

The Problem of Love, Good and Evil in the Works of I.A. Bunin and L.D. Rzhevsky

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ABSTRACT

The article expounds on the issues related to the philosophical and religious pursuits of Russian thinkers and writers on the cusp of the XIX-XX centuries. This leads to re-evaluation of values in philosophy, art, realization of the new role of an individual in the historical process. The authors consider the issue of "a person and its time" in its variety and complexity, the notions of good and evil, life and death, time, compassion, benevolence, the boundaries of reason, moral dimension of the technological progress, all of which played a crucial role in the development of the original Russian philosophical standpoints. The authors also investigate the above by looking into the works of I.A. Bunin and L.D. Rzhevsky of XIX-XX centuries, creative bonds between the writers, their inner dialogue through character-associative bonds and story arc.

Keywords: "Silver Age", "eternal" issues, philosophical and aesthetical issues of good and benevolence, new system of worldview and art, character — associative bonds, typology, subjectological parallels in works of I.A. Bunin and L.D. Rzhevsky

I. INTRODUCTION

"Silver Age" remains largely unexplored sphere of the Russian culture. Spreading across the brink of two centuries, it was a peculiar period which saw disintegration of the conventional way of life in Russia as the country was approaching unparalleled in its complexity and dramatic quality era of wars and revolutions.

Cultural and art figures of the "Silber Age" were determined to give the global shifts in all spheres of public life a thorough consideration. Philosophers, artists and scientists were facing the formidable problems of preserving culture on the foundations of humanism and uncontested priority of human values.

Thus, it is important to consider the philosophical, and religious and philosophical pursuits of Russian thinkers at the turn of the centuries. Those pursuits were mostly triggered by apprehension of the inherent bond between the past and the future, with the key issue "person and its time" being solved from the same angle. This originated form the fact that the end of the XIXth and beginning of the XXth centuries was

characterized by re-evaluation of the philosophical, moral, artistic values and realization of the new role of an individual in the historical process. The issue of "person and its time" should be viewed as multi-dimensional, including a plethora of moral, political and philosophical questions.

Spiritual realm of a person stood at the intersection of the interests of writers and philosophers. "Eternal" issues of good and evil, life and death, time, memory, conscience, truth were placed at the forefront this process. Fully appreciating the determination of their contemporaries to take an active part in the historical processes in the country, writers were exploring the crucial philosophical and aesthetic issue of Good, benevolence, compassion; boundaries of reason, application of emotional and physical efforts, moral dimension of the technological progress and were actively participating in various philosophical disputes which was the hallmark of the original Russian philosophy.

Literature stood at the ridge where one worldview was replacing another one, when one reference point was replaced by another one –

starting from individual socio-related manifestations and up to the cosmological syncretism, to reconsideration, systematization and amalgamation of the variety of knowledge into the new worldview essence, which would be the cornerstone of the new worldview, and therefore new system of art.

II. TYPOLOGY, SUBJECTOLOGICAL PARALLELS IN WORKS OF I.A. BUNIN AND L.D. RZHEVSKY

The emotional and value-based attitude of a writer towards the world and his characters can be revealed through social and class typology at the level of character-associative bonds and story arc. This can be of distinct importance in comparative analysis of typology and subjectological parallels in works of I.A. Bunin and L.D. Rzhevsky.

Though it is vital to look into the social background of Bunin's characters in order to identify peculiarities of its novel's plot, it would be prudent to start with the quantitative comparison.

Main characters of Bunin's short-stories "Dark alleys" can be subdivided into two-character and three-character categories that translates itself either into the "love line" or "love triangle" story line. Both versions of the "love triangle" are represented in the series: (a) two men and one woman ("Caucuses", "Muse"); (b) 1 man and 2 women ("Stepa", "Natalie").

"Dark alleys", "Late hour", "Tanya" and "In Paris" can be viewed as two-character novels. It is evident that the afore-mentioned list should not be treated as final, since the analysis of the novels would reveal the so-called "true and imaginary quantity", as we would refer to it going forward. It turns out that it is only the novel "Tanya" that can be classified as "truly two-character based" while three other novels "Dark alleys", "Late hour" and "In Paris" appear to be centred around the antinomy now/then and youth/senility and the protagonists have specific antinomic tropes which "potency" and story arc importance cannot be disregarded.

The true three-character story also seems to be a rare case. In "Dark Alleys" this category is represented by "Caucuses" and "Muse" where the three-character nature is determined by the love triangle, translating from the story line into the plot.

The imaginary three-character nature manifests in the novels "Stepa" and "Natalie". It is possible to transform the folklore notion of the "assisting beasts" into the "assisting women": the connection with Stepa leads Krasilschikov to make a drastic decision, i.e. to embark on a search for his actress. Having fully embraced the love of small Stepa, Krasilschikov comes to understanding of his love to

another women and leaves for her, having thus discontinued his initial plot pattern. Sonya shows similar transformation: having yielded to the intercourse she involuntarily promoted the crystallization of the main affection of the young Meschersky — his love for Natalie Stankevich. Here one can see the aesthetics of paradox: one may consider Stepa and Sonya to be the "imaginary" characters by comparing them with the "true" love objects of the protagonists – the actress and Natalie; however, it won't be exaggeration to say that the first novel is dedicated to Stepa while the actress is simply mentioned. The second novel sees the love triangle transformed into a "dot": Sonya vanishes in the first part of the story while Natalie dies at the moment of just attained happiness.

The difference between true/imaginary two-character narrative can be revealed using structural approach: presence/absence of the storyline antinomy between youth/senility that is illustrative of late Bunin: phycological, philosophical novel, flashback novel.

The novel "Ballad" has the "Dominical Wolf" as its "assisting beast" the embodies retribution for the vile sin against love. Comparison of this character with other presented in Bunin's novels leads to a certain contrast: "Dominical Wolf" resembles retribution not only for sins, but also for overall vanity as the centre of a man's existence.

Vanity manifests in various forms shapes. The vilest sin is punished by "Dominical Wolf" while others are smote by Bunin himself. It becomes obvious that the aesthetic of paradox has certain deep roots: trying to oppose vanity both "judges" apply the same trivial means: the wolf brings death while Bunin writes and thus prolongs the existence of life and therefore, existence of vanity.

There are no poor or dependent male-characters in the "Dark alleys": many of those have profession and pursuits, the characters are doing military service, create and travel. Main protagonist of Bunin is a military person ("Dark alleys", "Caucasus", "In Paris"), student ("April", "Natalie", "Rusya"), young or middle-aged noble, landlord (being someone's relative) ("Ballad", "April", "Muse", "Tanya", "Natalie", "Rusya", "Caucasus"), merchant ("Stepa").

There is certain schematics in the portrayal of female characters, as the "female trilogy" cannot be based around the profession affinity of any of the protagonists (unlike with the male characters). Even though female-protagonists of "Dark alleys", "Ballad", "April", "Muse", "Tanya" and "In Paris" might be viewed from the above standpoint, the female protagonists of "Caucasus", "Ballad", "Stepa", "Late hour", "Rusya", "Natalie" represent

common women which accompany men. This schematic approach of Bunin with generalization as the foundation of the novel and the character has special philosophical nature.

By conflating the protagonists on their social background, the writer bestows personalized sense of worldview and love upon them. Thus, the individual is translated into the common.

Man and Woman are represented as philosopheme for Bunin and the writer constantly draws parallels between this philosopheme and macrocosm (by subdividing the patterns of feelings and perceptions) and thus revealing the cosmic nature of love, life, death and their dialectical unity and mystery.

Both active and passive story lines of the female protagonists is essential to translate the author's idea. However, this should not be mistaken with the personal active/passive social standpoint of Bunin's female protagonists. This aspect is crucial not only in the sense of reality principal, as stated by Bunin as a writer-realist. Men love and leave their women irrespective of their social identity and personal qualities; women act in the same manner and their actions are conditioned by nature and higher powers. In another words, it can be stated that the paradox manifests through its highest aesthetic principle — love — and therefore this conflict stems from the beginning of time.

There are no male names in the titles of the "Dark Alleys" novels (comparing with the 1946 print Paris where the novel "Heinrich" was effectively the pseudo name of a woman). 5 novels out of 11 volumes printed in New York have female names in their titles. Man and woman have equal rights in love, while woman is the key bearer of love and man is the lead character.

Moreover, having amalgamated a plethora of different senses, Bunin's novels have no place for hatred. Bunin states that any ostent of love is natural, while sometimes such ostent might be an abomination in the face of Love itself ("Ballad"). In this context hatred is missing as being useless and unnatural feeling. Bunin tried to show not only "natural", but also ordinary, eternal sense of love that accompanies a common man. His understanding of intercourse cannot be simplified to the physical interaction between man and woman. The "Dark alleys" exert a strong sense of the fact that Bunin understood love a kind of aesthetic action, which is experienced by a person in full only once. Though there may be indefinite number of physical interactions ("In Paris", "Natalie"), but there can be only one ecstatic act.

It is a whole complex of things and perceptions, patters of feelings: environment, things, items, time, place, nature and weather, word, mimics and

gestures, glance, breath, smell and taste, the sense of touch, whisper, background (literature, music, painting, both as a memory and as a present), memory that gives the ability to experience new, unconsciousness, madness which given the sense of uniqueness of the present moment.

Analysis of Bunin's plot provides for revealing of literature tradition that had a powerful impact on both the soviet literature of the second half of the XXth century (Yu.M. Nagibin, Yu.P. Kazakov), but also the literature tradition of the Russian abroad, with works of L.D. Rzhnevsky being the best example.

III. ARTISTIC DIALOGUES OF BUNIN AND RZHEVSKY

Let's continue the virtual dialogue between L.D. Rzhnevsky and I.A. Bunin.

Many Russian and international researchers (V.V. Agenosov, D. Glad, R.B. Gul, S. Kryzhitsky, V.A. Sinkevich and others) spoke of the creative bonds between two writers. "I doubt that I can make a mistake or in any way offend L. Rzhnevsky should I consider him to be one of the most talented followers of Bunin" — wrote S. Kryzhitsky (Kryzhitsky 1978: 248). Works of I.A. Bunin as the classical writer and one of the key figures in the first wave of Russian emigration plays an important role in the art of one of the most prominent prose writers of the second wave of Russian exiles — Leonid Rzhnevsky. Bunin's works act as a kind of mirror for L. Rzhnevsky which perfectly reflects and even improves the image of Russia before the groundbreaking event of the October Revolution and Civil War, which divided the country into two parts.

L. Rzhnevsky viewed the Second World War not only as global catastrophe of the XXth century, but a kind of continuation of the Russian Civil War: in his novel "Between two stars" the write constantly addresses the issue of the "third power" in the war, depicting the life journeys of those who tried to fight both against Hitler and Stalin or even worse, with Hitler against Stalin for "Russia without the Bolsheviks". This "third way" is inherently flawed: people, who proclaimed that it is better to fight "alongside Devil, just against the Bolsheviks!" easily fell prey to the "diabolic paws" of fascism. Rzhnevsky struggled to find the "balanced, harmonized" Russia (before two World Wars and the Civil War) in the works of writers and poets of the first wave of emigration, in Bunin's works in particular. Moreover, Bunin's works remained the brightest source of knowledge about the pre-revolutionary Russia. Rzhnevsky used Bunin's works as inspiration, disputed with him and echoed his writings. [1]

I.A. Bunin was corresponding with L.D. Rzhevsky till the death of the great writer in 1953, while Rzhevsky continued to mail Bunin's widow for the next 12 months.

Critics belonging to the Russia abroad underlined certain Bunin's traditions in the works of L.D. Rzhevsky both on the formal and on the context levels.

L.D. Rzhevsky considered I.A. Bunin to be among the most brilliant Russian writers, and viewed "Dark alleys" as the example of the "eroticism in the Russian literature". He wrote: "profound and unparalleled love of life was teeming in his books alongside frenzy of love. His loyalty to beauty was pantheistic, almost like a religion".

Bunin's characters are portrayed with "acute colors, which only Bunin could boast of possessing" [2]. One of the main themes that brings works of L.D. Rzhevsky and I.A. Bunin together can be described as "orgy of resurrecting love; love that stretches across times and unites all generations. Most of the time this love has a tragic flavor (tough times and living environment separating the lovers), but similar to his favorite writer Bunin, this love resides in the memory of the teller (all works of the writer are written from the first person angle), inevitably dominating the disintegration of personality and even resurrecting not only the story-teller but the protagonists, some which used be cynical voluptuaries".

This theme runs through all works of L.D. Rzhevsky and its implementation is often conducted on the basis of Bunin's model at the level of character-associative bonds and story arc. All this provides an opportunity to draw subjectological parallels between "Dark alleys" (Bunin's main work) and minor epic forms of L.D. Rzhevsky. It is possible to say that many of Bunin's novels that constitute "Dark alleys" in particular became the story arc that drove novels and short-stories of L. Rzhevsky, of which "Sentimental story" is the best example.

IV. MEMORY AND FOREMEMORY, RATIONALISM AND INTELLECTUALISM IN THE WORKS OF BUNIN AND RZHEVSKY AS WRITERS OF THE "SILVER AGE"

It is natural that memory and forememory as the live sense of the past ages and nations in the soul of an artist that promoted the interest towards the ancients, archaic – that invoked not only "the works" of feelings, but also of the mind, active involvement of the associative memory in the creative process. All that became the source of rationalism and intellectualism of the "Silver Age" writers.

Though they may sometimes appear to be faux, this should not be treated as deliberate snobism but as inherent part of poetry considering its immanent nature as part of the paradigm of the Renaissance. The Renaissance of the Russian culture at the turn of the centuries was not centred around revival of the Russian Slavophile idealism, but rather revival through gradual integration with the world culture as part of the process that triggered adoption of the Antique and the Renaissance. That was the cornerstone of the viewpoint of many Russian idealists: Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Rozanov; their ideas were closely related to those of artists: Block, Brusov, Merezhkovsky, Annensky, Ivanov and neo-romanticists and neo-classicists, as well as to neo-realists Bunin and Kuprin.

It is not surprising that pantheism is a common trait of creative endeavors of writers of the 1900s: blistering shifts in life that was shattering under social disruptions and wars. The artists tried to find consolation in the eternal values and real essences. Creative endeavors of the artistic community were further boosted by philosophical pursuits which revealed new views on existence, life, death and immortality. Many writers were influenced by the pantheism: Leo Tolstoy, Korolenko, Kuprin. With all the difference in approaches towards understanding of the various aspect of the notion "Man and World" the ideal was inevitably sought in life of common people.

Many concepts of Bunin were united in his concept of "memory". Memory of a nation, being formed on the basis of individual memories of its members, transforms into a special kind of history. Obliteration of ancestors has always been viewed as one of the worst sins among the common people: "Ivan, who is absent-minded of his kinship" was the disdainful address to a person, who lived only by the immediate individual and egoistic personal needs, venally taking care exclusively of the day-to-day needs. Obliteration of history is the road to moral degradation. Thus, memory is the criterion for humanism.

Bunin stated multi times that he admires the East as the "birthplace of human religion": he tried to find fundamental principles of moral behavior in a man in Islam, Buddhism as well as in the ancient myths (antic, Slavic and eastern).

It would be fair to say that Bunin strived to understand his present linked to Russia and lift the curtain of secrecy from the future on the basis of pan-human approach (world history and ancient civilizations). His series "Temple of the Sun" (1915) was published only 5 years after the novel "The Village". At first glance it is hard to find commonalities in these two works of art: contemporary to Bunin Russian village, with all its

inertia and sluggishness in daily life but with radical shifts in the mindset of its inhabitants and the East-ancient and perpetually young. They are however united by the development of the writer's thought process, moving in time and space. By looking into the monuments of the past the writer tried to reveal the founding principles of spirituality of the previous civilizations.

Bunin's protagonist is always a person of the XXth century even when the author turns to historical plot (not as a novelist, but as a philosopher) and is measured by the Earth and Eternity. Bunin's characters are inevitably flamboyant personalities with distinctive features of national identity: Riksha from Ceylon ("Brothers"), abbruck highlanders ("Gentleman from San-Francisco") are different from Averky ("Bad grass") or Meliton (from the eponymous story). Together they create the moral being of a person. Kindness, unselfishness, empathy, love and faith have always been valued by different nations. All of this is crucial as the XXth century individual has felt its separation from others and loneliness (especially in the light of social and world conflicts). Bunin struggled to find common firstborn traits in people, their cultures, ancient historical bonds and kinship. Bunin's wise and full of humanism considerations presented in the series "Temple of the Sun" speak of broad views of the author, his democratism, historical optimism and love as the eternal value.

Love (to a woman, Motherland, world, people and God) had a similar perpetual axiological paradigm in the works of L. Rzhevsky. Protagonists of the novel "Between two stars" experience "trial through love" and "trial through war", with some of them failing to withstand the obstacles.

Within the axiological paradigm of L. Rzhevsky military prose the concept of Blessing, notion of Truth, Good and Beauty are connected with the image of Russia with interpretation of Russia's special way and the issue of memory. The idea of Blessing is revealed in the novel "Between two stars" as a category which cannot be split from patriotism. It is understood by the characters not as pan-human concept, but rather as Blessing for Russia as realization of its historic mission [3].

L.D. Razhevsky dream of "Spirit of Russia" resonates with metahistorical and trans physical vision of Daniil Andreev in his "Heavenly Russia". "Dream insights" showed to Daniil Andreev that "there is Russia's twin in the abyss and his image in Heaven". Russia's twin from the abyss is unharmonized and cruel Motherland that one can still love but which is so far away from its "Heavenly image". Both L.D. Rzhevsky and Daniil Andreev considered Russian history from the mythical and poetic viewpoint so that such history

is decided "on Earth, in Heavens and in the depths of abyss".

V. LOVE AS "ETERNAL" THEME

Love as beautiful and tender feeling in the souls of men is also an "eternal" and One of the "eternal" and timeless themes in the works of Bunin. Nevertheless, his hymn to love has some tragic tunes: not due to inequality, distances or insurmountable obstacles between the lovers. Most of the time love is mutual, ideal, harmonious but it lasts only for a moment and fades away after a right flare. It seems that Bunin is afraid of prolonging his characters' happiness as he is not convinced that the period of flamboyant emotional peak and passion can be preserved for many years of family happiness. Thus, love is viewed as obsession, revelation, "sunstroke".

It is this feeling that engulfs two people – lieutenant and a beautiful lady whose names are not even revealed (novel "Sunstroke").

Similar to all other eternal notions Bunin's love is interconnected with memory. Sometimes this connection can be of tragic nature, as depicted in the novel "Chang's dreams". There is nothing strange in the fact that memory of happiness is preserved by Chang the loyal and clever dog of the capitan. Chang is part of the living wise Nature and thus memory cannot and should not die since love is eternal. After death of his owner the loyal Chang keeps and transfers love and memory of love to another human as "part of something celestial that no one comprehends" [4].

Bunin has always caroled love as he sincerely believed that the human soul is strong only through love and it is at times of affection that people tend to show their best.

Bunin was able to see beauty in simple natural things, that are close to nature, not blemished by stencils, absurd traditions, routine or ideals of the "chosen ones". This becomes evident in the novel "Gentleman from San-Francisco" where the sharp contrast between the unnatural prettiness and false gaiety of the respectable passengers that voyage on board of a posh steamer, and sincere life of common folks, which the gentlemen try to keep unnoticed.

However, it appears that this conflict is not the central one in the novel. The key one is Life and Death, the suddenness of the latter, feelings which rise in the hearts of people near the passing away person.

The fatal nature of the end of life, signs of the approaching death and inability to change anything. However, each death can be different. Gentleman from San-Francisco who used to be so powerful in

his wealth becomes useless and an object to get rid of in order not to scare off the respectable passengers. His dead body is shipped back to America in the bulge of the same posh steamer. He immediately lost his powers upon death. What was his life? Was it of any need to anyone? Did he leave anything useful to people? Will he be remembered?

At the same time, we see another life and another death-proud and serene: a man passes away with the sense of fulfilled duty and certain trace left on earth. This is Bernard, the protagonist of the cognominal novel: "tall, slim, with vigorous and tanned by the sea-salt face. His last words were: "I think I was a good sailor". "What did he want to express with these words? Happiness stemming from the fact that he was useful to his kin while being alive and a good sailor? No, but rather that God awards certain talent to everyone and it is our holy duty to avoid hiding it in a napkin. But why, for what reason? One cannot tell. But one must be aware that everything in this incomprehensible world has a meaning, a certain celestial intention aimed at making this world a better place and that prudent fulfillment of this intention should be not only one's highest achievement in His eyes, but also happiness, pride [5].

VI. CONCLUSION

The theme of death was important to Bunin: a man is powerless in the face of this pitiless law of nature. Bunin, however, was not bothered by the fear of non-existence, but was exploring what a man can leave after his death: grateful memory or oblivion, whether his footprint would continue to be visible or would dissolve forever right at the deathbed. Moral and ethical viewpoint on this question provides for comparison with Leo Tolstoy's understanding.

Bunin's idea of death was connected with the theme of love, since the latter is always tragic in its nature. The author mates Love and Death because human happiness in the world torn asunder by the social cataclysm is unstable and can abruptly end in a catastrophe. Such understanding of Life, Love and Death were peculiar of Bunin's mindset during the period of emigration when his personal experience of the distant youth was explored from the angle of huge life expertise, multiplied by the bitter years of exile from the Motherland ("Dark alleys", "Life of Arsenyev").

Nevertheless, the sense of darkness of despair is largely experienced by Bunin's prose characters of the emigration period, while those notions that should be incorruptible (woman as an embodiment of the Beauty and Love) are transient in this world. Death balances everything and everyone, forgives and purifies (for instance, the novel "Transfiguration"), but also acts as a judge that

totals a human life (comparison of "Gentleman from San-Francisco" with "Bernard").

Bunin examines the moral firmness of his characters through love, life and death and investigates their senses during transition from one state to another, whether these characters retain their link with Nature, forememory that exists in subconsciousness.

In his twilight years Bunin used to say: "We live through all those things that we live with and to the extent that we understand the value of those things. Most of the time this price is negligible: however, it surges at a time of happiness, delight or distress, acute sense of loss or gain. Also, in brief period of poetic amalgamation of the past in the memory" [6].

With this short statement the writer reflected upon his key worldview elements: memory, insight and life.

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