is a fitting one for a rootless, degenerate society that has turned its back on the countryside and nature's timeless lessons.

In "Russia"(1940), Bunin uses color to stimulate the senses of the characters, and the interventions of color, smell and sound create a more striking impression. Through the mists of time, the narrator's memory of

34) Ivan Bunin, op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 387.

35) *Ibid.*, p. 388.

36) *Ibid.*, p. 393.

love with Rusya, his student's sister, emerges in his recollections: "She was herself picturesque, like an iconpainting. A large curled pigtail hung down her back, her face was swarthy with dark little moles, a straight regular nose, black eyes, black eyebrows...Her hair was dry and thick, slightly curling. All that with the yellow sarafan and broad white muslin sleeves combined to create a most charming effect."³⁷⁾ The heat of their passion is symbolized as a green, hot, steamy, almost tropical locality situated near a swamp. Throughout the story, Bunin creates very tense and dramatic atmosphere by colorful descriptions of the ceaseless, seething activity of nature and by the repetition of concrete details: "They went through the water which glistened among the green and yellow vegetation; the warm silver light all round was almost blinding; the steamy air, the shifting rays of sunlight, the curly whiteness of the clouds shining softly in the sky cast reflections in the water."³⁸⁾ Bunin contrives to create the atmosphere of tension between the lovers and their environment by means of repetition and accumulation of explicit statements: a constant sound accompaniment to the events is provided by the whining of gnats and the beating of dragonflies' wings, and the lurking presence of these insects instills a subtle element of menace that is powerfully reinforced by the other repeated details of nature. The active participation of nature in this story is progressively intensified, finally expressing itself in the irruption into the house of a sinister black rooster at the precise moment when the hero and heroine are enjoying their first embrace: "The fresh fragrant rain poured down ever faster and heavier, clattering on the balcony beyond the open doors; in the darkened house everyone was sleeping, and he was frightened out of his wits when a rooster, its black feathers shot with iridescent green and with a huge red comb, suddenly ran in from the garden."³⁹⁾ In this story, Bunin utilizes black color and numerous references to frogs, grass snakes, leeches, and moths to convey a vague sense of foreboding.

One of the most vivid uses of color is shown in "Temnye allei" (Dark Avenues, 1938). In this short story, the use of color plays an important role

37) Ivan Bunin, op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 45.

38) *Ibid.*, p. 49.

39) *Ibid.*, p. 47.

in creating delicate atmosphere and emotional tone. Bunin makes a significant contrast between two worlds — the outside world and Nadezhda's world — by the use of the opposite colors. Bunin begins with a description of the "cold, nasty autumn weather" which envelops the hero as he approaches the warm and snug carriage house. From the very beginning scene of the story, Bunin places a special emphasis on darkness and dirt: "black ruts"; "a tarantas spattered with mud"; "a sturdy peasant, with a serious and dark face and a scanty pitch-black beard, looking rather like a old-fashioned brigand, and an elderly officer, wearing a large peaked cap and a grey military coat with stand-up beaver collar, sat together on the box of the tarantas. The elderly officer had black eyebrows but his moustache was white and matched the color of his side-whiskers."⁴⁰

Bunin stresses the darkness and filth of the outside world to create a sharp distinction between it and Nadezhda's world. The characteristic of the world, where Nadezhda belongs, is evident in the very first descriptive line: "In the sitting-room it was warm, dry, and tiny; a new golden icon in the left-hand corner; under it stood a table covered with a plain clean tablecloth and with spotlessly scrubbed benches arranged alongside it."⁴¹ When the officer steps into Nadezhda's room, he enters a realm of brightness and purity very different from the dark world in which he has been traveling: "with a tired look, passed his pale thin hand over his forehead — his gray hair, thinning at the temples, grew more curly near the corners of his eyes, his handsome elongated face with its dark eyes still showed a few slight traces of fatigue"⁴²; and when he says that he is impressed by cleanliness of the house with pleasant condition, Nadezhda answers modestly and meaningfully, "I love cleanliness and I have to know how to live decently."⁴³

In appearance, Nadezhda herself has something in common with the officer: she too has black eyebrows, and she wears a black skirt. Yet she is also in a red jacket and red slippers, which add a dash of color not found on the officer, and she is compared to an elderly gypsy, in an image that carries a connotation of liveliness not found in the officer's appearance.

40) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

41) *Ibid.*, p. 8.

42) *Ibid.*, p. 8.

43) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Significantly, when she addresses the officer by name, he opens his eyes and blushes (in Russian, 'pokrasnel,' "reddened"). This sudden reddening is perhaps an external sign of the deeper emotional link established between Nadezhda and him. As the conversation continues, "his tiredness and distraction" disappear, and again he blushes, "reddening through his gray hair."⁴⁴ Now it is clear that the emotional atmosphere of Nadezhda's world, in which the fires of love have not died out, has penetrated his cold and aging world. The subsequent conversation verifies this as his declaration, "Everything passes," gives way to his understanding of the true importance of his youthful love for Nadezhda.

Yet the patterns of life are long since set, and the officer must return to the cold world from which he came. Thus, the story's final scene shows him once more on the road. Again there is the "black ruts," but now a new element appears as well. The sun is setting, and although this detail reinforces the atmosphere of age and approaching death established earlier, the low sun here "shone with a yellow light onto the empty fields."⁴⁵ In this touch of subdued color one may detect a last echo of the passionate experience of the past: the faint rays of remembered love still shine in a heart that has grown dark and empty. Then, as it to shut out the troubling emotions roused when Nadezhda first spoke his name and he "opened his eyes," the officer closes his eyes and thinks: "Certainly those were the best moments. If not the best, they were pure magic. All round the crimson wild rose flowered, along the dark lime-avenues..."⁴⁶ Although one can identify still other evocative details in the story, there is formed a distinctive code through delicate use of color, which creates allegorical and symbolic atmosphere intensifying the difference of two world throughout the story. It produces an aesthetic effect on us; and shows us aesthetic effect and Bunin's subtlety of use of color.

In Bunin's narrative prose, the creation of mood makes a significant role in the evaluation of aesthetical effect. In his works, Bunin is not interested in developing dramatic events, he prefers lengthy passages of allusive

44) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

45) *Ibid.*, p. 11.

46) *Ibid.*, p. 11.

description. For Bunin, the entertaining effect of story telling is meaningless, and instead, he focuses on what he has seen and what is pleasant to remember. So, in his works, we find expressive nuance of mood rather than dramatic transition of plot. "The aim of literature," Bunin wrote in 1912, "is to make a direct emotional impact. It is precisely this emotional, organic element that is lacking in the works of contemporary writers, whereas the cerebral element is present in excess."⁴⁷ All emotion and thought are incorporated into descriptions of natural environment that are elaborately crafted to create the desired emotional atmosphere. In the human soul, Bunin keenly observes mutual interaction between nature — mists, sea, and forests — and man in suggestive images.

Aside from a few stories on romantic themes, Bunin's works, which create lyrical moods, mostly focus on anxiety over the mystery of death and sadness over the passing of Russia's traditional ways of life. These two subjects interact to make a single effect in the lyrical story "Pines," which deals with an unidentified narrator's reaction to the death and burial of a peasant named Mitrofan. As the narrator reflects on the close relationship between Mitrofan and his natural environment, Bunin's narrative achieves a remarkable aesthetic effect to create a lyrical mood of harmony and peace: "Mitrofan was a genuine forest peasant-huntsman, in whom everything produced an impression of wholeness."⁴⁸ Throughout the story, Bunin attempts to show Mitrofan's surrender to the beauty of the natural world by the reflective narrator's voice. In "Pines," Bunin's primary intention is "to capture the elusive concept of harmony with nature by means of carefully selected and oft-repeated details, by significant juxtapositions."⁴⁹

But there is still the existential unrest in the soul of the narrator, so he attempts "to catch that elusive thing that God alone knows — the secret of the simultaneous superfluousness and significance of all that is earthly."⁵⁰

47) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 9, p. 542.

48) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 213.

49) Leland A. Fetzer, "Man and Nature in Bunin's "Pines,"" p. 27. In this article, Fetzer tries to analyze the philosophical fusion of the thematic aspects of the narrator and the surrounding nature.

50) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

Finally, commenting on Mitrofan's death, he clearly endorses the philosophy of natural passivity. It means "living" and "dying" like the pines, adapting oneself to nature's cycle, and passively accepting the evanescent fate of human existence. In conclusion, utilizing lyrical narratives of soft tone, which create a metaphysical mood, Bunin depicts "the eternal, majestic life of the universe," that dimly reveals its presence in the hum of the pines and the shimmering of the stars. Under such lofty mood, the narrator meditates about the eternal truth "of the uselessness and the importance of everything on earth."⁵¹

In "Tuman" (Fog, 1901), Bunin describes the struggle between the narrator's anxiety over the impalpability of death and his sensual delight with the beauty of life. To emphasize the contrast of two different dimensions, Bunin makes use of nocturnal and diurnal setting. Detached by the night and the fog from every human contact and confronted solely with this awesome spectacle of omnipotent nature, the hero suddenly becomes aware in "the terrifying fragility and insignificance of his individual identity."⁵² In a somber mood, the hero is compelled to acknowledge the folly of aspirations to personal happiness and to recognize in death a meaningful release from the ludicrous charade of life. So he states that "I do not understand the silent mysteries of this night, and in general I understand nothing in life. I am completely alone, and I do not know why I exist... I need no one now, and no one needs me. We are all foreign to one another."⁵³

This mystical and gloomy mood is transformed abruptly with the passing of night and the dispersal of the fog. Bunin's narrative creates a subtle change of nuance in the hero's mood. As the lunar symbol of death surrenders the stage to the solar symbol of life, the hero's "lonely thoughts" suddenly yield to the spontaneous responses of his reanimated senses, and, "filled again with the unconscious joy of life," he declares: "It seemed to me that the night and the fog had existed only to make me love the morning all the more."⁵⁴ In this work, Bunin alternates the mood of the

51) *Ibid.*, p. 219.

52) James Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

53) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 233-34.

54) *Ibid.*, p. 235.

hero through his contemplation of its beauty and mystery of life. As the hero perceives a source of reconciliation with the ephemerality of existence and the horror of death, Bunin's metaphysical narrative relapses into the "nocturnal" state of mind of the hero. In the course of the constant alternation of the inner mood of the hero's mind, Bunin understates the essential absurdity of life and man's inborn capacity to attain a joyous sense of affinity with nature.

When Bunin writes about romantic themes, his creation and use of mood achieves vivid aesthetic effects. In "Osen'iu"(In Autumn, 1901), Bunin depicts a male narrator, who finds in his inner world a paradoxical aspiration of man to achieve fulfillment beyond himself and thus to transcend the limits of his own personality. The narrator has been wooing a married woman for a month. In their climactic encounter, they drive to the seashore on a brisk, windy night. Here, Bunin instills in the narrator's soul a sharpened sensitivity to his affinity with nature through lyrical monologues: "Only the sustained triumphant roar of the sea was audible. The damp wind threw us down on the precipice, and we were long unable to sate ourselves with its soft freshness which penetrated to the depths of our souls."⁵⁵⁾ Here, the activity of nature is clearly more than a symbolic accompaniment to the lover's surge of emotion. It creates a very emotional mood. The presence of the sea, which rolls in a "greedy and furious surf," somehow encourages the shedding of inhibitions, and the woman divulges something of her longings and aspirations. Motivated by the lofty mood, she feels that it may be "the only happy night" in her dreary life, and so she declares her love for the narrator.

He also is caught up in the emotion of the moment and, although he has known many women in his life, "on this night she was incomparable"⁵⁶⁾. In this story, Bunin intensifies the ecstasy of individual, sensual experience through depiction of the awesome power of nature. And more significantly, through creation of serene mood, Bunin inspires an exhilarating, instinctive awareness of personal communion with and participation in the elemental life of the universe: "As they embrace, he looks at her with the face of an

55) Ivan Bunin, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 251-52.

56) *Ibid.*, p. 253.

immortal ecstasy."⁵⁷⁾ Although some might perceive that this story suffers from excessive emotional hyperbole, its exalted sense of affinity with eternal nature is a good motivating factor to create a touching mood. And through the creation of the condensed mood, Bunin succeeds in depicting human aspirations to sense the fleeting moment of the elusive breath of happiness without developing any thematic evolvments.⁵⁸⁾

III. The Artistic Unity of Narrative Tempo and Tension

The most conspicuous aesthetic feature of Bunin's narrative composition emerges from the general coloring of the descriptive passages, from using narrative tempo with variations of pace and rhythm, and from continually sustaining the dramatic tension. In dealing with the thematical development of a literary work, to keep stylistic effects under control is a crucial factor in the composition of narrative. Bunin, however, succeeds in creating a singular artistic unity in his prose works, harmonizing the tensional effect of narrative and its narrative tempo through the swift change of depiction of scenes and the graceful transition by parallelism and juxtaposition.

One of those aesthetically successful works is "Ignat"(1912). In this work, Bunin focuses on "the complex psyches in the portrayal of his characters and impulses"⁵⁹⁾. From the opening portraits of the two main characters and the descriptions of the Panin estate, Izvaly, where they work, he demonstrates his unique ability to generate a sense of tension simply from the structural transition of the narrative — from the alternations of action and descriptive digressions. In the structure of the story, there are two

57) *Ibid.*, p. 253.

58) Some critics, like Mirsky, argue that Bunin's literary works do not have the thematic developments in plot. But the perspective of Bunin about the evolution of plot is different. He remarked to his nephew N. A. Pusheshnikov in 1911: "I never write what I would like to write or in the manner that I would like. I do not dare.

I would like to write without any form, disregarding literary devices completely.... As a matter of fact, all literary devices should be sent to blazes." cf. A. K. Baboreko, *Bunin na Kapri: po neopublikovannym materialam*, p. 246.

59) Julian Connolly, *Ivan Bunin*, p. 68.

parts. In the first section, lust is the dominant emotion, and jealous rage prevails in the second part.

And towards the climax, where Ignat returns home to find Liubka in a sexual tryst with a visiting merchant, Bunin escalates the effect of tension, in a restrained narrative manner. Describing the return of Ignat to Izvaly, first by train and then by foot, Bunin attempts to subtly intensify tension and rising emotion by the descriptions of "the chill of the snow-covered fields", "nocturnal frost", and "the crowing of the roosters". References to the landscape repeatedly interrupt the account of Ignat's advance, contributing to the buildup of tension, by retarding the onward rush of the narrative toward the denouement, and evoking a sense of his mounting impatience. Combining these visual and auditory lyrical elements with time's relentless flow, Bunin projects the rhythm of the action in the narrative with a pervasive sense of ceaseless, regular movement. The most striking rhythm is produced by his march to the catastrophe: "Shagal on tv'ordo, rovno i sporo.... V pole bylo pusto, m'ortvo i tikho"⁶⁰.

In the final scene of the story, Bunin uses slow narrative tempo and makes a shift in perspective, from Ignat's inner world to his lonely position in the outside world. After murdering the merchant, Ignat has cut himself off from the ordinary world, and now he becomes stranger to everybody. At the denouement of the tale, the narrative device of the transition of perspective intensifies the aesthetic effect at its maximum in the story. Bunin's skill in manipulating point of view and narrative perspective adds another distinctive feature to his narrative composition.

In "Light Breathing"(1916), focusing on the tragic consequences of love, Bunin creates a work of remarkable narrative concision and structural composition. Konstantin Paustovski has described it as "one of the most lyrical stories in world literature"⁶¹. The aesthetic impact of "light breathing" is mainly achieved by abrupt juxtapositions of events, scenes, and revelations, which were produced by the swift and dramatic transition to different points in time. Bunin himself was satisfied with "the delightful rapidity which came to me at certain happy moments of my writing"⁶².

60) Ivan Bunin. *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 20.

61) Konstantin Paustovski, *Blizkie i dal'kie*, p. 265.

The opening scene in the cemetery is followed first of all by a selective, chronologically ordered account of the events that lead to Olia's death. But before the linkup with the present is completed, the temporal sequence is again reversed, first by the officer's description of the events that precede the denouement, and then by Olia's account in her diary of her earlier encounter with Maliutin. The present time appears once more in the form of the schoolmistress and the second description of the cemetery in schoolmistress's reminiscences, the present narrative time changes into the past before finally reestablishing itself in the last sentence. The six-page story, therefore, contains six abrupt changes of temporal perspective, which steadily increase the effect of tension.

Within the frame of the two scenes in the cemetery, Bunin recounts and illuminates from a diversity of angles the mystery of an entire human life, extracting from it a timeless beauty, and alluding to the inherently tragic nature of life in general. Even more notable, however, is the lyricism. The tragic irony of the descriptive narrative combines sadness and "poetic" exultation in the strangeness and beauty of life through briefly sketched scenes and episodes from Olia's life. This gradual development of the theme reinforces the lingering effect of emotional impression, created by three dominant features—her physical beauty, her carefree attitude to life, and her vitality and lightness of movement.

The personal views and emotions of the author-narrator are never explicitly disclosed. Restricting himself to the narrating of events and to the visual portrayal of characters and scenes, he assumes no personal responsibility for the most revealing insights into Olia's mind and conduct, preferring to entrust them to rumor (for example, the rumors about Shenshin), to the heroine herself (her diary and recollected conversation), or to other characters in the fiction (the Cossack officer and the schoolmistress). His personal "presence" is detectable solely in the expressive pattern of the structural composition—in the disruptions of chronology and abrupt transitions that give the story its most telling effects.⁶² Through such manipulation of plot and textual boundaries, Bunin

62) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, p. 369.

63) This kind of expressive pattern of the structural mosaic creates the disruptions

intensifies the impression of the unique spontaneity of Olia's free consciousness.

In "Muza"(1938), where the sequence of events in thematic development is not complex, Bunin utilizes a characteristic variation of the tempo of the narrative to intensify the aesthetic effect at its maximum. From the very beginning of the story, Bunin uses swift transitions within his narrative tempo: "The snow always piled up under the windows, with the dull thundering of the horse trams along the Arbat. In the evening the sour smell of beer and gas in the dimly-lit restaurant.... It was really an unpleasant and boring life. I can not conceive why I led such a dreary existence.... However, one day in March a no longer wintry dampness from wet snow and rain penetrated through the upper opening of the double windows, as the trams rattled almost musically on the road. Suddenly someone knocked at my entrance door"⁶⁴. The alternation of brief sentences reflects the contrast between time in motion and static motivation, conveying the transition: from winter to spring, from stasis to motion, and from tedium to exhilaration.

Emerging immediately as the very embodiment of movement and vitality, Muza brings quick movement and lively thought into the timeless, lifeless world of the narrator. Then, until the catastrophic denouement, for a short time Muza leads their living together with her instinctive spontaneity and self-assurance. Now the narrator actively strives to feel the value of life. Bunin conveys some static and lyrical descriptions with swift narrative tempo: "It rained constantly. There were pine forests all around... Everything was wet, lush and mirrorlike. The twilight of the west lingered and lingered in the motionless, silent moonlight which was also motionless and bewitched."⁶⁵ The use of descriptive passages corresponds on the compositional level to the retarding effect of increasing tension. But soon Muza leaves the narrator silently of her own will, as she does on her arrival. After a vain search at the station, he sets out for Zavistovski's estate; however, to his regret, the narrator enters the house to find his

of chronology and abrupt transitions that give the tale its most telling effects.

64) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, vol. 7, p. 31.

65) *Ibid.*, p. 33.

suspensions confirmed. Muza is staying with Zavistovsky without any moral responsibility. Describing the sequences of those episodes, Bunin utilizes a varied narrative tempo to delay the climactic moment and to keep up the tension. Through this device, he succeeds in intensifying the tension until the last stage of the story. Contributing significantly to the development and dramatic tension of the theme, expressive variations of narrative tempo become in this story a vital ingredient of the total artistic structure.

IV. The Aesthetic Features of Bunin's Style

Bunin's prose narrative style distinctively has lyrical and expressive quality of poetry. In an interview with a correspondent, he stated that "The poetic element is naturally inherent in works of literature, regardless of whether they are written in verse or prose"⁶⁶. Since he started his literary career as a poet, the lyrical element of his prose was natural. During this period, Bunin focused on personal anguish over death or the yearnings for sexual passion or the gradual disappearance of traditional life styles in rural Russia. "Antonov Apples"(1900) is a good example. In this story, Bunin turns to the past to offer a luminous vision of the vanishing tradition. Bunin's treatments of this subject are an extension of his fundamental concern with the passage of time and the transience of human life. Memory is the only defense one has against the destructive force of time, so Bunin attempts to describe physical relics of the past with lyrical narrative style. At this stage of his career, however, Bunin achieves greater artistic success in describing with palpable images the decay of a general social order, than in treating with vague symbolic images his own personal anxiety over death. Also, clarity of structural design and transparent depiction of expressive narrative about the natural environment, which surrounds a gloomy state of human mind, are the remarkable merits of his style.

Then, in "The Village"(1910) Bunin shows a new dimension of his

66) Bunin talked to a correspondent of *Moskovskaia gazeta* in 1912. Quoted from Baboreko, "Bunin o Tolstom", p. 132, in *Yasnopolyanskiy sbornik: Sta'i i materialy*, edited by A. I. Popovkin.

narrative style. First, his style achieves concrete descriptions of everyday reality. Bunin observes the actual life of common people and describes it without artificial creation. Violence, crime, and death pervade everywhere. Stripped of hope for a brighter future, lacking glowing memories through which to relieve the past, people are ensnared in a bleak and meaningless present. Although Bunin still continues, in Stepun's phrase, "to think with his eyes"⁶⁷⁾, but now he selects concrete details with subtlety of relevance and suggestiveness. The most striking scene is that of "A blind girl who sits at a table calmly eating a mixture of milk and bread while nearby rests a coffin containing the corpse of a dead baby"⁶⁸⁾. Bunin described this horrifying scene unemotionally with a sober narrative. Bunin himself said that "In The Village, there is not a trace of lyricism or sadness. It seems to me that my tale is written very simply, very objectively and very realistically"⁶⁹⁾. Bunin attempts to put the naked truth of the actual reality of life in compressed descriptions. The result is not the simplification of reality, but the revelation of its essence in the entire complexity.

Secondly, Bunin develops his narrative technique through compression of narrative space. In this story, Bunin underscores the impression of several years telescoping into a single day by a subtle manipulation of chronology in his account of Tikhon's life: he allocates increasing amounts of narrative space to decreasing amounts of time. Thus, Bunin provides a broad outline of Tikhon's life in the first five or six pages, but devotes the last twenty three pages of the chapter to the experiences of one day. Through this device of expanding detail he creates the sensation that the present moment in Tikhon's life has swallowed up and engulfed the past, so that "all merged into one working day". As with the description of Tikhon's working day, Bunin focuses on the account of this day in detail. Through this intensive observation of one specific day of Tikhon's life, Bunin succeeds in the presentation of Tikhon's naked truth of his mental state and aspirations. As Tikhon's working day draws to a close, he can not find spiritual peace, so he becomes a brooding, poisoned man, and his life, the life of a petty

67) F. Stepun, *Vstrechi*, p. 92.

68) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 89.

69) Quoted from I. S. Gazer, "O nekotorykh khudozhestvennykh osobennostiakh povesti I. A. Bunina 'Derevnia'", pp. 98-99.

merchant in rural Russia, seems unrelievedly dreary and unpromising. Despite his lifetime of arduous effort, it appears to the middle aged man that he will be deprived of what he considers his ultimate reward — a child and heir. He confronted with a dreary future, he often turns to the past, to memory, for visions of consolation.

Thirdly, to contrast different dimensions of two brothers' perspectives, Bunin does not apply direct narrative. Instead, he makes use of juxtapositional technique in order to depict two heroes' complex roles with figuratively descriptive tone. In the character Tikhon, Bunin presents a possible alternative. In contrast to Tikhon with his life of selfish toil, Kuzma has cultivated his spiritual perspective through reading and writing poetry. Bunin's stylistic sensitivity, however, does not attempt to make a direct contrast between two different personalities. Instead, Bunin parallels the vicissitudes of their life: Tikhon's frustration with a gloomy future and Kuzma's fruitless wandering. Then, Bunin suggests that although two brothers may have traveled along very different paths, but they have arrived at the same impasse. The confluence of two destinies is the most disheartening development in Bunin's narrative. They are, in a sense, complementary halves of a chillingly passive and sterile whole. There is no escape for them, no possibility of improvement, for fatal sterility and paralysis already infect their blood. Bunin described the atmosphere of degeneration of them through objective juxtaposition.

Fourthly, Bunin presents the life of the village mainly through two heroes' eyes, and their convergent points of view chiefly determine the descriptive tone of the author-narrator. Through inner monologues and reflections of them, the reader learns how the characters feel about themselves and the world they inhabit, and thus the picture of rural Russia that emerges is ostensibly a reality perceived and experienced by the inhabitants themselves, not one imposed by an external narrative consciousness. And such a stylistic technique makes Bunin's portrait of rural Russia especially sobering, because without any didactic messages the narrative succeeds in intensifying the present reality.

In this work, however, Bunin still had not found a balance of descriptive and narrative elements. Sometimes descriptive passages are too long loose, as Gorki comments on this work: "If it is necessary to speak of a defect,

for I see only one — it is richness. Three of four objects are crammed into every sentence. Every page is a museum⁷⁰⁾. Bunin was so eager to show and describe the two heroes' meditations and lyrical monologues at excessive length.

Much of Bunin's prose is "more poetical and more subjective than his verse,"⁷¹⁾ as Mirsky states in his study. This lyrical style was the first aspect of his prose that attracted general attention to his individuality. However, Bunin made a serious effort to polish his narrative to achieve terse and elegant style. When he writes "Sunstroke"(1925), Bunin's descriptive passages, keeping the lyrical tone, achieve terseness with compact style. In this story, Bunin focuses on the spontaneous joy that passion can bring to life and on the profound sorrow that its passing may evoke. In order to create coherent aesthetic effect, Bunin depicts the evocation of sensual passion with swift narrative and dazzling scenic effects.

In particular, the sun enters in the narrative, to intensify character's response to passion: "He is struck by the smell of sunburn": and "In bliss and awe his heart sank at the thought of how strong and dark her whole body must be under the light gingham dress after lying for a whole month beneath the southern sun"⁷²⁾. The description of the sun brings out not only a lyrical image, but also a very sensual tone. In a brief and smooth style, Bunin's narrative achieves diverse effects, because it creates various metaphorical interpretations. Similar effect is found in the term "sunstroke". The title "Sunstroke" is a metaphor for the lethargic state of mind from which the characters have emerged, but ironically the heroine unwittingly identifies in her remark the real cause of the experience. Also, Bunin conveys their sensual passion through descriptive allusion: "They entered a large but terribly stifling room which the sun had filled during the day with its searing heat"⁷³⁾. Here, Bunin treats tension between conscious activity and subconscious in a suffocating atmosphere with a brief and allusive style. That is, in spite of the familiarity of its theme, "Sunstroke" produced

70) Quoted from Woodward, "Ivan Bunin", p. 90.

71) D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 391.

72) Ivan Bunin, *op. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 238.

73) *Ibid.*, p. 239.

a quite distinctive impression through its stylistic brilliancy.

Finally, in his last collection of stories *Dark Avenues*, Bunin's narrative style attained the brightest aesthetic level of all his prose. To achieve that quality, Bunin focused on the concision of narrative. The very consciousness of these works underscores Bunin's concept of passion as a shortlived emotional experience. Of course, it is not the intensity of human emotion alone that makes the stories in *Dark Avenues* so moving. Bunin compresses his already compact narrative style with allusion and psychological mood. Among the techniques Bunin utilizes to animate his stories are dramatic shifts in narrative effects, and the manipulation of setting and detail to establish broad emotional or psychological moods. Bunin synthesizes these structural elements with the conciseness of narrative style, creating the artistic unity.

Among the stories in *Dark Avenues*, "In Paris" shows a remarkably new aesthetic dimension of narrative style. The theme of this story is the love of two middle-aged Russian emigrants, which is not new. Also, structurally, it does not have any dramatic changes: there is no climax, which produces a lingering aesthetic effect without excessive descriptions. Bunin only attempts to use clear and brief sentences. However, Bunin fills the empty place between the lines with an elegiac mood. Clearly, it creates a serene state of mind, and also it intrigues us with metaphysical reflections: the dichotomy of life and death, and the basic contradiction between human existence and the inevitability of fate. Through these stylistic features, this story succeeds in building the ineffaceable aesthetic tranquility.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, what I focused on was that Bunin is always aware of aesthetic quality of musicality and expressive impressionism taking part in the embodiment of beauty. In his prose narrative, Bunin all the time attempts to achieve the perfection of an artistic work, which consists in its wholeness, its harmony and the absence of anything superfluous. Therefore, he tries to harmonize the correspondence of "form" and "content". It is

neither his metaphysical themes nor his capability to offer keen psychological analysis that makes Bunin one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. The essential value of his literary creativity is that Bunin succeeds in creating an authentic artistic unity through dynamic fusion of the theme, the structure of plot, the simplicity of language and the clarity of style. In this aspect, Bunin is unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries or even by the great writers of the nineteenth century.

Aesthetically, even while he was dealing with serious metaphysical themes, Bunin attentively builds the plot of narrative with the laconicism and impressionism of style. Striving for brevity and compactness, Bunin demonstrates an unmatched artistic capability to find the precise word and the transparent expression. Writing in such a laconic, compressed manner, Bunin is very attentive to differ the general mood of each story with the considerable stylistic variations. These characteristic features of his style make the readers feel the atmosphere, which seems to be often more important than the plot itself. Therefore, the effect of his narrative prose is suggestive, evocative, and stimulating. At the same time, he deeply considers musicality and narrative tempo in narrative. The purpose of these experimental stylistic method is to intensify the aesthetic effect in the structural development. The transparent and lyrical quality of style, the subtle perception of the imagery and the exclusion of didacticism are attributes of the artistic evaluation in Bunin's verbal artistry.

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The Analysis of Aesthetic Aspects in Ivan Bunin's Prose Narratives

Lee, Sangryong

In his prose narrative, Bunin focuses on the achievement of the extreme density and compactness through various techniques. He is all the time interested in keeping the harmony between the emphasis of the themes and the structural form of his prose works. This kind of experimental treatment of the composition of the structure from the standpoint of aesthetics creates an evocative artistic unity, and it serves as an essential element in Bunin's narrative.

To this day, criticism of Bunin convincingly asserts that he was, above all else, a meticulous stylist, a sharply discriminating and fastidious preteritioner of his craft. However, it implies a certain narrowness of outlook, an excessive preoccupation with formal perfection that allegedly explains the impression of coldness his prose tends to convey. Clearly, Bunin is not a writer to everyone's taste, however, it does not justify the assertion that his prose is as dry and detached as he was. Of course, his narrative manner is calmly controlled. The surging emotions of his protagonists are conveyed through a cool, restrained narrative exposition.

Throughout his literary career, Bunin had paid attention to the artistic effect, which is created by using of the lyrical perception of nature, the artistic unity of narrative tempo and tension, and the compactness of style. Considering the aesthetic quality, Bunin is always aware of the mutual relationship between the theme, structure, and style. In his prose narrative,

trying to harmonize the correspondence of "form" and "content", Bunin all the time attempts to achieve aesthetic artistry under the unity of thematic development. In this aspect, Bunin succeeds in creating an authentic artistic unity through dynamic fusion of the theme, the composition of plot, the simplicity of language, and the clarity of style. In doing so, Bunin achieves the essential value of his literary creativity.