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## Aspects of «Russianness» in the Philosophic-Artistic Concept of Ivan Bunin Creative Work

**Olga A. Karlova\***

*Siberian Federal University*

*82 Svobodny, Krasnoyarsk, 660041 Russia<sup>1</sup>*

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*This article gives an overview of philosophic issues of national identity in the creative work of the famous Russian poet and writer Ivan Bunin, the investigation of the phenomenon of the «Russian soul constant» in the context of his works, the determination of the aspects of «Russianness» of the genre and style peculiarities of his prose and poetry, as well as Bunin's creative style in general.*

*The reflection of nature accompanied by sounding silence is the most typical feature of Ivan Bunin's poetry.*

*The human in Bunin's works is a vessel for the reflection of the nature, the organ of its thought and emotional experience. It is the world of nature the images of which occupy 74 % of all artistic descriptions by Bunin and for him it is the world of the highest harmony of the existence.*

*Another typically Russian aspect of Ivan Bunin's work is his sinaesthetics. Bunin's texts, especially poetry, are first of all very picturesque. It may be said that it is the poetry of thousands of colours, but colours strictly selected and philosophically encoded.*

*The picturesqueness of Bunin's poetry and prose does not have analogues in the Russian literature: at the average use of 70-90 colours formations for 10 thousand words in a text, Bunin uses 190 colours. At the same time the colourful luxury of Bunin's language according to Vladimir Nabokov is achieved, first of all, by its tone-painting, rhythm, laconism and the highest density of the verse.*

*Letting the impressions through the prism of his concept, the master creates an integral image of heightened life, aims at painting its intensity of emotions, at reaching the superb degree of existence.*

*The framework of the writer's philosophic thought is the entirety of existence. This framework includes all his poetry, plots, motifs, stories. Everything is connected with everything, everything is mutually penetrating, everything has its meaning only in respect to the whole. It is not only ancient logics of the mythocosmos typical for Russian philosophers and writers of various epochs, but also the courage of the thinker to operate with such notions as «eternity», «cosmos», «life» and «death».*

*Love of a man and a woman obsessed with life and charmed with death, is eternal, tragic and mystical in Bunin's work. His contemporaries used to note «repetitions» and imitation in Bunin's works.*

*Yu. M. Lotman opened a new era in Bunin's studies by speaking about Bunin's modernist desire to «rewrite» the Russian literature in its art samples.*

*Bunin is a realist only in artistic manner, although it is among the writers-realists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where he felt at ease. But his everyday life description is anti-natural, selective and symbolic. And in this anti-realist everyday life description Bunin was absolutely original.*

*Another aspect of the «Russianness» artistic concept of Bunin is the memory. It becomes the crossroads of all the motifs of his work.*

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\* Corresponding author E-mail address: marina\_b@krskstate.ru

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*Bunin himself expresses the essence of his work in words which at most cover the verges of life «heightened by art»: «We live by all that, by what we live, only to the extent at which we understand the price of that by what we live. Usually this price is very low: it rises only in the moments of excitement – excitement of happiness or unhappiness, vivid consciousness of the acquisition or loss, and in moments of poetic transfiguration of the past into memory».*

*These and other existential, reason-for-being questions tired pragmatic Western thinkers and especially the European masters of arts of the 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the natural-contemplating harmony of the Oriental civilizations such questions were too straightforward and «humanized». Answers to them the Russian culture gave. And these answers were secretly-mysterious, spiritual-pagan, light- sad, tragic-majeure. Perhaps these are the questions and the answers of the borderland of civilizations.*

*Keywords: Russian literature, mentality, Russianness, reflection, sinaesthetics, intertextuality, realism, symbolism and modernism.*

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«Russia cannot be understood by mind alone...» – having made this quite accurate diagnosis a famous Russian poet though preaching to believe, side stepped the question regarding the essence of the Russian soul. Centuries pass by but this mystery is still intriguing everybody who shares the Russian point of view and the mentality of the Russian art. Let us assume that this mentality is a kind of a constant and its essence has been appearing in various epochs, in languages of different arts.

This year is the year of 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ivan Bunin. A poet who was appreciated as a prosaic, the last Russian symbolist who strongly believed himself to be the last Russian realist, a philosopher of the Russian culture closing by himself and his artistic reflection, his epoch and opening the doors wide for new. Our considerations seek the purpose to understand what determines the deep essence of «Russianness» of Ivan Bunin heritage, a person who after the «accursed days» of 1917 left his homeland forever but never failed to identify himself with Russia.

Let us start with the hypothesis which has already become an axiom: «Russianness» is being formed by the Russian nature itself, its space. Not without a reason the Russian natural landscapes can be so easily transformed to the landscapes of the Russian soul. Not without a reason a whole pleiad of masters of various arts

proudly bore the name of poets of the Russian landscape.

The reflection of nature accompanied by sounding silence is the most typical feature of Ivan Bunin's poetry. In the philosophic concept of his work, as well as the art work of many other Russian masters of art, nothing prevents the lyrical character from contemplating the world of forest sounds and images of nature; the life of the human does not reach this world, where the poet speaks with the wise cuckoo asserting: «...I love the whole world, but I love it lonely, being lonely everywhere and always».

Loneliness is a natural inner state of Ivan Alekseevich. Having been born in a noble family to which a famous poetess of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even a forefather of the Russian Romanism Vasily Zhukovsky belonged, but which was entirely ruined at the moment of the small Ivan's birth, Bunin was involuntarily under the necessity to live the life of a poor commoner. Being a fanatic worshiper of the Russian artistic culture, the singer of the Russian landscape, he has to spend half of his life abroad.

In cold and hunger, in the all-the-time homelessness of Orel, Moscow, Grass and Paris, Bunin finds company in nature. Its speechlessness supposes forest rustle, screams of the cranes and all other natural sounds which share the poet's loneliness and give him answers to the

unexpressed questions, allow to contemplate beauty and verity.

Two temples – the temple of nature with its natural sounds and orthodox church with the roll call of the bells – these are two ways of entering the heavenly world. The nature of Bunin is active and emotional, it is not only consonant with the human like in the Japanese tanka, but it persuades, alerts and warns... In the world of nature one can deeply feel something alien, mysterious and supernatural... This is why the winter in Bunin's work is always a presage of the eternal spring, the summer is a philosophic presage of the autumn about which one can speak only with nature itself.

The human in Bunin's works is a vessel for the reflection of the nature, the organ of its thought and emotional experience. It is the world of nature the images of which occupy 74 % of all artistic descriptions by Bunin and for him it is the world of the highest harmony of the existence.

Another typically Russian aspect of Ivan Bunin's work is his sinaesthetics. Bunin's texts, especially poetry, are first of all very picturesque. It may be said that it is the poetry of thousands of colours, but colours strictly selected and philosophically encoded.

The picturesqueness of Bunin's poetry and prose does not have analogues in the Russian literature: at the average use of 70-90 colours formations for 10 thousand words in a text, Bunin uses 190 colours. The feeling of admiring the nature's beauty makes him turn to white and blue – 23 % from the whole number of words usage. By the way, it is the blue colour the linguists consider to be the «colour ethnoprriority of Russia». The colour in Bunin's work is steady and bears the notion of a specific lyrical motif. This feature of his artistry was perfectly expressed by the philosopher Fyodor Stepun: «It should not be forgotten that the Greek word «theory» does not

mean thinking, but contemplating. Bunin's talent remembers this. Bunin «thinks with his eyes».

Bunin uses colour as a means of mythologizing. Good and sin in his works have a certain range of colours. The palette of stories of the «Dark Avenues» is based on the dominant red-white-black colours, the number of variations of black/dark is endless. The colour repeats the rhythm of the plot: waiting for love, meeting and parting. This where the special Bunin's genre of stories comes from – the literary still-life. Portraits, landscapes, interiors dominate in Bunin's prose absorbing and dissolving in themselves the event-plot basis, giving permanency and mise-en-scènesness to a verbal image, a kind of paintingness.

At the same time the colourful luxury of Bunin's language according to Vladimir Nabokov is achieved, first of all, by its tone-painting, rhythm, laconism and the highest density of the verse. By means of these techniques he was able to enclose any object of nature and «the obscured meaning which it is full of» into accords and sounds of the tremendous power of nature.

Ivan Bunin most of all wanted to be considered, in the first place, a poet. But his contemporaries seemed not to notice his poetry. In his literary recognition in general there was a lot of «not at the proper time» and «not about what is needed». His honorary status of the academician of the Emperor's Academy of Sciences he received in 1909 was ignored by the intelligent outlaws in solidarity with M. Gorky who did not receive this status. When he became the Nobel Prize winner in 1933, Bunin had nobody to share his happiness: the group of immigrants is not large, the politicized homeland is far away. But there is another court – the judgement by history and culture. And nowadays we have the right to exclaim: only a truly great poet could have the sorrow of admiration and speechlessness

of existence melted to such tremendously tense meditation and contrasting poetic musicality.

Bunin sees and hears the world not only in the contrast of colours and music meditation. His thirst for life, as Ivan Alekseevich said himself, «heightened feeling of life», determined the fundamental basis of Bunin's artistry, especially in the late period at the background of such loneliness and cruel isolation from homeland when it seemed that Russia is Bunin. Letting the impressions through the prism of his concept, the master creates an integral image of heightened life, aims at painting its intensity of emotions, at reaching the superb degree of existence.

The framework of the writer's philosophic thought is the entirety of existence. This framework includes all his poetry, plots, motifs, stories. Everything is connected with everything, everything is mutually penetrating, everything has its meaning only in respect to the whole. It is not only ancient logics of the mythocosmos typical for Russian philosophers and writers of various epochs, but also the courage of the thinker to operate with such notions as «eternity», «cosmos», «life» and «death». The notions which are not only Europe-like psychological, but Orient-like ontological. From the Freudian vividness of specific impressions, change of feverish, almost ailing states, Bunin proceeds to philosophic understanding of light and shade, Yang and Yin, happiness and sorrow, cosmic, reviving love and passion – sexual, all-absorbing and tragic.

In the work of the late Bunin the dramatic early love of a poor journalist with the daughter of the Eletski doctor, Barbara Pashchenko, a short-lived marriage with Anna Nikolaevna Tsakni, and conversely, many years of emotional affection towards Vera Nikolaevna Muromtseva, who became his wife in 1907 and lived with him half a century, are fused together. This marriage embodied passion and cooling, intimacy and loneliness, noisy quarrels and infinite patience –

and all this was suffered through publicly, under the same roof with Russian immigrant writers living in their house, among whom were young women as well.

Bunin's love in his life and work is a state of passion, life of life, the most striking developer of truth and beauty. «He was very much in love», says the child in the short story «The Chapel», «and these who are very much in love, always shoot themselves». This love is marked by the fatal mutual closeness of the essence of male and female passion. It is equally intimate and worldwide, marvelous and awful. And death comes not as an act of destruction, but as the Great limit. And the Woman is only a trigger of the deadly weapon, beautiful and unforgiving at the same time. Love of a man and a woman obsessed with life and charmed with death, is eternal, tragic and mysterious in Bunin's work.

Bunin's contemporaries often spoke of «rehashes» and feeble imitation in his work. The first to note this «dependence of Bunin on the great Russian culture» as a distinct originality of creative handwriting was Hermann Hesse. For a long time in the Russian literature studies Bunin was spoken of exclusively in the context of the concept of «tradition», however, not revealing his uniqueness regarding the «traditions of the Russian literary classics». It can be said that it was Yu. M. Lotman who opened a new era in Bunin's studies by speaking about Bunin's modernist desire to «rewrite» the Russian literature in its art samples. He called Bunin's work of the immigration period «the realistic representation of the real world which does not exist», noting that «this world once existed in the Russian literature and it was this world which Bunin was drawn to with nostalgia, it was this world in which he saw genuine reality».

Bunin-innovator of the modernist era kind of exempts the types of the Russian literature from a dusty museum of classics, experiences

their untapped potential. These are the characters of Pushkin, Turgenev and Tolstoy, but in the conditions of turn of the twentieth century, with new partners and new opportunities. The writer reveals to us the infinity of the image–plot potential of the Russian classics, its «resolving to infinity». If the Turgenev's story «The First Love» begins with a detailed description of a young man hunting for crows he hated, Bunin's novel «The Crow» built on the same dramatic theme of love-obsession, pays tribute to Turgenev, but also argues with him.

Bunin is a realist only in artistic manner, although it is among the writers-realists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where he felt at ease. But his everyday life description is anti-natural, selective and symbolic. And in this anti-realist everyday life description Bunin was absolutely original. Thus, no one before Bunin had conducted a verbal-figurative dialogue with the visual arts: his constant technique – «quotation» of artists' canvases. Try look at his Malyavin's black–red-yellow beauties in Bunin's «Dark Avenues», «quotations» of paintings of G.F. Yartsev, K.A. Korovin, S.P. Kuvshinnikova, Russian icons, European religious paintings. And finally, the «Shore» by Bunin is a direct quote and development of Levitan's painting «Above the Eternal Peace».

We remember this canvas: a heavy gray-blue-green gamma with pearl tints lulls the oval of the lake stretched to infinity; powerful clouds are floating forward to the viewer; the cape with a church and a cemetery – in the depth and upwards of the space, to infinity. The vast, inspired spaces of the sky create an image of the lake, mournful and majestic at the same time, persuading in incomprehensible for the human, but perfect essence of the universe.

In his «Shore» Bunin in a way continues the philosophical theme declared by Levitan. He speaks with the human substance on the way to heaven. Describing people's ritual of the funeral,

«wax candles» and «plank long boat», the poet focuses on the loneliness of the «speechless twin» who has «no name and no patronymic, no friends, no home, no relatives».

In the «Shore» Bunin joined the popular poetic elements and the Orthodoxy. His «blue sea» is a tribute to folklore. This is why he lets go the «white boat» to the «blue sea» which never existed in reality. The boat is a metaphor for the grave, but the difference between the long and white boat at the end of the verse is enormous. The white boat seems to be not material already, it is on its way to heaven. The verse pause in the line of the last quatrain is filled inside with incredible deep sense of the watershed and at the same time the merging of two worlds. It creates a feeling of compassion and peace, overcoming the horror of life by a strong and high emotion. It is not only the reflection of the Russian classics, it is the reflection of the Russian soul...

Another aspect of the «Russianness» artistic concept of Bunin is the memory. It becomes the crossroads of all the motifs of his work. This is an in-depth recollection of his pre-existence, and also the theme of appealing to the lived-through, and the eternal world of the Russian artistic classics. The memory in his work is a kind of artistic optics of empathy into the world, it colours all the narration of Bunin with a complicated feeling of enthusiastic sadness. Behind the appeals to the past primarily stays the desire to retain the present. Therefore, memory began to occupy quite a special place indeed in the works of Bunin, when the Accursed days occurred in his life and Russia irrevocably became the past.

The memory and creative work have a deep relationship. Memory, like art, sifts out everything empty and unimportant, exposing the most essential thing. «That's why», Bunin wrote, «creative work requires only obsolete, only the past». The selection of memory is unconscious,

it is driven not by mind, but by something much deeper. With respect to the values of this deep being pictures and story lines are being built creating a surprising uniformity of time of Bunin's narration, when the past and the present are almost indistinguishable in the manner of writing – one might be living in another, making one «timeless» time.

Bunin himself expresses the essence of his work in words which at most cover the verges of life «heightened by art»: «We live by all that, by what we live, only to the extent at which we understand the price of that by what we live. Usually this price is very low: it rises only in the moments of excitement – excitement of happiness or unhappiness, vivid consciousness of the acquisition or loss, and in moments of poetic transfiguration of the past into memory».

As the poet asserted himself, these are not the landscape and colours which fascinated him in the surrounding world, but «the shining of colours of love and happiness of existence in it».

We have tried to identify only some of the verges of philosophical and artistic concept of Ivan Bunin, although many questions remain unanswered. Was the literary heritage of this writer, who considered himself a follower of Lev Tolstoy, realistic? Was it at all realistic Russian art of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

One can say with certainty only that the prose and poetry of Ivan Bunin, like work of many

Russian masters of arts, were sinaesthetic – equally picturesque, musical and poetic. Bunin's artistry was symbolic in terms of existence in its stable complexes of ideas, images, archetypes, and, of course, was characterized by intertextuality and dialogical consciousness.

Are these the features, which manifest specific Russianness of the Russian culture and its view of the world? Or is it the philosophy of feeling which still lies in the basis – the intellectual courage to handle the concepts of «eternity», «love», «life» and «death», «ends and beginnings», «soul» and «cosmos» –and even greater courage to live all this in his work? Or maybe it's the utmost openness and utmost secrecy as of the first, so of the second – the great mystery of being and cognition of life in its earthly fullness and divine destiny...?

These and other existential, reason-for-being questions tired pragmatic Western thinkers and especially the European masters of arts of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the natural-contemplating harmony of the Oriental civilizations such questions were too straightforward and «humanized». Answers to them the Russian culture gave. And these answers were secretly-mysterious, spiritual-pagan, light- sad, tragic-majeure. Perhaps these are the questions and the answers of the borderland of civilizations.

It is known that borders in this world go by land. In this case, this land is Russia ...

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## **Аспекты «русскости» в философско-художественном концепте творчества Ивана Бунина**

**О.А. Карлова**

*Сибирский федеральный университет  
Россия 660041, г. Красноярск, пр. Свободный, 82*

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*Статья посвящена философским вопросам национальной идентичности в творчестве русского поэта и писателя Ивана Бунина, исследованию феномена «константа русской души» в контексте его произведений, уточнению аспектов «русскости» жанровых и стилистических особенностей его прозы и поэзии, а также в целом бунинского творческого почерка.*

*Рефлексия природы, которой сопутствует звучащая тишина, является главной приметой поэзии Ивана Бунина.*

*Человек у Бунина – сосуд рефлексии природы, орган ее мысли и переживания. Именно мир природы, образы которого занимают 74% всех художественных описаний Бунина, – и есть для него мир высшей гармонии бытия.*

*Другим типично русским аспектом творчества Ивана Бунина является его синэстетичность. Бунинские тексты, особенно поэтические, прежде всего удивительно живописны. Можно сказать, что это поэзия тысячи красок – но красок, строго отобранных и философски закодированных.*

*Живописность поэзии и прозы Бунина не имеет аналогов в русской литературе: при среднем использовании в текстах на 10 тысяч слов 70-90 цветообразований, только Бунин использует 190 красок.*

*В то же время красочная роскошь бунинского языка, по утверждению Владимира Набокова, достигается прежде всего его звукописью, ритмикой, лаконизмом и высочайшей плотностью стиха.*

*Пропуская впечатления через призму своего концепта, мастер создает интегральный образ повышенной жизни, стремится к изображению ее страстного накала, к достижению превосходной степени бытия.*

*Рамкой философского мышления писателя является целое бытия. В эту рамку вписаны все его стихи, сюжеты, мотивы, рассказы. Все связано со всем, взаимопроникаемо, все имеет смысл лишь по отношению к целому. Это не только древняя логика мифокосмоса, характерная для русских философов и литераторов разных эпох, это еще и мужество мыслителя оперировать понятиями «вечность», «космос», «жизнь» и «смерть».*

*Любовь мужчины и женщины, одержимых жизнью и замороженных смертью, у Бунина вечна, трагична и мистериальна. Современники Бунина часто говорили о «перепевах» и эпигонстве в его творчестве.*

*Ю.М. Лотман открыл новую эпоху в буниноведении, заговорив о бунинском модернистском желании «переписать» русскую литературу в ее художественных образцах.*

*Бунин – реалист лишь по художественной манере, хотя именно среди писателей-реалистов XIX века он чувствовал себя своим. Но его бытописание антинатуралистично, избирательно и символично. И в этом своем антиреалистическом бытописательстве Бунин был абсолютно оригинален.*

*Еще один аспект «русскости» художественного концепта Бунина – память. Она становится перекрестком всех мотивов его творчества.*

*Сам Бунин выражает сущность своего творчества в словах, которые максимально полно охватывают грани «повышенной искусством» жизни: «Мы живем всем тем, чем живем, лишь в той мере, в какой постигаем цену того, чем живем. Обычно эта цена очень мала: возвышается она лишь в минуты восторга – восторга счастья или несчастья, яркого сознания приобретения или потери; еще в минуты поэтического преображения прошлого в памяти».*

*На эти и другие экзистенциальные, смысложизненные вопросы ответы давала русская культура. И ответы эти были таинственно-мистериальные, духовно-языческие, светло-печальные, трагически-мажорные. Возможно, это и есть вопросы и ответы пограничья цивилизаций.*

*Ключевые слова: русская литература, ментальность, русскость, рефлексия, синэстетичность, интертекстуальность, реализм, символизм, модернизм.*

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