

**The University of Sheffield**

**The Reality of Time, History and Life in the Prose  
of Ivan Bunin.**

**Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## Abstract

The thesis focuses on two major aspects. Firstly, it offers a discussion of the evolution of the notion of 'historicity' in the thought of various Russian thinkers and cultural historians with particular reference to the ideas of Berdiaev, Bakhtin and Likhachev. It also addresses the problem of the contribution made to the twentieth-century humanities by the 'Slavonic Renaissance' of the early part of the twentieth century. Secondly, the work examines various views on the issue of historical time and its perception and representation in artistic work, focusing primarily on the specificity of artistic time in the prose of Ivan Bunin. The discussion of this issue is based on four of Bunin's substantial works (*The Shadow of the Bird*, *The Life of Arsen'ev*, *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* and *Dark Avenues*), examining the problem of historical time from semantic and formal points of view. The analysis of the novel *The Life of Arsen'ev* emerges as central to the whole discussion since it approaches the problem of the notion of 'path through life' and its significance both for an understanding of Bunin's work and in relation to the discursive practice of the 1920s and early 1930s in Russia. Moreover, for Bunin this category proves to be both a feature of artistic thinking and of generic significance, extending the boundaries of understanding and portrayal of historical time in its various aspects.

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## Translation and Transliteration

Throughout the work all quotations are given in both the original language and in English. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Russian words are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system (without diacritics).

As the twentieth century draws to a close we can assert with some confidence that in the history of the development of intellectual thought, our century will always be marked by its deep, at times 'obsessive', engagement with the study of time and space, and the interrelation and interaction between them, representing, above all, a determined striving to exercise control over the way this issues develops. In other words, an attempt if not to solve the problem, then at least to draw certain conclusions and formulate some concepts from it. It is therefore no surprise that for the contemporary humanities, statements about the complexity and diversity of forms of time and space and their importance for an interpretation of artistic work are accepted at face value. However, every time we move this issue from the realm of philosophy (where its study originally began and has been a priority for a long time) and place it within the sphere of *poetics*, we stumble across unexpected difficulties, one of which lies in the fact that here such notions as 'time', 'space', 'history', and such associated categories as 'historical time', 'historical method' and finally 'historicity', their meaning and content, are not fully and clearly defined.

The present study, containing as it does five chapters, can be provisionally divided into two sections, one theoretical and the other practical. The function of the former is, by definition and purpose, to be theoretical and introductory at the same time. The latter seeks to establish and maintain an organic link between the two parts, dealing primarily with an analysis of the literary text.

The thematic core of the study focuses on two major aspects. On the one hand, it offers a close examination of various views on the issue of historical time and its perception and representation in artistic work. On the other hand, it approaches the question of the state of the Russian humanities at the turn of the century and during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Needless to say, in the history of Russian culture this epoch is noteworthy in many respects, marking a time of tremendous intellectual ferment and challenging questioning of conventional values which found their expression in a new, daring way of thinking and in a phenomenal diversity and prosperity of artistic and literary manifestations. But there will always be one distinctive feature that underlies all the work of Russian thought of this period. This peculiarity can be describe as an aspiration *to broaden* one's awareness of, in essence, a single problem, namely, *man's existence in history*, broadly speaking, *in culture*. In conjunction with this it was important for me here to raise afresh the issue of the meaning and content of such notions as 'historicity' and 'the historical' and to demonstrate their significance both for an understanding of the discursive practice of the 1920s and early 1930s in Russia and in relation to an analysis of the artistic work.

A significant part of the thesis is concerned with the study of Ivan Bunin's fiction. The focus on Bunin is stimulated not only by my personal interest in his work, but, more importantly, by a wish to examine the specificity of artistic time in Bunin's work, to reveal all the complexity of its understanding and the profound context of its perception and representation. The discussion of this issue is based on four of Bunin's substantial works (each of which is closely examined in a separate chapter): the collection of

travel notes *The Shadow of the Bird*; the novel *The Life of Arsen'ev* (in English translation *The Well of Days*); the monographic essay *The Emancipation of Tolstoi*; and the collection of short stories *Dark Avenues*. The choice of these particular works is conditioned first and foremost by the fact that, representing different phases in the development of Bunin's creative thinking, they allow us to trace most vividly the dialectics of Bunin's 'sense of time', that is, the formation and evolution of the concept of historicity as such. Furthermore, the generic diversity of the selected works (travel notes, novel, essay, and short stories) offers an opportunity to consider the problem of historical time from a semantic as well as formal point of view. From this perspective it thus becomes possible to broaden the spectrum of study of Bunin's fiction in general, shifting the endless and seemingly unresolvable debate about Bunin's position on the Realism - Modernism scale to a discussion of the true place of his artistic world in Russian literature of the turn of the century and onwards. Such an approach, moreover, enables me to trace the polemics on the nature of time and its perception and representation in Bunin's work, arguing against the view, widely held in contemporary scholarship (in the works of such scholars as Afanas'ev, Kucherovskii, Connolly, Woodward and Mikhailov), that Bunin was a thoroughly 'ahistorical' artist.

In my work I greatly benefited from the material held in the Bakhtin Centre (University of Sheffield) to which I was attached as a PhD student. I have found the Russian State (formerly Lenin) Library to be an invaluable source of secondary bibliographical material and the Russian Archive at Leeds

University to contain much important information on Bunin's life and work such as diaries, periodicals, magazines, literary journals and Bunin's correspondence with writers and critics.

I owe a debt to my supervisor Professor David Shepherd for his considerate guidance, indefatigable help and encouragement. I should like to thank Professor William Leatherbarrow for reading and commenting on two chapters of the present work. Thanks are also due to Professor Robert Russell for his constant willingness to offer assistance with my research. Finally, I am grateful to Thomas Dearman for his patience, and linguistic and moral support through each stage of the writing of this work.



## **Part One**

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Idea of 'Historical Existence' in the Chronotope of Early 20th Century Russian Culture.

Но бытие, на мой взгляд, – бытие историческое, человек не поселенец какой-нибудь географической точки. Годы и столетия, вот что служит ему местностью, страной, пространством. Он обитатель времени. [...] Человек – действующее лицо. Он герой постановки, которая называется “история” или “историческое существование”.

Борис Пастернак, *Что такое человек?*

#### 1. Why the 'Slavonic Renaissance'?

The question of *what* took place in Russian culture at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century and *how* this should be defined has interested the contemporary humanities for some time. The idea that for Russian philosophy, literature and art the turn of the century and first quarter of the twentieth century was both chronologically and qualitatively a new epoch representing a peculiar cultural-historical phenomenon, remains widely accepted. The sources of this approach can be found in the theoretical works of thinkers and writers of that time. Nevertheless the significance of the experience gained by the Russian humanities of the turn of the century and first quarter of this century turns out to be hotly debated, constantly ‘troubling’ contemporary minds. Moreover, there are reasons, perhaps decisive ones, for touching upon certain difficulties which arise when answering this question. The first reason is one of material, for the existing theoretical and critical literature devoted to this subject is quite considerable. It includes substantial monographs and books, essays and articles in literary magazines and journals

and conference papers and abstracts on studies in Slavonic literature and poetics. However, notwithstanding the large quantity of research material which offers various general descriptions of the contribution made to cultural history by the first quarter of this century, the very notion of the *productivity of the cultural content* of that epoch (not its status), along with its influence on the further development of Russian humanities thinking, has not yet received precise and clear definition and problematisation. The second reason is the status and notion of a 'turning point' and its content. For, the more we try to consider that period from our own cultural-historical position (which has not yet been given any firm definition but which could be conventionally named, by analogy, the late twentieth and early twenty-first century), the more we become certain of the idea that everything which is somehow related to and can be described in terms of 'turning' or 'transitional' is not easily susceptible to any sort of definition and classification. All that is left to us is to 'forecast' and at the same time ponder the ideas expressed at 'the dawn' of our century about the possibilities of this century. Even after amassing substantial knowledge about the epoch, so that the essence of what happened becomes more or less clear, we find ourselves in a situation where familiar events and facts unexpectedly reveal their new, hitherto unexplored, side. In this sense, the recent polemics among Russianists (particularly in the sphere of Bakhtin studies) on the fate and role played by the so-called '*Third*' or '*Slavonic Renaissance*'<sup>1</sup> in Russian cultural history of the turn of the century and first

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<sup>1</sup> This notion was introduced in 1919 by the Russian Hellenist F. F. Zelinskii in his book *Drevnegrecheskaia literatura epokhi nezavisimosti* [Classical Greek Literature of the Period of Independence]. In his comments on the article 'Tretii Renessans' [The Third Renaissance] (1995), Vitalii Makhlin draws attention to the importance of the context in which Zelinskii proposes the terms the 'Third' or 'Slavonic Renaissance'. Zelinskii points to the fact that in the two Western cultural Renaissances - Romanic and Germanic - which were inspired by Classical Greek Literature 'the

quarter of the twentieth century, can serve as a vivid example. This discussion was initiated by Vladimir Bibler's book of 1991, *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin ili poetika kul'tury* [Mikhail Bakhtin or The Poetics of Culture]. Bibler begins the description of the turn of the century and first quarter of the twentieth century by outlining that the most fundamental peculiarity of this epoch lies in the difficulty of approaching it from an evolutionary-genetic or the more widespread comparative-historical point of view, since this period, like no other age, developed the idea of the 'unity of humane knowledge' (*edinstvo gumanitarnogo znaniia*), expressed, as Bibler puts it, 'in the aspiration [...] to understand every phenomenon of human life as a phenomenon of culture' [*stremlenie [...] ponimat' kazhdyi fenomen chelovecheskoi zhizni kak fenomen kul'tury*].<sup>2</sup> In other words, the major feature of that epoch's thinking (or what Bibler calls 'indeterminate intuition' (*neopredelennaia intuitsiia*)) is based on a 'fully determinate' historical and 'creative pathos' to consider every phenomenon of nature, history, society, human life, relations, passion and thought to be first and foremost a manifestation of culture. This pathos (and this is a correct and important observation of Bibler's) turns out to be an 'a priori' for all thinkers in the first quarter of the twentieth century, for:

If a scholar (or artist) of the twentieth century falls out from this pathos, then a reader, spectator or listener of his works inevitably feels a certain inferiority, inapplicability, lack of vitality and secondary nature of the perceived cultural

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Slavonic world participated only indirectly, illuminated by reflected or refracted light; its future cultural originality requires it to have its own, third in number, great Slavonic Renaissance'

[Славянский мир в обоих участвовал лишь косвенно, освещаемый отраженным или преломленным светом; его будущая культурная самобытность требует, чтобы и он имел свое – числом третье – великое славянское Возрождение] (quoted from V. L. Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', in *Bakhtinologiia: Issledovaniia, perevody, publikatsii*, ed. K. G. Isupov (St. Petersburg: Aleteliia, 1995), pp. 132-54 (p. 151)).

phenomena (these may be very nice and comfortable for one's perception as reader and spectator).

**[Если какой-то исследователь (и художник) XX века выпадает из этого пафоса, то читатель, зритель, слушатель его произведений неизбежно ощущает какую-то неполноценность, неадекватность, нежизненность, вторичность воспринимаемых культурных феноменов (быть может, очень милых и уютных для моего читательского и зрительского восприятия).]**

(Ibid.)

Moreover, in his book Bibler seeks to demonstrate the fruitfulness of approaching a cultural phenomenon from the position of a quest for the 'evolutionary vector' (p. 15): in so doing we part from an understanding of that which, in the end, forms and defines the integral character of the epoch. Bibler argues that a cultural phenomenon is always 'crystal-like' (*kristallichen*) (ibid.): by considering culture, its every occurrence and manifestation as a simultaneous existential crystal, we can link different temporal, historical and aesthetic layers, art and life. Hence Bibler's metaphor of culture as crystal vividly expresses the aspiration to perceive any cultural epoch as a single whole, with all its, at times, contradictory occurrences and points of view, to see in it above all an Event, an Image, a work of fine art (within the limits of a single artistic work) and even a text (if we apply this idea within the total literary output of a single author).<sup>3</sup> He proposes that we regard Bakhtin as the structural and meaningful centre of this 'crystal' (that is, the cultural context of

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<sup>2</sup> V. S. Bibler, *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin ili poetika kul'tury* (Moscow: Progress, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Bibler's book is a fruitful and quite successful example of an attempt to read and understand Bakhtin's works as a single whole ('a unique crystal'), as one work, compressing the period from 1918 to 1975 into one year. According to Bibler, this is guided by the idea that this approach 'offers a new way of paraphrasing Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope (time-space of culture) and at the same time offers a preliminary summing up of our understanding of the chronotopic peculiarities of the cultural phenomenon known as "M. M. Bakhtin"' [дает новый парафраз бахтинской идеи хронотопа (время-пространства культуры) и одновременно подводит первоначальные итоги в понимании особенностей хронотопа того культурного феномена, который называется "М. М. Бахтин"] (p. 36).

the beginning and first quarter of the twentieth century) or, more precisely, Bakhtin's idea of culture as 'the *focus* of all *other* (social, spiritual, logical, emotional, moral and aesthetic) meanings of human existence' [*sredotochie vsekh inykh* (sotsial'nykh, dukhovnykh, logicheskikh, emotsional'nykh, nravstvennykh, esteticheskikh) smyslov chelovecheskogo bytiia] (p. 38). Indeed, the first quarter of the twentieth century in Russia emerges as the focal point of human thought's spiritual strivings, as 'the realm of "ultimate resolutions" of [...] the destiny of culture' [pole "poslednikh reshenii" [...] sud'by kul'tury] (ibid.). Bibler, moreover, notes:

In *this* sense culture in the twentieth century is not only a problem of so-called 'cultured people'. It is a problem of the life (to the extent that life becomes a spiritual problem) of every individual who is ill with the twentieth century illnesses, and healthy with its health.

**[В этом смысле культура в XX веке - это проблема не только так называемых "культурных людей". - нет, это проблема жизни (в той мере, в какой жизнь становится духовной проблемой) каждого человека, страдающего болезнями XX века, здорового его здоровьем.] (Ibid.)**

Bibler also dwells on the significance of those alterations without which an understanding of 1920s Russia does not seem to be possible and which, in their turn, define the specific character of the cultural chronotope of that period in particular and the twentieth century in general. The chronotope of culture in our century, according to Bibler, shifts towards the 'epicentre' of social and personal catastrophes and decisions, emerging as a major 'subject' of sincere and spiritual efforts, since:

The enigma of culture - of its rise, existence and downfall - becomes the individual torment of the human spirit, even in the perception of phenomena of nature, in

everyday life. This all follows only *if* man makes sense of daily disquiets as the disquiets of *Being*, that is, interprets them in the heights of spirit.

[Загадка культуры, – ее возникновения, бытия и гибели, – становится личным мучением человеческого духа, даже в восприятиях явлений природы, в повседневности быта. Конечно, *если* тревоги быта вообще осмысливаются человеком как тревоги *бытия*, то есть осмысливаются на высотах духа.] (p. 39)

Pointing out that his view of culture is particularly concerned with its spiritual and existential meaning (in Bibler's terminology this is '*the sphere of self-determination*' (*sfera samodeterminatsii*)), Bibler introduces a qualitatively new approach to the evaluation of the meaningful context and spiritual content of both the beginning of the twentieth century and, in retrospect, the whole of our century, whose originality (and here it is very difficult to disagree with Bibler) is 'exhausted' (*ibid.*) by its first thirty years. The understanding and attitude to culture developed during the 1920s and 1930s raised the question which defined that epoch's main content and pathos, namely, the idea of man's *historical existence in culture*, since it is, indeed, in the twentieth century that culture emerges as the realm wherein man truly encounters history in such a way that, remaining 'alone' with history, he begins to feel and understand that he is an inseparable part of it. At this point I shall deliberately pause in order to return to a closer examination of the works of those scholars without whose conclusions this theme cannot receive its final problematisation.

It should be noted that Bibler's book was followed by a large number of publications which dwell on the necessity of (re)turning to and reviving the humanities that were born at the turn and beginning of this century. Almost all of these works, indisputably different in their purposes and content, have one

thing in common: a moment of uncertainty and disturbance when the question of the current state of the humanities and its future development is raised. All the authors seem to be unanimous in the conclusion that it is unlikely that, without an appeal to the discursive practice introduced and developed by the thinkers of the *Third* or *Slavonic Renaissance*, we would be able to ‘come out alive’ (Bibler’s expression) from the upheavals of the end of this century and enter into the twenty-first century.

In his article ‘Russkii neklassicheskii gumanitet 20-kh godov XX veka’ [The Russian non-classical humanities in the 1920s] (1994) Vitalii Makhlin, for example, is firmly convinced that the contemporary humanities are in a state of ‘inevitable and fruitful crisis of consciousness and cognition’ [neizbezhnyi i produktivnyi krizis soznaniia i poznaniia].<sup>4</sup> In this sense the paradigm of the Russian non-classical humanities acquires great significance since, as Makhlin argues a year later in ‘Tretii Renessans’ [The Third Renaissance], the mentality which was formed by this paradigm ‘*had already given the answer* in the past to today’s question about the absolute future’ [uzhe dal otvet v proshlom na nash segodniashnii vopros ob absolutnom budushchem] of the culture of humanities and our own ‘possibilities’ in the light of this absolute future.<sup>5</sup> The great goal of the Slavonic Renaissance, for Makhlin, is ‘to discover for us and in us that *historical potential* which has not been revealed’ [raskryt’ nam i v nas samikh istoricheskii potentsial, eshche ne raskryvshiisia].<sup>6</sup> This comparatively new way of thinking (or what Makhlin defines as ‘the Russian Atlantis’ (‘russkaia Atlantida’) in twentieth-century

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<sup>4</sup> V. L. Makhlin, ‘Russkii neklassicheskii gumanitet 20-kh godov XX veka’, in *Bakhtinskie chteniia: Filosofskie i metodologicheskie problemy gumanitarnogo poznaniia*, ed. D. Z. Arsent’ev and Iu. S. Borisov (Orel: Izdatel’stvo OGTPK, 1994), pp. 37-45 (p. 38).



humanities)<sup>7</sup> was fully formed and historically situated between the pre-Revolutionary Russian and post-Revolutionary Soviet mentalities, including such names as Ukhtomskii, Bakhtin, Fedotov, Meier, Berdiaev, Kagan, Pumpianskii, Losev, Bitsilli, Mandel'shtam, Pasternak, Prishvin, Stepun, Shpet, Frank, Vygotskii and many other representatives of the so-called 'unofficial layer of culture'.<sup>8</sup>

Both Bibler and Makhlin consider Bakhtin to be the central figure of the whole paradigm. This they substantiate by pointing out that, regardless of how well Bakhtin himself and his ideas were known in 1920s Russia and the extent to which they could have an influence on the actual development of that epoch's philosophical and aesthetic thinking, Bakhtin's thought, nevertheless, 'inhaled the pathos' of Russian and European culture of the early twentieth century, becoming 'one of the focal points of the culture' [stav odnim is sredotochii kul'tury] of the 1920s and the early of the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Bakhtin with his *dialogism* as a new type of consciousness and cognition defines, as Makhlin puts it, 'this concrete movement of discursive practice as "the absolute future"' [eto konkretnoe dvizhenie diskursivnoi praktiki v kachestve 'absoliutnogo budushchego'].<sup>10</sup> Proceeding from the assertion that the Third Renaissance should be regarded as a peculiar mentality (since it is not only complete in itself and accomplished in its own time, but also fundamentally differs from both classical and anti-classical ways of thinking),

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<sup>5</sup> Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', 134.

<sup>6</sup> Makhlin, 'Russkii neklassicheskii gumanitet', 44 (emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', 133.

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Bocharov, 'Sobytiie bytiia: O Mikhaile Mikhailoviche Bakhtine', *Novyi mir*, 11 (1995), 211-22 (p. 213).

<sup>9</sup> Bibler, *Bakhtin ili poetika kul'tury*, 10. Here Bibler also touches upon the problem of the connection of some of Bakhtin's ideas with the philosophy of Viacheslav Ivanov in Russia and Herman Cohen in Germany.

<sup>10</sup> Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', 132.

Makhlin proposes a brief description of the new paradigm's initial characteristics: '*the reality of experience*' (*real'nost' opyta*) (the term used by both Ukhtomskii and Bakhtin) and that of '*otherness*' or, in other words, 'an orientation toward the face of the other' (*ustanovka na litso drugogo*).<sup>11</sup> The whole paradox of this paradigm is (and herein lies the explanations of its long-term obscurity) that it did not receive any official recognition,<sup>12</sup> remaining, as Sergei Bocharov maintains, 'the underground life of the cultural epoch which had almost no way out onto its turbulent surface' [*podvodnaia zhizn' kul'turnoi epokhi, pochni ne imevshaia vykhoda na ee burliashchuiu poverkhnost'*].<sup>13</sup> The whole activity of these thinkers, mainly of a group character, was legally suspended as early as the mid 1920s (the polemics finally ceased to exist by the end of the 1920s), and the 'unique impulses' of their ideas were, in Bibler's expression, 'completely eclipsed' (*naproch' zasloneny*) by classical reason, which our century inherited from the nineteenth, with its gravitation towards 'absolute essences', 'eternal values', strikingly manifested individualism of consciousness and monologism of thinking.

But what, in fact, had been accomplished - and here Bocharov, Bibler and Makhlin come to a similar conclusion - is an absolutely new comprehension of man, life, the world, God, the historical process and culture as a way, as Makhlin formulates it, 'to see, think, understand [...] and "act" in conditions of *new experiences* (emphasis added) of "unprecedented changes"

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<sup>11</sup> Makhlin, 'Russkii neklassicheskii gumanintet', 42.

<sup>12</sup> In 'Tretii Renessans' Makhlin comments on this as follows: 'unaccomplished "officially", that is, unacknowledged even as "an enemy" (the usual pretext for the "appearance" of a "trend" in science, art and the public consciousness; in accordance with them, as is well-known, one - with hindsight - changes "the epoch")' [*не состоявшаяся "официально". т. е. не признанная хотя бы даже в качестве*

[videt', myslit', ponimat' [...] i 'postupat" v usloviakh novogo opyta "nevidannykh peremen"]. Furthermore:

Raising the question on the theoretical level that something *had been accomplished* without *being accomplished* legally and institutionally, we are simply putting to the test this matter of principle [...] the concept of 'non-official culture', that is, we are raising the question of the *reality* of this notion for ourselves.

**[В теоретическом плане, ставя вопрос о том, что нечто *состоялось*, не *состоявшись* легально и институционально, мы только подвергаем испытанию принципиальное [...] понятие "неофициальной культуры", т. е. ставим вопрос о *реальности* этого понятия для нас же самих.]<sup>14</sup>**

Thus, the epoch of the Slavonic Renaissance or, to be more precise, its very beginning is our age - the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. For the peculiarity of our historical vantage point is that we are only beginning to grasp and experience what was manifested by the first thirty years of our century. Speaking metaphorically, the notion of an historical point is very useful in connection with the above, since the life of every single one of us, to a certain extent, turns out to be that very point (on a terribly complex winding path, namely, the twentieth century) which seeks to stay alive. An historical point is a dramatic phenomenon in the sense that people who live during periods such as the turn of the century experience more acutely the action of an historical point on themselves, because it presupposes that they make a spiritual effort, twofold in character. The first requires the renunciation of the 'nostalgia' for eternal essences, for this feeling is an enemy of Being. Such a rejection of 'absolute', 'theoretical' values not only enables us to perceive the whole of mankind and the historical process as a living 'thread' that conducts

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"врага" (обычный поворот "появления" какого-то "направления" в науке, в искусстве, в общественном сознании; по ним-то, как известно, меняют - задним числом - "эпоху") (p. 133).

<sup>13</sup> Bocharov, 'Sobytiya bytiia', 214.

the current of 'communication' (Jaspers) or 'dialogue' (Buber) between people, but also offers us an opportunity to enter freely into this dialogue on the basis of equal giving and receiving. This dialogue, moreover, contains in itself that 'fire of Existence'<sup>15</sup> that we liberate by joining in this dialogue. This keeps us alive, and only in this context does it become possible to speak of a Renaissance both cultural and spiritual whose final goal and meaning are sublime. The second effort is closely linked to man's aspiration or, perhaps, ability to be complete in himself and in time, simultaneously extricating that experience which helps him become free of the dogmatic wreckage and ashes of the past.

Herein, as I see it, is rooted the 'goal' (Makhlin) or 'pathos' (Bibler) of the Russian non-classical humanities. It is, indeed, now that this paradigm's experience (which has not yet been consolidated in a separate study or monograph, although the first fruitful steps have been taken in this direction in the works of the above mentioned scholars) turns out to be as vital as ever, since only with its help can the question of what, in essence, defined the cultural content of the first quarter of the twentieth century be answered. For, as was noted at the beginning, there were a large number of works devoted to the problem of this epoch's general status which today no longer require official recognition. Finally, and this is of great importance in the context of my work, beginning to experience or, to be more exact, speculate on the actual significance of the contribution to the humanities made by the Third Renaissance, reviving its ideas and applying its terminology, we can assert that

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<sup>14</sup> Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', 133.

<sup>15</sup> The term is used by the Soviet philosopher Merab Mamardashvili with reference to the works of Proust: see M. Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaiia topologiia puti: M. Prust, 'V poiskakh utrachennogo vremeni'* (St. Petersburg: Universitetskaia kniga, 1997), p. 401.

this epoch was able to change the problem of man and history (broadly speaking - man and culture) in a direction of which the nineteenth-century consciousness (exhausted as it was by Tolstoyan strivings to find an absolute knowledge and experience) was badly in need. Here history emerges as that real, concrete realm wherein man fully realizes himself and wherein the 'social and existential' (Bibler) sides of human life (which in the last century and right up to the beginning of this were thought of as two diametrically opposed poles of human life) are drawn together, reaching a harmonious co-existence in an open dialogue with each other.

Beginning, perhaps, with Chekhov and Bunin, and afterwards in Mandel'shtam and Pasternak, everyday life was discovered and chosen to be that way of thinking, that sphere, where *Being* finds its final manifestation. For Chekhov, man's existence in history is his *byt*, that is, everyday life, the quotidian (*povsednevnost'*). History never exists outside a direct relationship with man. Chekhov did not see, as did, for example, Dostoevskii, Garshin or Andreev, a furious struggle between the good and bad sides of life. In fact, Chekhov did what had not been done in Russian literature before: he demonstrated the identical susceptibility of all that exists in relation to man to the same influences from the point of view of historical time. This discovery was to a certain extent significant both for representatives of realist art and for artists of modernist tendencies. Turning his attention to the problem of the meaning of human existence, Chekhov in virtually all of his substantial works tells a story (*istoriia*) of an individual who finds himself in a difficult relationship with time. The concept of the temporal relativity of literary characters and their lives, conditioned by real and visible everyday existence in

historical time, becomes the major feature of Chekhov's literary thinking, more precisely, an aesthetic category.

The idea of an exceptional fullness of human existence remains crucial in all of Bunin's works too. Accepting and re-working Chekhov's tradition, he attempts to show human life as something that cannot be divided into good or bad, for, in order to accept life in general, one has to deny the existence of such categories.<sup>16</sup> Mandel'shtam and Pasternak (and herein lies the root of the synthesis of their artistic thinking) seek to return to man the proud dignity of Existence which *is not sufficient* if it is merely taken for granted and mechanically understood; it is worthy only if it cannot be guaranteed and is therefore not always safe. This is man's existential pride and property. Only thanks to the existence of these two oppositions - the plenitude of this world and life and their emptiness - the world or 'the world-picture' (Lotman) finds its completeness. This probably also explains what Bibler means by '*the new dominant of reasoning in the twentieth-century*' (*novaia dominanta razumeniia v XX veke*). He expresses his point of view in the following way:

Man in Europe (but also in Asia and Africa...) finds himself somewhere between different counter-running curves of meaning, he loses the comfortable position of the material point on a single rising trajectory. In such an in-between space each intelligent act no longer has an absolute historical and axiological sanction any longer and bears in itself the risk of re-solving anew historical choices and destinies. [...] A *re-orientation of reason from the idea of 'science-learning'* (as the basis of modern philosophy) *toward the philosophical logic of culture (or, more profoundly, - toward the grounding of the fundamentals of mutual understanding).*

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<sup>16</sup> I shall return to this theme later, in a closer examination of Bunin's works. See also the splendid study by V. A. Geideko, *A. Chekhov i I. Bunin*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1978) which offers a detailed discussion of the significance of Chekhov's influence on Bunin's artistic thinking in conjunction with a vivid description of that time's literary atmosphere.

[Человек Европы (но и - Азии, Африки...) оказывается где-то в *промежутке* различных встречных смысловых кривых, он теряет комфортное положение материальной точки на некоей единственной восходящей траектории. В таком промежутке каждый осмысленный поступок уже не имеет абсолютной исторической и ценностной санкции и несет в себе *риск перерешения* заново исторических выборов и исторических судеб. [...] *Переориентация разума от идеи "наукоучения"* (как основы философии Нового времени) *к философской логике культуры* (или, глубже - *к обоснованию начал взаимопонимания*).]<sup>17</sup>

The common problem which arises in the context of Bibler's book and the works of Makhlin can be formulated in the following way:<sup>18</sup> the period of the 1920s in Russia, along with its understanding of time, memory, the role of myth, God and culture through and as an inalienable part of human experience, prepared the ground for solving the crucial question: What does it mean, in the end, to be able to be free, to understand yourself, other people and the world in general? The 1920s begin to consider the idea of human freedom in terms of man's personal 'answerability' (Bakhtin) for the destiny of culture in time. For this epoch's consciousness, the notion of the extra-temporal and eternal find their meaning only when they are interpreted in terms of the temporal, the finite and that which is directly related to human life. The category of the extra-historical, in its turn, also makes sense only if it receives embodiment and realization in the realm of history. Thus, the epoch manifested the acute necessity for an essentially new problematisation of the *philosophy of history*.

<sup>17</sup> Bibler, *Bakhtin ili poetika kul'tury*, 40-41.

<sup>18</sup> I should note that this is my reading and understanding of the works of the above mentioned scholars whose ideas and conclusions I use in accordance with the main logic and context of my work.

## 2. The turn of the century and the new attitude to history

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century was (if we were to consider this notion as a certain cultural state) a unique cultural chronotope when people, as never before, sensed time and history through themselves. The turn of our century represented an exceptionally compressed (*uplotnennoe*) time, noteworthy for its extraordinarily diverse ways of thinking (the development of Russian Religious Philosophy, Symbolism, Acmeism and Futurism), which was characterized by a tremendous interest and engagement in the study of *historical memory*. Here historical memory emerges as an *aesthetic category*, which lies at the basis of a new philosophical-religious and literary-artistic thinking. The factor of the historical or historicity is of utmost significance in this context since it manifests, in essence, that very realm where different historical events, consciousnesses, ways of thinking, behaviour and life styles encounter and intersect with each other. The idea of history and the aspiration to explain and express its meaning and goal turn out to be the spirit and dominant of this epoch's mood, conditioning, in the end, its inner unity and uniqueness.

The intensity and tragic nature of this epoch are combined with impressionism of art forms, the publicistic and professed-confessional character of literary-creative thinking, illustrating the complete merging of life style and literature. On the one hand, the twentieth century began with a vigorous process of the free manifestation of human individuality based on the idea that the only reality is human life and man or, more accurately, man's



personal destiny is the central theme of history. On the other hand, man discovers for himself the terribly disharmonious world of the turn of the century and, having entered it, he at once begins to feel the disharmony of both this world and life and his own estrangement and throwing from the chain of Existence wherein the process of stratification and collapse dominates the process of synthesis. Blok, by saying that 'there is positively nothing to cling to' [polozhitel'no ne za chto zatsepit'sia] offers thereby the most vivid description of man's state and culture of that time. In the foreword to the poem *Vozmezdie* [Retribution] Blok's metaphor of 'world maelstrom' (*mirovoi vodovorot*) bears in itself the concern that this whirlpool of history 'sucks into its funnel almost the whole of man' [zasasyvaet v svoiu voronku pochni vsego cheloveka], and furthermore:

There is scarcely a trace left of the personality, which itself, if it still remains in existence, becomes unrecognizable, disfigured and crippled. There was man - and he is gone, all that is left is worthless, limp flesh and a decaying soul.

**[От личности почти вовсе не остается следа, сама она, если остается еще существовать, становится неузнаваемой, обезображенной, искалеченной. Был человек - и не стало человека, осталась дрянная вялая плоть и глеющая душонка.]<sup>19</sup>**

Thus, as K. G. Isupov very rightly maintains, thanks to the 'efforts of Neo-Kantian "atomistic" psychology, Freudianism and neo-avantguardism in art, at the beginning of the twentieth century the ontological status of the personality found itself under threat' [usiliiami 'atomarnoi' neokantianskoi psikhologii, freidizma i neoavangardizma v iskusstve ontologicheskii status

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<sup>19</sup> Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (8 vols), (Moscow-Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1960-63), III (1960), pp. 295-300 (p. 298).

lichnosti v nachale XX veka okazalsia pod ugrozoi].<sup>20</sup> Hence, such 'over-saturated' culture, with all its diversity of art forms and attitudes, leads to the rise of a new type of art and literature where personality does not have the same kind of importance as it did in the nineteenth century. Man finds himself on the way to creating a different system of new values, capable of reassessing such categories as God, good, evil, history and acceptance of the world in all its fullness. Moreover, not only does time as an objective factor of human existence change, but man's perception of time and his attitude to things and events happening in the outside world become completely different. This epoch, signifying the transition from an abstract philosophical understanding and attitude to history, develops the idea of the perception of history as something concrete and closely associated with man, as a continuous movement, a permanent transformation of both external forms of life and categories of consciousness with whose help (from the position of one's own time) one can understand other times, ways of thinking and culture in general. At the beginning of the twentieth century, man, as mentioned above, conceived the world in much broader, but at the same time less normative, categories which required the creation of a new system of spiritual values and attitudes capable of responding to the problem of changeable and moving time.

At this point it would be appropriate to mention Bitsilli's book of 1919 *Elementy srednevekovoi kul'tury* [Elements of Medieval Culture], which examines the historical and social structures of medieval society and human psychology. Bitsilli offers a truly remarkable study of the cultural and religious-aesthetic horizons of medieval man, his perception and reflection of

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<sup>20</sup> K. G. Isupov, 'Ot estetiki zhizni k estetike istorii', in *Bakhtin kak filosof*, ed. L. A. Gogotishvili and P. S. Gurevich (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), pp. 68-82 (p. 74).

the world in works of fine art and literature. Analysing the meaning of such notions as ‘history’, ‘the historical process’ and the category of ‘historicity’, Bitsilli comes to the conclusion that it was not until the twentieth century that historicity and the idea of historical understanding proved to be the principal feature of human consciousness and cognition. He asserts that our century, like no other age, emerges as an epoch of *historicity*, for it is now that human thought begins truly to grasp the world, life and the meaning of culture:

The “historicity” of our time is organically linked to the colossal complexity of our life, to its rapid tempo, to the continual non-coincidence between the rhythms of the personal and intersubjective spheres, which forces us to feel directly the swift flowingness of the stream of life such that for every one of us *panta rhei* (“everything is flowing”) is a primary experience. [...] For us the world is a process. [...] For us the world itself creates its own God.

**[“Историзм” нашего времени органически связан с колоссальной сложностью нашей жизни, с быстротой ее темпа, с постоянным несовпадением ритмов в личной и intersубъективной сферах, что заставляет нас непосредственно ощущать всю стремительность житейского потока, так что *panta rhei* (“все течет”) для каждого из нас – первичное переживание. [...] Для нас мир – процесс. [...] для нас мир сам творит своего Бога.]<sup>21</sup>**

Bitsilli outlines a scheme within which for man of this century there is nothing that is given once and for all or that can be merely taken for granted by him. History and time become man’s major passions, making him sensitive to life’s rhythms and creative work.

These words of Bitsilli’s are a useful starting point for a discussion of the problems of the *aesthetics of history*<sup>22</sup> introduced and developed in the

<sup>21</sup> P. M. Bitsilli, *Elementy srednevekovoi kul'tury* (St. Petersburg: Mifril, 1995), pp. 138-39.

<sup>22</sup> The term the ‘aesthetics of history’ was introduced and widely used in the works of the Soviet medievalist A. V. Gulyga (see, for instance, his book *Estetika istorii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974)) on the

works of representatives of the Russian Religious Renaissance such as Fedotov, Solov'ev, Florenskii, Bulgakov, Viacheslav Ivanov, Karsavin and finally Berdiaev. A more detailed analysis of some aspects of Berdiaev's philosophy of history will be presented in the next part of the present study. For the purposes of my work I have chosen to focus on Berdiaev's conception of the philosophy of history because of its flexible character and completeness. By flexibility I mean the fact that Berdiaev's broad analysis and treatment of the notion of history and the category of the historical raises many problems which were symptomatic and essential for an understanding of the discussions that took place in 1920s Russia on the essence of history: the correlation between culture and civilization, historicity and historical method, the historical process and eternity, time and space, God and man's goal and destiny and finally between historical myth, tradition and memory. The idea of completeness (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say openness) in relation to Berdiaev's philosophy of history can be expressed in a way that does not reduce or place the polemics within the framework of a philosophical-religious interpretation. In spite of my personal disagreement with Berdiaev's final conclusions, unlike those of many other thinkers of this paradigm engaged in the study of the question of the meaning of history, Berdiaev's conception vividly shows the extent to which this problem was seen as being central to the debate at the turn of the century and first quarter of the twentieth century, shedding light on the question of historicity developed in the works of Losev, Shpet, Askol'dov, Mandel'shtam, Bitsilli and Bakhtin, and in part

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aesthetics of the Middle Ages and Renaissance to describe not a scholarly discipline but an aesthetics of the historical process. This term was also employed by Isupov in 'From an aesthetics of life towards an aesthetics of history' [Ot estetiki zhizni k estetike istorii], in which he examines the source of Bakhtin's philosophy in the light of the tradition of Russian philosophical-religious thought.

Likhachev, who consider the idea and the meaning of historicity in the context of, as Likhachev puts it, 'the inner life of the work of art' [vnutrennego mira khudozhestvennogo proizvedeniia].<sup>23</sup>

### 3. Berdiaev: Towards a reconsideration of the philosophy of history

The First World War and two Russian Revolutions mark a period of heightened interest in the problems of the *philosophy of history* for both the representatives of the *Cosmic (kosmicheskoe)* trend in Russian philosophical thought, such as Fedorov, Tsiolkovskii, Vernadskii, Murav'ev, Sukhovo-Kobylin, Umov, Gorskii, Chizhevskii, Maneev, Kholodnyi, Kuprevich and Setnitskii, and for thinkers of the Russian *Religious Renaissance*, such as Solov'ev, Bulgakov, Florenskii and Berdiaev. The latter school is noteworthy, in Berdiaev's terminology, for its *anthropocentric* character, that is, concern with orientation towards the problem of human existence and activity in nature and society. This tendency developed the idea of *active eschatology*, the essence of which was described by Berdiaev as follows: 'the end of this world, the end of history depends on the creative act of man too' [konets etogo mira, konets istorii zavisit i ot tvorcheskogo akta cheloveka.]<sup>24</sup>

In Moscow during the winter of 1919-1920, at the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture (Vol'naia Akademiia Dukhovnoi Kul'tury), Berdiaev delivered a course of lectures on the major questions of the religious

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<sup>23</sup> D. S. Likhachev, 'Vnutrennii mir khudozhestvennogo proizvedeniia', *Voprosy literatury*, 8 (1968), 74-87.

<sup>24</sup> N. A. Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia: O Rossii i russkoi filosofskoi kul'ture* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), pp. 235-36; 258.

philosophy of history; some of these ideas, developed throughout the course, were expanded upon in his book *Smysl istorii* [The Meaning of History] (1922), in which Berdiaev's discussion of the essence and meaning of *the historical* is a direct continuation of the nineteenth-century Russian literary-philosophical tradition: during the previous century, Russian philosophical and literary thought strives, as never before, to solve the problems of the philosophy of history raised in the works of Chaadaev, Pushkin, the Slavophiles, Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. This was an important development. Firstly, it paved the way for an understanding of the spiritual and cultural atmosphere of a new epoch and prepared the ground essential for the growth and development of twentieth-century individual and national consciousness. Secondly, it enables us to trace the polemics of the Slavophiles and Westernizers on the place of the West and East in humanity's spiritual evolution and the role of Russia and Europe in this process. Berdiaev sees 'the enigma of Russia' and the specific character of its historical destiny as 'the enigma of the philosophy of history'. For him the idea of the religious nature of the philosophy of history is a result of nothing other than the originality and vocation of Russian thinking, which, unlike the Western way of thinking, is of apocalyptic character, that is, appeals to the eschatological problem of the *End* (death, judgement, heaven and hell). Berdiaev's philosophy of history seeks to solve three crucial questions: What is the historical? When and in what circumstances is history endowed with positive meaning? And finally, if human destiny lies at the basis of history, can the problem of individual destiny (and its connection with universal destiny and participation in the life

of all mankind) be solved within the bounds of history? In answering these questions, we begin to understand the meaning of 'the essence' of history.

It should be noted that Berdiaev followed a rich religious-philosophical tradition in examining the notion of history. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Chaadaev pointed out that a distinguishing feature of modern man's thinking is the aspiration to 'envelop all types of knowledge in historical form' [oblekat' vse vidy poznaniia v istoricheskuiu formu], for:

Contemplating the philosophical fundamentals of historical thought it is impossible not to admit that it is now called to rise to an incomparably higher level than it has hitherto reached; one could say that reason now feels free only in the realm of history. [...] It is time to realize that the human mind is not limited by that force which it draws from the narrow present, that it has another force which, combining in one thought both elapsed and promised times, forms its authentic essence and raises it to the true sphere of its activity. [...] The reason of this century requires a new philosophy of history.<sup>25</sup>

From Chaadaev onwards, in the thinking of Gogol', Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, the idea of the historical process is primarily concerned with *moral aspects* of history, expressed by an aspiration to grasp the 'moral meaning' of great historical epochs, cultures and nations and understand man as a moral being in his primordial connection with God, Reason and the life of the whole of mankind. In other words, for the nineteenth-century philosophy of history the meaning of history was the quest for a solution to the mystery of man's goal.

Berdiaev describes our century as 'the very peak of history' (*samaia vershina istorii*),<sup>26</sup> arguing that the social catastrophes and spiritual crises which contemporary mankind is forced to live through are distinguished by a

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<sup>25</sup> P. Ia. Chaadaev, *Filosoficheskie pis'ma*, in *Stat'i i pis'ma* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989), pp. 38-147 (pp. 103-4).

hitherto unprecedented sharpening and intensification of *historical movement*. Such an awareness of the critical moments in history, according to Berdiaev, is particularly significant, since it is during such moments that human thought and consciousness begin to reconsider the philosophy of history. In this sense, the state of the contemporary epoch requires a re-evaluation of the notion of '*the historical*'. To understand the historical and perceive its inner essence, it is necessary to establish a distinction between '*the historical*' (or *historicity*) and the '*historical method*'. Without formulating the defining difference between historicity and the historical method, Chaadaev does highlight that there is a difference between these two important categories: a continual accumulation and sorting of events and facts leads, in the end, to the conclusion that history is nothing other than 'causeless and senseless' movement and that the historical process illustrates 'the pitiful comedy of the world' carried away by the genius of *reiteration*.<sup>27</sup> For Berdiaev these categories are by no means identical, but contain an important 'difference', if they are not in fact diametrically opposed. This antithesis manifests itself in such a way that the historical method (the characteristic and final result of the development of the science of history, which sprang up mainly to serve science by offering general points of view on questions of culture) turns out to be far distant from the 'mystery' of the historical, losing all 'ways of communication' as well as points of intersection with it. Moreover, Berdiaev argues that the historical method can neither *cognize* nor conceive the historical, for historical science, concentrating on collecting historical data and the abstract usage of documents, buries in oblivion the very fact that history and historical life have their own

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<sup>26</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1990), p.15.

<sup>27</sup> Chaadaev, *Filosoficheskie pis'ma*, 105; 125-27.



inner order and essence. In this sense, Berdiaev considers the twentieth century to be an epoch of *addressivity and return* to the problem of the historical, since all the social disasters which we witness should be seen, first and foremost, as catastrophes of the *human spirit*:

[...] when, having experienced the collapse of the familiar historical order and way of life, having experienced the moment of splintering and schism, it [the human spirit] can compare and contrast these two moments, the moment of direct participation in the historical and that of splintering from it, in order to move to a third spiritual state which affords a particularly acute consciousness, a particular capacity for reflection, and, at the same time, a particular appeal of the human spirit to the mysteries of 'the historical' is accomplished.

[[...] когда он, пережив крушение известного жизненного исторического строя и лада, пережив момент расщепления и раздвоения, может сопоставить и противопоставить эти два момента - момент непосредственного пребывания в историческом и момент расщепленности с ним, чтобы перейти в третье состояние духа, которое дает особую остроту сознания, особенную способность к рефлексии и, вместе с тем, в нем совершается особенное обращение духа человека к тайнам "исторического".] <sup>28</sup>

Here, Berdiaev points out that his view of history is particularly concerned with its *spiritual meaning*.

What is the purpose of the philosophy of history according to Berdiaev? What is understood by the historical? And what lies at its basis? To answer these questions it is important to consider Berdiaev's description of the historical as 'reality of a special kind and order', 'a special stage of existence' [osobaia stupen' bytiia] (p.12). This description, moreover, is closely associated with *the category of historical tradition*; only through this can the historical be known, and without it historical thinking is impossible.

Thus he enters an open polemic with the Marxist conception of history, which completely denies the importance of historical tradition in the understanding of the historical. By '*reality of a special kind*' Berdiaev assumes the *concrete* nature of the historical, stressing that history deals only with *concrete* subjects, and all abstract ideas are opposed and alien to both history and the historical. Thus, he seeks to distinguish historical reality from knowledge; sociology, says Berdiaev, on the contrary, is utterly and completely based on abstract thinking and operates with solely abstract and general notions and categories, such as class, social group, collective or class consciousness, majority opinion and so forth. In this sense, speaking of the historical as '*reality of a special order*', Berdiaev points out that it is not only of concrete but also of 'individual character' (p. 13), because historical reality is closely linked to concrete spiritual reality, namely *man*. Hence, it is important to establish and observe this well-defined opposition between the historical and sociological, since the purpose of historical cognition as well as the philosophy of history is *the destiny* of a concrete individual in history:

Man is in the highest possible degree an historical being. Man is situated in the historical and the historical is situated in man. There exists such a profound, mysterious and primordial union, such a concrete reciprocity between man and 'the historical' as to make their rupture impossible. It is as impossible to isolate man from history and consider him in the abstract as it is to isolate history from man and to examine it outside of man and from a non-human point of view. Nor is it possible to think of man outside of the deepest spiritual reality of history.

**[Человек есть в высочайшей степени историческое существо. Человек находится в историческом и историческое находится в человеке. Между человеком и "историческим" существует такое глубокое, такое**

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<sup>28</sup> Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii*, 6.

таинственное в своей первооснове сращение, такая конкретная взаимность, что разрыв их невозможен. Нельзя выделить человека из истории, нельзя взять его абстрактно, и нельзя выделить историю из человека, нельзя историю рассматривать вне человека и нечеловечески. И нельзя рассматривать человека вне глубочайшей духовной реальности истории.] (p. 14)

Thus, for Berdiaev the basis of the historical is of an ontological nature, and the essence of Being as well as the inner meaning of history truly reveal themselves only in the historical. The historical turns out to be profoundly enriched with existence and eventness; in order to understand 'the mystery of the historical', man must, above all, grasp both the historical and history as something that is intimately related and belongs to him, as *his history* and *his destiny* (p. 15). Berdiaev also emphasizes the necessity of recognising the existing and unbreakable connection between man and history, to the extent that the two are united and identified with each other and understood in terms of each other.

To define the essence of the historical Berdiaev proposes that we consider the significance of *historical memory*, the role of *myth* and the general meaning of *the mythological* in history. For Berdiaev historical memory represents nothing other than 'the spirit of eternity in our temporal reality [dukh vechnosti v nashei vremennoi deistvitel'nosti], a spirit that 'upholds the historical connection of the times' [podderzhivaet istoricheskuiu svyaz' vremen] (p. 58). 'Memory', Berdiaev writes, 'is the basis of history. [...] It is the eternal ontological principle which creates the foundation of all that is historical' [Pamiat' est' osnova istorii. [...] Pamiat' est' vechnoe ontologicheskoe nachalo, sozidaiushchee osnovu vsego istoricheskogo] (ibid.). Historical myths, according to Berdiaev, are born in the historical memory;

they give meaning to history, symbolising the historical destinies of man. By saying that 'history is not an objective, empirical given; it is a myth' [istoriia ne est' ob"ektivnaia empiricheskaia dannost', istoriia est' mif] (p. 18), Berdiaev argues that myth cannot be treated as fiction or fantasy; on the contrary, we are dealing with a reality which is distinguished from that which exists objectively. He does not restrict the notion of myth to the context in which we usually use this word; rather, in Berdiaev's thinking, myth is synonymous with *symbol*. Discarding Schelling's doctrine of mythology as an initial human history, he seeks to demonstrate that apart from myths whose roots stretch into the distant past, different historical epochs (even the current epoch which is so unfavourable for mythology) turn out to be saturated with *myth-making*, creating their own myths. He explains this by assuming that we cannot understand, and therefore accept, 'purely objective history', since we always find ourselves in a quest for inner, profound connection with 'the historical object':

It is necessary that not only the object be historical, but also the subject, that the subject of historical cognition sense and reveal 'the historical' in himself. Only as it reveals 'the historical' in himself does it begin to grasp all great historical periods. Without this connection, without its own inner 'historicity' it would not be able to understand history.

**[Нужно, чтобы не только объект был историчен, но чтобы и субъект был историчен, чтобы субъект исторического познания в себе ощущал и в себе раскрывал "историческое". Только по мере раскрытия в себе "исторического" начинает он постигать все великие периоды истории. Без этой связи, без собственной внутренней историчности не мог бы он понять историю.] (ibid.)**

Furthermore, Berdiaev extends Plato's *doctrine of recollection* to support his own concept of history. According to Plato, penetration into various epochs is achieved and can be fruitful only when this penetration is the inner *recollection*, or inner memory of events that took place in human history; the authenticity of human cognition is based on this. For Berdiaev, recollection manifests in its turn a certain profound unity which identifies everything happening inside us and to us with that which has been accomplished in different historical periods. In this sense, historical myths are singled out for their great importance in 'the great act of recollection' [velikii akt pripominaniia] (p. 20). The actual 'tale' (rasskaz) which is represented and preserved in historical myth and inherited in popular memory helps to arouse from the depths of human memory the spirit of an inner layer that is linked with the depths of time. Thus, myths are closely associated with human existence, providing us with the opportunity to cognize history in ourselves and become part of it on the strength of the fact that each single individual bears inside himself all previous historical epochs along with knowledge about them, and this cannot be destroyed either by successive temporal layers or by recent historical life. It may well become covered or pushed aside by human consciousness, but it can never be completely lost.

At this point it would be useful to touch upon the conception of myth developed by Losev in his now well-known book *Dialektika mifa* [The Dialectics of Myth] (1930), devoted to the question of *contemporary* myth. According to Losev, it is during periods of spiritual catastrophes and social instability, which undermine the cultural base and tear man away from his natural ground, that human thought finds salvation in turning to classical

antiquity. Myth, therefore, turns out to be one of those very old, ‘absolutely essential categories of thinking and life’ [sovershenno neobkhodimykh kategorii mysli i zhizni]<sup>29</sup> capable of effecting and maintaining the link between times which, under pressure from social disasters, is threatened with collapse. In the classical Greek language the word ‘myth’ had more connotations, meaning ‘word’, ‘name’ and ‘appellation’, and signified a way of representing life’s experience. Losev defines the major theme of his book in the following way:

It is necessary to wrest the doctrine of myth from the sphere of both theological and ethnographic study. [...] I take *myth as it is*, that is, I want to reveal and positively establish what myth is in its own right and how it conceives its own miraculous and fairytale-like nature.

**[Надо вырвать учение о мифе из сферы ведения богословов и из сферы ведения этнографов. [...] Я беру миф так, как он есть, т. е. хочу вскрыть и позитивно зафиксировать, что такое миф сам по себе и как он мыслит сам свою чудесную и сказочную природу.] (pp. 23-24)**

Thus, from the very beginning Losev intends to show that myth cannot be treated as an abstract-ideal being or category of poetic figurativeness. Myth, if we proceed from its ancient interpretation, is, above all, the ‘image of a person’ (*obraz lichnosti*), ‘personality itself’ (*sama lichnost*) and ‘personalistic history’ (*lichnostnaia istoriia*), manifested in a word (p. 74). By seeking to ‘purify’ mythology of any anti-mythological theories (such as metaphysical or psychological), and of approaches developed by modern science in order to give a ‘positive’, that is, phenomenological understanding of myth, Losev (and herein lies the paradox of his whole theory) offers a

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<sup>29</sup> A. F. Losev, *Dialektika mifa*, in *Filosofia. Mifologiya. Kul'tura*, ed. A. Rostovtsev (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), pp. 21-187 (p. 24).

conception of myth which contradicts and, to some extent, disclaims the original idea. Myth still acquires the same ideal-abstract content which remains in the depths of its initial treatment. Hence myth, in Losev's interpretation, turns out to be an extra-temporal as well as extra-historical reality, isolated from the concrete, that is, outer vision of the world where the real experience of human life is concentrated.

In this sense, returning to Berdiaev's ideas, it is possible to say that within the framework of his conception of history, Berdiaev makes an original attempt to problematize the notion of myth. For him myth is a Being whose riddle is very difficult to solve. He therefore proposes that myth is first and foremost an *existential*, that is, not an abstract but a concrete reality, which, being based on and living by the inner connection of events, gives meaning to history, concentrating in itself both the link between times and man's concrete *participation* in the historical process. In Berdiaev's philosophy the identification of myth with symbol offers an opportunity to leave the interpretation of the notion and context of its usage relatively open. A comparison with M. I. Kagan, Berdiaev's contemporary, who was also engaged in the study of myth and history, is appropriate at this point. In the work 'Dva ustremeniia iskusstva' [Two Aspirations of Art] (1922) written at the same time as Berdiaev's *The Meaning of History*, Kagan comes to a similar conclusion on the question of the essence of myth:

Myth is always nothing other than the discovery of the meaning and connection of events and phenomena whose purpose is as though anticipated by the inner character of events. After all, no event can be historically finite or completed. Just as it is impossible to speak of a concrete historical beginning. History is the inclusion of events in this identity of the infinite beginning and end of man and Being in their

mutual unity. If history was only a stream this would, of course, be enough. But what is to be done with pure chance, or the pure fact which, immanently-historically, in its own right is not at all pure? After all, the purity of chance and fact in history is not finite. But finiteness exists. It as it were irrupts into history and offers itself to it. Myth is precisely this original finiteness of the concrete. It is the principle and fact of the permanent creative principle in anticipation of a revelation of the future in the present, and of the inclusion of the past in the constantly opening eternal present which lives by the future. Already lives by the future.

**[Миф – это всегда не что иное, как открытие смысла и связи событий и явлений, цель которых как бы предвосхищена самим внутренним характером событий. Исторически ведь ни одно событие не может быть окончившимся, оконченным. Подобно тому, как нельзя говорить о конкретном историческом начале. История и есть включение событий в такое тождество бесконечного начала и конца человека и бытия в их взаимном объединении. Если бы история была только потоком, этого, конечно, было бы достаточно. Что делать, однако, с чистым случаем, с чистым фактом, который имманентно-исторически сам по себе вовсе не чист? Ведь чистота случая и факта в истории не завершена. А завершенность существует. Она как бы врывается в историю и даруется ей. Миф и есть эта изначальная завершенность конкретного. Это принцип и факт постоянного творческого первоначала в предвосхищении откровения будущего в настоящем и включения прошлого в постоянно открывающееся вечное настоящее, которое живет будущим. Уже живет будущим.]<sup>30</sup>**

In his discussion of the meaning of the historical, Berdiaev dwells on two aspects which require extended interpretation. They are both related to the problem of the origin of this notion: in other words, why did the historical occur in human history, and how did human consciousness become aware of the existence of these realities, namely, 'historical movement' and 'historical process'? The answer to these questions, as Berdiaev sees it, is rooted in the

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', 132-54 (p. 142).



Hellenic and Hebraic worlds, since both these principles, according to Berdiaev, lie at the basis of contemporary European consciousness, and their combination gave birth to the Christian world. Berdiaev seeks to demonstrate that the idea and sense of history were absolutely alien to the whole of Hellenic culture in general. There the notion and awareness of historical *fulfilment* did not exist at all. This is explained by the fact that the ancient Greeks' attitude was founded on an aesthetic perception of the world, which was seen as a complete, static and harmonious cosmos, where everything was cyclical in character, manifesting only reiteration and perpetual return:

The Hellenic consciousness was always addressed not towards the future, where history comes to an end, and where the centre of history and the exit from it must be, but rather towards the past. [...] For the ancient Greek consciousness there was no attitude to the future that could have become a point of departure in the perception of the historical process and which would have made it possible to be aware of history as a certain drama in progress.

[Эллинское сознание всегда было обращено не к грядущему, в котором завершается история, в котором должен быть центр истории и выход, а к прошлому. [...] Для греческого сознания не было того отношения к будущему, которое сделалось бы исходной точкой восприятия исторического процесса и сделало бы возможным сознание истории как некоторой совершающейся драмы.] (p.23)

Berdiaev argues that this understanding of history as tragedy or fulfilment (so alien to the Hellenic world) can be found in the thinking and spirit of ancient Israel, since the ancient Hebrew consciousness saw the historical process in the light of the Messianic idea. This, first and foremost, accounts for its orientation to the future, which turns out to be nothing other than the tense expectation of a certain great Event, capable of resolving the fortunes of countries and nations (in this case, the fate of Israel). The world's

fate, moreover, can no longer be seen as a closed circle; on the contrary, it is regarded as a tragedy which has its own ultimate aim. Berdiaev sees in ignorance and lack of *freedom* the explanation of why the Hellenic world did not know and did not understand history and the historical. He argues that the ancient Greeks were not capable of knowing freedom simply because the whole of the ancient world's existence was firmly based on the idea of man's complete feebleness and submissiveness to fate. Thus, man was not considered by them to be a creative subject of history without whom fulfilment, awareness and perception are impossible. The Hellenic ignorance of freedom also accounts for the predominance of form over content which we see expressed in every sphere of the ancient Greeks' life, and in particular, in politics and art, including literature and philosophy, where the principle of formal perfection and shape prevailed over the material, that is, the principle of content; the latter, according to Berdiaev, is closely linked to *the irrational principle* of human life, namely, freedom, which, in its turn, was brought into this world by *Christianity*. Christian thinking, by giving all the prerogatives to content, seeks to disclose first and foremost human freedom and 'liberate the creative subject', that is, man, for whom history and the historical process emerge as reality endowed with meaning:

Christianity was characterized by a particular historicity [...] unknown to the ancient world, where all revelations of the world, the Hellenic as well as the Jewish world, were reunited. One of Schelling's most interesting and profound thoughts was the idea that Christianity is in the highest degree historical, representing God's revelation in history.

[Христианству, в котором произошло воссоединение всех откровений мира, эллинского мира и мира еврейского, свойственна была неведомая древнему миру [...] особая историчность. Одна из самых интересных и

глубоких мыслей Шеллинга – это мысль о том, что христианство в высшей степени исторично, что христианство есть откровение Бога в истории.] (p. 26)

Christianity introduces, along with the notion of the singularity and uniqueness of human life and events, the idea of the *dynamics* of the historical process, giving, thereby, new strength to historical movement. Here Berdiaev echoes Chaadaev's idea that Christianity, like no other religious doctrine, is shot through with the sense of historicity, which represents the real force that makes the historical process come into being. Finally, the Christian consciousness, being founded on the idea of freedom, for the first time fully acknowledges that the *eternal* can be manifested in the *temporal*, to be more precise, here these two categories are treated as inseparable from each other, that is, the eternal enters the temporal and vice versa. Thus, *the dynamics* of the Christian world, its *freedom*, which tears temporal boundaries apart, and the *irrational principle*, which is connected with the content of human life, define together, according to Berdiaev, the historical process. The major role in this triad, moreover, belongs to the irrational principle:

Historical reality presupposes [...] an irrational principle which makes dynamism possible, because neither history nor true dynamism is possible without this irrational principle which is turbulent and provokes a struggle between light and darkness. [...] This irrational principle must be understood [...] in an ontological sense, in the sense of a recognition of the irrational principle in Being itself, in the sense of that irrational principle without which history is impossible, dynamism is impossible.

[Историческая действительность предполагает [...] иррациональное начало, которое делает возможным динамизм, потому что без этого иррационального начала, как начала бурлящего, вызывающего борьбу света и тьмы, [...] без этого начала невозможна история, невозможен истинный динамизм. Это иррациональное начало нужно понимать [...] в

онтологическом смысле, в смысле признания иррационального начала в самом бытии, в смысле того иррационального начала, без которого невозможна история и невозможен динамизм.] (p. 29)

As was noted earlier, the nineteenth century, more than any other age, emerges as an epoch of deep engagement with the study of problems of history and the meaning of the category of the historical; even words such as 'historicity' and 'historical method' had gradually become deceptively habitual over the last century. The nineteenth century, in Berdiaev's opinion, introduced the idea of '*historical revolt*' (*istoricheskii bunt*), which manifested itself in the rise and firm establishment of a 'false' attitude to history that made history dead and internally unreceptive to man. Berdiaev points out that the major difficulty of our time consists in the fact that the appreciation of and approach to the problem of the historical developed during the nineteenth century had been extended to contemporary consciousness, representing still the same '*anti-historical*' and '*anarchica*' understanding of the historical process. In other words, the twentieth century has to face and deal with a situation where man, feeling his own estrangement, isolation and even complete rupture from the historical, rises up against the violence of the historical process. In this revolt, Berdiaev says, one can find all things except one: 'spiritual freedom' (p. 30), which Berdiaev describes as man's peculiar state where he ceases to sense history as something that is thrust upon him or inserted from without, and, instead, begins to experience history as an inner Event, as his own freedom:

Only such a truly free and emancipating attitude to history made it possible to understand history as man's inner freedom, as the moment of his celestial and earthly destiny. In it man follows his peculiar path of martyrdom where all the great historical moments, the most terrible and torturing, turn out to be the inner moments

of this human destiny, for history is the inner and dramatic fulfilment of the destiny of man.

[Только такое отношение, поистине, свободное и освобождающее отношение к истории и дало возможность понять историю как внутреннюю свободу человека, как момент небесной и земной судьбы человека. В ней человек проходит свой особый, стратотерпческий путь, в котором все великие моменты истории, самые страшные, самые страдальческие оказываются внутренними моментами этой человеческой судьбы, ибо история есть внутреннее, полное драматизма, свершение судьбы человека.] (pp. 30-31).

Berdiaev, returning to the question raised earlier in his work about the way human consciousness first created and fully grasped the historical process, speaks of two elements - *the conservative* and *the creative* (or *dynamic*) - without whose combination the perception of history as movement is not possible by any means. The conservative element symbolizes man's close link with the spiritual past and an acceptance of that which is most sacred from this past. By the creative element he means the idea of man's '*initiative*' (*pochin*) in continuing the historical process, its completion and final settlement. For example, abstract conservatism refuses to continue history, since its functions are exclusively conclusive, preservative and protective. For Berdiaev, faithfulness to the past, association with it and its sacred heritage is, therefore, a direct path to the future, orientation towards a new life and its union with that of the past; and this process of reunion takes place in one internal movement of history or, in other words, in eternity.

Thus in Berdiaev's conception of history an understanding of the historical process identifies the historical and metaphysical, bringing together the temporal and eternal and joining terrestrial history with celestial. The latter is more significant than the former, since it pre-determines that very history

whose embodiment is realized in man's earthly life and destiny. Celestial history, as Berdiaev puts it, is 'a heavenly prologue like that which opens Goethe's *Faust*. Faust's destiny is man's destiny, and the terrestrial destiny of mankind was pre-determined by this heavenly prologue' [пролог на небе, подобно тому прологу, с которого начинается Гетевский Фауст. Сама судьба Фауста есть судьба человека, и этим прологом на небе предопределилась земная судьба человечества] (p.32). Hence, history should be understood, according to Berdiaev, as *prophecy* or *prophetic exegesis* which, by addressing itself to the past, leads to the future:

Man's destiny is not only a terrestrial, but also a celestial destiny, not only historical but also metaphysical, not only a human but also a Divine destiny; it is not only a human but also Divine drama. Only a prophetic appeal to history, to the past, can make dead evolution and movement alive, active and inwardly spiritual [...]. There can be no opposition between man's spiritual world and the great world of history. Such an opposition is the deadening of both man and history.

[Человеческая судьба есть не только земная, но и небесная судьба, не только историческая, но и метафизическая судьба, не только человеческая, но и Божественная судьба, не только человеческая, но и Божественная драма. Мертвую эволюцию, мертвое движение сделать живым, движущим, сделать внутренне духовным может только пророческое обращение к истории, к прошлому [...]. Не может быть противоположения человека и великого мира истории. Такое противоположение есть омертвление человека и омертвление истории.] (pp. 33-34)

Thus, Berdiaev sees the real goal of historical consciousness as establishing a proper attitude to both the past and the future. This idea leads us to one of the key notions of Berdiaev's conception of history, namely, the problem of *time*.

It is significant that in the chronotope of Russian culture in the first quarter of the twentieth century the word 'time', and the metaphor of

‘temporal’ or ‘temporality’, acquire a particular importance because of their fundamental connection with other problems such as space, culture, artistic freedom and history. The question of the meaning and essence of time and space, their nature and function emerges as one of the central issues in various philosophical-religious and literary-linguistic as well as natural scientific discussions. At the beginning of this century there were thinkers interested in this problem and writing about it from various perspectives and with different purposes: S. A. Askol'dov (*Thought and Reality* [Mysl' i deistvitel'nost'] (1914) and ‘Time and Its Overcoming’ [Vremia i ego preodolenie] (1922)), V. I. Vernadskii (‘Beginning and Eternity of Life’ [Nachalo i vechnost' zhizni] (1922)) and G. G. Shpet (‘Phenomenon and Meaning’ [Iavlenie i smysl] (1914) and ‘The Inner Form of the Word’ [Vnutrennaia forma slova] (1927)). A deep engagement with the study of time can also be found in the works of Ukhtomskii, Karsavin, Bitsilli (*Elements of Medieval Culture* [Elementy srednevekovoi kul'tury] (1919)), Mandel'shtam, Losev (in a number of his books on aesthetics, mythology and literary theory such as *Ancient Cosmos and Modern Science* [Antichnyi kosmos i sovremennaia nauka] (1927), *A Philosophy of Name* [Filosofia imeni] (1927), *The Dialectics of Artistic Form* [Dialektika khudozhestvennoi formy] (1927) and *The Dialectics of Myth* [Dialektika Mifa] (1930)) and finally Bakhtin (*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* [Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti] (1920-24), ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel’ [Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane] (1937-38) and ‘The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism’ [Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma] (1936-38)).

For Berdiaev and for the Russian humanities in the 1920s in general, the treatment of this problem has two aspects. The first is directly concerned with time in a historical-metaphysical sense (Florenkii, Losev). The second, developing this notion in the context of 'freedom of will' (Askol'dov), approaches the theme of the fate of human culture and its interrelation with civilisation. The second aspect requires more detailed elucidation. Firstly, it substantiates the conception of 'surmounting' or 'removing' time which was developed in modernist thinking, art and literature. Secondly, some of the ideas introduced by Sergei Askol'dov<sup>31</sup> can be used as a starting point to understand Berdiaev's approach to the question of the nature of time and its role in history. In the work 'Time and Its Overcoming' [Vremia i ego preodolenie] (1922) Askol'dov stresses the fact that for a long time philosophical thought has sought to find a departure from the bounds of time, to *theoretically* surmount it. In so doing, philosophy tended to forget time itself as a true measure of Existence. This is a potentially perilous path, for forgetting Being (here I simply paraphrase Heidegger's idea of 'fleeing into care'),<sup>32</sup> man forgets his own temporal and therefore finite and mortal essence. Illustrating that in history this surmounting of time had been accomplished for

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<sup>31</sup> Sergei Alekseevich Askol'dov (Alekseev) is another, in Makhlin's terms, 'as it were successful/unsuccessful thinkers' [kak by sostoiavshiisia/ne sostoiavshiisia myslitel'] of the first quarter of the twentieth century. In the brief biographical supplement compiled by professor P. V. Alekseev, the editor of the collection *Na perelome. Filosofskie diskussii 20-kh godov: Filosofii i mirovozzrenie* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), Askol'dov is described as 'a philosopher of the idealistic trend' (p. 513). This supplement also provides some information about Askol'dov's life and a list of his works which includes *Major Problems of Epistemology and Ontology* [Osnovnye problemy teorii poznaniia i ontologii] (1900), *Thought and Reality* [Mysl' i deistvitel'nost'] (1914), *Consciousness As a Whole: The Psychological Notion of Personality* [Soznanie kak tseloe: Psikhologicheskoe poniatie lichnosti] (1918), *Gnoseology* [Gnoseologiiia] (1922), 'The Works of Andrei Belyi' [Tvorchestvo Andreia Belogo] (1922), 'The Religious-Aesthetic Significance of Dostoevskii' [Religiozno-esteticheskoe znachenie Dostoevskogo] (1922), 'Analogy As the Major Method of the Theory of Knowledge' [Analogiia kak osnovnoi metod poznaniia] (1922), 'Time and Its Overcoming' [Vremia i ego preodolenie] (1922) and 'Form and Content In Verbal Art' [Forma i sodержanie v iskusstve slova] (1925).



different purposes, Askol'dov tries to explain what lies at its basis. He emphasizes that the whole experience of the previous epochs demonstrates that this question was approached either from the point of view of various ontological doctrines about higher constant forms of Being (time was one of them) which are not subordinated to the general law of alteration, or considered to be a property of Epistemology and Theology where time is understood as cognitive and therefore a purely subjective form of human experience.

For contemporary thought concern with this problem is closely linked to the question of freedom and freedom of will. Askol'dov argues that very often in order to achieve a departure from temporal limits many thinkers and artists simply deny time to one or other realm of Being. As a result of such an attitude to time they begin to create and introduce new terms and words with prefixes or suffixes 'extra-', 'supra-', 'over-' and '-less', for example, 'extra-temporal', 'timeless' and so forth, without 'any concern' to understand the meaning of the 'lying beyond the bounds' ('zapredel'nogo') attitude to time:

Attention is rarely paid to the fact that [...] "extra-", "-less" and "over-" do not explain the notion of 'lying beyond the bounds' in relation to time; this notion must of necessity be understood in its positive content also, since in all the ways of formulating this question the "timeless" or "extra-temporal" are not fenced off by some sort of impenetrable partition from temporal Being. On the contrary, as is especially evident with the problem of freedom, the timeless and temporal [...] in a sense are fused into a single ontological unity. [...] Perhaps, the most important aspect of the problem is indeed the understanding of how and in what sense the "timeless" or "extra-temporal" comes into contact with the "temporal" and how two

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<sup>32</sup> See Martin Heidegger, 'Temporality and Within-time-ness as The Source', in *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp. 456-89 (p. 477).

such opposed modus of existence can be implanted into one and the same or, in any event, contiguous Being.

[Редко обращают внимание на то, что [...] “вне”, “без”, “над” понятие запредельного в отношении времени совершенно не выясняется, это понятие необходимо должно быть как-то уяснено и в своем положительном содержании, поскольку во всех формах постановки этой проблемы “безвременное” или “вневременное” не является отгороженным от бытия временного какой-то непроницаемой перегородкой. Напротив, как это особенно видно в проблеме свободы, безвременное и временное [...] слиты в каком-то смысле в одно онтологическое единство. [...] Едва ли не самой существенной стороной проблемы является именно уяснение того, как и в каком смысле “безвременное” или “вневременное” соприкасается с временным, каким образом в одном и том же или, во всяком случае, как-то соприкасающемся бытии могут быть укоренены два столь противоположных modus’а существования.]<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Askol'dov outlines the necessity of finding a realm where the problem of time and its surmounting loses its negative connotation. This idea received its final embodiment in Bakhtin's conception of chronotope, where historicity is considered to be that sphere where the removal of time, which is of such crucial importance, not only becomes possible but can be fully accomplished within time itself. For Askol'dov to answer the question about time is the same as to answer the question about *change*, for ‘if there is no time then there is no change’, he writes, ‘if there is no change - there is no time either’ [Esli net vremeni, to net izmeneniia, esli net izmeneniia, to net i vremeni] (p. 400). Change defines the essence of time, forming a unity with the past, present and future. The triplicity of time (as with any change in general) indicates its major peculiarity - time is ‘shot through with the unity of

changing Existence' [pronizano edinstvom izmeniaiushchegosia bytiia] (ibid.). The combination, unification, keeping and forewarning of these changeable moments is realized in human consciousness and through it. 'Only *living consciousness* or life in general', concludes Askol'dov, 'is possessed of such power of keeping and forewarning' [Podobnoi siloi uderzhaniia ili predvareniia obladaet lish *zhivoe soznanie* ili zhizn' voobshche] (ibid.). Thus alteration, that is, time is above all a property of the human *soul*. Hence it follows that time in its content is *psychological* and all other meanings of time - *ontological* and *physical* - are based on this psychological meaning which, in its turn, is subject to philosophical interpretation. The major feature of psychological time is its *relativity*, that is, it contains both individual and subjective, and general and objective aspects. The temporal relativity is also explained by the fact that experience of the temporal course can be quite diverse and in different psychological conditions the range of the present is not the same, not only for different people but even for one single individual. Thus, the psychological conception of time introduced a vertical section to the world, which had hitherto been understood in cross-section. Indeed, it was modernist art that made great discoveries, considering and portraying the life of an individual as the point of intersection of different temporal layers and meanings. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not during his work on *The Meaning of History* Berdiaev was familiar with Askol'dov's conclusions,<sup>34</sup> but Berdiaev's views on the essence of time and history as the dynamic unity of

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<sup>33</sup> S. A. Askol'dov, 'Vremia ontologicheskoe, psikhologicheskoe i fizicheskoe', in *Na perelome. Filosofskie diskussii 20-kh godov: Filosofiia i mirovozzrenie*, ed. P. V. Alekseev (Mosow: Politizdat, 1990), pp. 398-402 (p. 399).

<sup>34</sup> It is more than likely that he was, since Askol'dov's major works were published before 1922 (see footnote 7), that is, before Berdiaev's expulsion from Russia.

that which disappears, resides and appears, and his concern with the psychological aspect of time, show a certain similarity to Askol'dov's ideas.

As was pointed out earlier, Berdiaev considers history to be the most profound interaction between eternity and time, a continuous intrusion of the former into the latter. From the point of view of Christian consciousness (historical in its very nature) the eternal can only occur and be fully incarnated in time. But in order for history to be fulfilled as a process and understood as a movement, it is essential, Berdiaev insists, to recognize and be aware of the presence of a continuous struggle between eternity and time. Thus, history assumes time for its fulfilment, but time should only be taken here as the antithesis of the eternal:

This is a constant struggle, the constant opposition of eternity in time, the constant effort of the eternal principle to accomplish a victory of eternity not in terms of a departure from time, nor a denial of it, nor in terms of a transition to a position which does not have any link with time, because this would be a denial of history, but a victory of eternity in the very arena of time, that is, within the historical process itself.

**[Это есть постоянная борьба, постоянное противодействие вечного во времени, постоянное усилие вечных начал свершить победу вечности, свершить ее не в смысле выхода из времени, не в смысле отрицания времени, не в смысле перехода в то положение, которое не имеет никакой связи с временем, потому что это было бы отрицанием истории, а победу вечности на самой арене времени, т.е. в самом историческом процессе.]<sup>35</sup>**

Furthermore, Berdiaev also speaks of another struggle that lies at the basis of the struggle between eternity and time: the tragic struggle between *life* and *death* which, in essence, exists along the whole length of the historical process. He argues that the process of interaction between the eternal and

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<sup>35</sup> Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii*, 53.

temporal principles can only be realized in the clash of life and death, since the final separation of time from eternity would signify the triumph of the temporal principle over the eternal principle, that is, the victory of death over life, just as the entire transition from time into eternity leads first and foremost to a withdrawal from the historical process as such. Hence, by saying that 'in reality there is a third way and a third principle to which the very essence of the struggle between the eternity of life and the mortality of time is reduced' [**в действительности существует третий путь и третье начало, к которому сводится и самое существование борьбы вечности жизни со смертностью времени**] (p. 54), Berdiaev proposes to base this third approach on the idea of the necessity of finding the correct correlation between the past and the future, for the historical process, according to Berdiaev, is founded on the struggle between them.

For Berdiaev the present, moreover, has no significance whatsoever, since it represents a fleeting '*instant*' (*mgnovenie*) 'when the past has already ceased to exist and the future has not yet come along' [kogda proshlogo uzhe net, a budushchego eshche net] (p. 55). In this sense he describes contemporary reality as an 'evil and diseased' period, as an epoch of 'fragmented' and false time, pointing to a severance of the past from the future. The contemporary world (and herein lies the root of its tragedy) bears life only *superficially* in itself, seeking to create this life on the basis of oblivion of the past, plunging the past into the 'abyss of non-existence'. Thus, this reality is lethal, its present state is reminiscent of a madman, finally deprived of his memory, the loss of which is, in its turn, the proof of madness. Hence, as was already noted, for Berdiaev memory turns out to be a real force, a peculiar ontological principle, capable of resisting the 'evil and mortal' nature of time.

Memory initiates and directs the struggle for the restoration of the integrity of history, bringing together the past, the present and the future. Historical memory, and this is of particular importance here, functions as a carrier of the 'paternal principle' (*otchee nachalo*), that is, our connection and relationship with our fathers which links the future with the past, for:

A complete forgetting of our fatherland would be a complete forgetting of the past. This would be that madness where mankind is in the shreds of time, its torn instants, without any temporal connection.

**[Окончательное забвение нашего отечества было бы окончательным забвением прошлого. Это было бы тем сумасшествием, при котором человечество пребывало бы в клочьях времени, в разорванных мгновениях времени, без всякой связи времен.] (p.58)**

This is the very reason why Berdiaev rejects Futurism and the Futurist interpretation of life and events, for, being utterly based on the cult of the future and that of every present instant, it would lead the whole of humanity to genuine insanity. The Futurist attitude to things, symbolising a rupture of ontological connection, undermines any possibility of such connection, indicating, in the end, the loss of historical memory.

It seems appropriate here to recall the historical conception which was introduced and developed in the works of the Russian Futurists, whose artistic thinking and aesthetic strivings, based on the futurist feeling of everlasting progress in time (in contrast to Berdiaev's anti-Futurist point of view on the historical process), represent an attempt to perceive history through the idea of the future.<sup>36</sup> The Futurists attached great importance to myth and folklore (the study of which was initiated in the second half of the nineteenth century in the

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<sup>36</sup> It should be pointed out here that I intend not to examine the significance of these ideas from the scientific or historical point of view, but rather to touch upon the question of the innovative character of their artistic and aesthetic approach to the problem of history and time.

works of Rovinskii, Potebnia, Afanas'ev and Veselovskii), since historical myths offered profound evidence for the understanding of the inner essence of both time and history. In historical myths and legends they discovered first and foremost the link between time (which was fragmented in contemporary reality), raising to the literary surface old and even at times archaic (in the case of Khlebnikov, for example, heathen, or of Maiakovskii early-Christian and medieval) cultural layers.

The development and flourishing of Futurism are chronologically situated between the two Russian Revolutions (1905-1917) - a period of social catastrophes and intellectual ferment in Russian spiritual life. It was a time when 'history was happening before people's very eyes in a most unexpected manner, defining passionate rejection of the surrounding world, culture and civilisation, a radical denial of the contemporary world's orders and an intuitive foresight of a new time' [История самым неожиданным образом разыгрывалась на глазах у людей, определяя страстное неприятие окружающего мира, культуры и цивилизации, радикальное отрицание порядков современного мира и интуитивное предвидение нового времени]<sup>37</sup>. The crisis of Symbolism was perhaps the most striking phenomenon of that epoch's spiritual situation, primarily because it gave rise to two new trends in literature and art, Acmeism and Futurism. Secondly, it marks the beginning of a turning point in the understanding of myth and folklore: in the process of the re-evaluation of historical events, contemporary reality and human experience in general mythology acquires a new significance.

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<sup>37</sup> M. Ia. Poliakov, 'Velimir Khlebnikov: Mirovozzrenie i poetika', in Velimir Khlebnikov, *Tvoreniia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), pp. 5-36 (p. 9).

The Acmeists, mainly developing the ideas of the late Symbolists, in particular Viacheslav Ivanov's theory of *neo-myth* as a way of conserving the past, advocated the so-called *eternal essences* (*vechnye sushchnosti*), illustrating their meaning in the past. Their appreciation of contemporary reality was realized in the realm of previous cultural tradition and experience, where the present was entirely transferred into the past. The Futurists, on the contrary, attempted to place the present in the future, or, as Poliakov puts it, moving away from Symbolism, they searched for a way to an immediately given, material reality [...] and destroyed the boundary between art and life, between image and everyday life' [отталкиваясь от символизма, искали путь к непосредственно данной, вещной действительности [...], разрушали границы между искусством и жизнью, между образом и бытом] (ibid.). The present was considered by the Futurists to be a certain reality - 'State or Continent of Time' (Khlebnikov) - with the logic of time and space broken: time and space here swap their functions, overflowing one into the other. The sense of time, moreover, disappears, time emerges as space and the past and the future resemble spatial 'tatters' or fragments. This is guided by the idea that, with the help of a fragmentary vision of the world, time becomes surmountable, that is, the border between contemporary life and that of the past also becomes eroded, which leads, in the end, to the combination of historical events and the restoration of the broken link between times in history. The conception of time-space which was introduced and developed by the Futurists leads, in the end, to *extra-temporality*, for in their space (where different temporal layers coexist together with mythology and history) historical movement comes to a halt. Such space or, in Losev's terminology,



'hyperspace' (*giperprostranstvo*)<sup>38</sup> can be represented or imagined, but it cannot be perceived because of the absence of change that defines the essence of time as the unity of that which disappears, resides and appears. Herein also lies the root of Berdiaev's denial of the Futuristic point of view on meaning of history. Berdiaev comes to the conclusion that the Futurist approach, ahistorical in character, simply destroys the very possibility of perceiving the link between time and understanding history and the historical process as a 'coherent fulfilment'.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, in the discursive practice of the 1920s the theme of cultural *Renaissance* was one of the most widely discussed issues within the framework of the current state of contemporary humanities in general. Development of this question can be found in the works of Zelinskii<sup>39</sup>, Bitsilli, Mandel'shtam, the brothers Nikolai and Mikhail Bakhtin and Kagan. In the book *A Study of the Development of Russian Philosophy* [Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii] (1922) Shpet touches upon the theme of the Renaissance in connection with the at the time, widespread discussion about what should be understood by the *historicity* or *ahistoricity* of opinions. Assigning the problem of the philosophy of history to the realm of *methodology*, Shpet argues that the notions of 'historicity' or 'ahistoricity' are not defined by the character of estimations or portrayal of fact, but by 'their introduction into an appropriate 'context', establishment and choice of this context' [vvedeniem ikh v dolzhnyi "kontekst", ustanovleniem i vyborom etogo konteksta]<sup>40</sup>. In this sense Shpet regards the current state of European

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<sup>38</sup> See Losev's analysis of space in the Futurists, Cubists and Marc Chagall with reference to N. M. Tarabukin in Losev, 'Dialektika mifa', 96.

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>40</sup> G. G. Shpet, 'Istorizm i novaia filosofia', in Alekseev, *Na perelome*, 84-88 (p. 85).

culture as a 'sunset' in which he sees 'the behest of a new sunrise' [zavet novogo voskhoda] and furthermore:

This is already a matter of subjective belief and wish to foresee in this sunrise not renewal or restoration but Renaissance as a real new Existence in the strict sense of the historical category of Renaissance.

**[Это уже дело субъективной веры и желания предвидеть в этом восходе не восстановление, не реставрацию, а Возрождение, как реальное новое бытие, в строгом смысле исторической категории Ренессанса.] (p. 86)**

Shpet links his own confidence in the 'Russian Renaissance' with his belief in the 'new intelligentsia', which has not yet even been finally formed, but 'already *healthy* in spirit, representing a new [...] aristocracy, an aristocracy of talent' [uzhe *zdorova* po dukhu, predstavliaia novuiu [...] aristokratiiu, aristokratiiu talanta] (p. 87). 'This new Renaissance', concludes Shpet, 'will bring with it a new philosophy in that stage of development which I consider to be the highest' [Etot novyi Renessans prineset s soboi i novuiu filosofiiu, v toi stadii razvitiia, kotoruiu ia schitaiu vyssheiu] (ibid.).

For Berdiaev one of the central themes in history is that of 'the end of the Renaissance and the crisis of humanism'.<sup>41</sup> 'I sense the epoch which we are now entering', writes Berdiaev, 'as the end of the Renaissance period of history' [Ia oshchushchaiu epokhu, v kotoruiu my vstupaem, kak konets renessansnogo perioda istorii] (ibid.). The main pathos of the Renaissance, for Berdiaev, is the rise of human individuality and the liberation of the human spirit, and this idea has a deep religious basis. Berdiaev argues that in order to become firmly established (in the Renaissance sense of this word) human individuality must recognize and accept its own connection with a higher divine principle (p.

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<sup>41</sup> Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii*, 116.

120). For, when man does not want to know and be aware of anything apart from himself, he ceases to sense both himself and the world. To feel free and be an individual it is necessary to recognize 'not only yourself' but also the other ('i ne sebia') (ibid.), that is, another human personality and individuality as well as the Divine Existence. 'Only this', Berdiaev concludes, 'gives a sense of human individuality' [To'l'ko eto i daet oshchushchenie chelovecheskoi individual'nosti] (ibid.). Here Berdiaev expresses the general tendency for all thinkers of the paradigm of the Russian non-classical humanities of the 1920s to be aware and recognize the other person's existence - the Other Self, the Thou. For through such recognition 'the I', 'personality' becomes more truly 'a Self'. K. G. Isupov observes that for Russian culture the turn of the century marks a period of heightened interest in the study of the other person's significance and uniqueness.<sup>42</sup> He suggests that this 'curiosity' in the life of the other has two main sources. The first, external, source is associated with the spread of Neo-Kantian ideas along with the philosophy of Nietzsche and Freud's psychoanalytical theory. The second, internal, source stretches its roots into the Russian religious-philosophical tradition, with its themes of the eschatology of history (Bulgakov) and, divine love (Solov'ev), and Nikolai Fedorov's calls for a restoration of the lost kinship between people: as Fedorov puts it, 'one ought to live not for oneself (egoism) or for others but with all and for all' [Zhit' nuzhno ne dlia sebia (egoizm) i ne dlia drugikh, a so vsemi i dlia vsekh].<sup>43</sup> Here, indeed, the theme 'I and the Other' arises and finds its problematisation.

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<sup>42</sup> K. G. Isupov, 'Mikhail Bakhtin i Aleksandr Meier', in *Bakhtinskii sbornik II: Bakhtin mezhdou Rossiei i Zapadom*, ed. D. Kuiuundzhich and V. Makhlin (Moscow: n. p., 1992), pp. 60-70 (p. 61).

<sup>43</sup> Nikolai Fedorov, *Filosofia obshchego dela v dvukh tomakh* (2 vols), (Moscow: Tipografiia Semirechnogo oblastnogo pravleniia, 1906), vol. 1, p. 96.

In *The Meaning of History* Berdiaev only begins to approach the problem of 'the other', which receives its final development in his subsequent works, particularly *Solitude and Society* [Opyt filosofii odinochestva i obshcheniia] (1934), written in emigration. Berdiaev's conception is similar to (indeed sometimes echoes) Martin Buber's *I - Thou* relationship (whose nature is *dialogical*) with the Other Self or the Thou. Considering the problem of the Other within the framework of Russian religious-philosophical thinking based on the idea of the *sobornost'* (*alltogetherness*) of consciousness, Berdiaev argues that, although Buber rightly 'envisages the relationship between the Ego and the Thou as one uniquely between man and God', he does not take into account several points which are essential for understanding the very basis of this relationship. Berdiaev writes:

His [Buber's] investigations do not extend to the relationship between human consciousness,

between the Ego and the Thou, between two human beings, or to the diverse relationships implied in the multiple life of mankind. Nor does he consider the problem of social and human metaphysics, that of the We.<sup>44</sup>

The existence and significance of the We, according to Berdiaev, cannot be ignored, since it postulates the social, on which the very *possibility* of joining in relations with the other or others is founded. Thus the We symbolizes a 'community and communion with other people, a communion wherein each person is not an It but a Thou' (ibid.). 'The pure ontological idea of the Church', concludes Berdiaev, 'is founded upon such a relationship' (p. 108). Hence the social is always to be found within the personal and every personal act in human life represents at one and the same time a *social act*.

The communication both between the I and the Other, and between man and God, is based on the idea of *free love*:

This is the mystery of the relationship between God and man, the mystery of love and freedom, the mystery of free love. It is this understanding of the inner relationship between God and man as a drama of free love that lays and reveals the sources of history. [...] The mystery of Christ is therefore the mystery of the relationship between God and man, the tragedy of free love.

[Это и есть тайна отношений между Богом и человеком, тайна любви и свободы, тайна свободной любви. Вот это понимание внутренних отношений Бога и человека как драмы свободной любви, обнажает и раскрывает источники истории. [...] Поэтому тайна Христа есть и тайна отношений между Богом и человеком, трагедия свободной любви.]<sup>45</sup>

At this point Berdiaev's philosophy parts company with the traditional Christian conception of sacrificial love. The idea of freedom and free love, erotic or friendly, is, in essence, an Existentialist solution. Furthermore, the tragedy of human destiny and contemporary reality in general, according to Berdiaev, is that, on the one hand, we have discovered the *idea of individuality* which was hitherto unknown, or, to be more precise, had not been achieved during any previous epoch. On the other hand we observe the process of the shattering of 'human individuality' which we have never experienced before. In this sense, for Berdiaev 'the current epoch' (*nashe vremia*) turns out to be nothing other than an open and outspoken manifestation of extreme and unrestrained *individualism* (of which Socialism is a striking example) that destroys human individuality. Human self-affirmation which 'does not wish to recognize any authority' [*ne zhelaiushchee nichego znat' nad soboi*] (p.121),

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<sup>44</sup> Nicolas Berdiaev, *Solitude and Society*, tr. George Reavey (London: Geoffrey Bles, The Centenary Press, 1938), p. 107.

<sup>45</sup> Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii*, 42-43.

turns into the complete disintegration and denial of *the human image*, leading, in the end, to *the loss of man*. This signifies, in its turn, that humanism begins to grow into its own opposition, that is, *anti-humanism*, of which process the philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche is a vivid illustration. Moreover, according to Berdiaev, the symptoms of anti-humanism can be found in almost all modern literary and artistic trends, but a complete break with Renaissance traditions is particularly clearly revealed (finally reaching its peak) in Futurism with all its themes and forms. By comparison with the Renaissance, that is, integral perception of human forms, 'in Futurism man as the greatest theme of art dies'; and furthermore:

In Futurist art man is no longer present, he is torn to shreds. Everything begins to enter into everything. All the realities of the world are shifted from their individual places. Objects, lamps, divans, streets begin to enter into man, disrupting the integrity of his being, image and unique countenance. Man is swallowed by the surrounding world of objects.

**[[...] в футуризме погибает человек как величайшая тема искусства. В футуристическом искусстве нет уже человека, человек разорван в клочья. Все начинает входить во все. Все реальности в мире сдвигаются с своего индивидуального места. В человека начинают входить предметы, лампы, диваны, улицы, нарушая целостность его существа, его образа, его неповторимого лика. Человек проваливается в окружающий его предметный мир.] (p. 135)**

Berdiaev argues that the process by which man 'disperses and disintegrates' his own forms and negates his own image in artistic works is violated, manifesting the final *de-humanisation* of modern art. The same process can be observed in social life: man becomes indistinguishable and 'as an individualized being, ceases to be the theme of art, plunging [...] into social and cosmic collectives' [chelovek, kak individualizirovannoe sushchestvo,

perestaet byt' temoi iskusstva, on pogruzhaetsia [...] v sotsial'nye i kosmicheskie kollektivnosti] (p. 136). This explains one of the major peculiarities of our time which, like no other epoch, has fully realized the phenomenon of *the crisis of artistic creation*, which Berdiaev defines as that state of defiance when the results or products of creation do not entirely satisfy the creator. He firmly believes that this fundamental antithesis of every creative activity has become particularly acute in our age. He claims that all great artists of the Renaissance worked joyfully, without experiencing all the bitterness of a 'divided consciousness', where the creative aim has not been given the exact realisation that was initially intended by the master. Herein lies the secret of their 'great mastery'. In our time, on the contrary:

Great contemporary trends bear the imprint of profound inner dissatisfaction and a torturing search for and escape from the vice in which human creation is gripped. The greatest creative individuals, such as Nietzsche, Dostoevskii and Ibsen were conscious of the tragedy of creation and tormented by [...] the impossibility of creating what was demanded by the creative urge.

**[Великие же течения нашего времени носят отпечаток глубокой внутренней неудовлетворенности, мучительного искания выхода из тисков, в которых человеческое творчество славлено. Такие величайшие творческие индивидуальности, как Нитцше, Достоевский, Ибсен сознавали трагедию творчества, они мучились [...] этой невозможностью создать то, что задано в творческом полъеме.] (p. 138)**

Berdiaev attempts to show that Russia is singled out for the unique role that she played in the process of the end of the Renaissance since Russia (although she had never known the Renaissance in the strictest sense) experiences the decline and humanist crisis more acutely than anywhere in the West. Herein lies the explanation of the peculiarity and originality of her historical fate:

It was never given to us to experience the joy of the Renaissance, nor have we ever had an enthusiasm for humanism [...]. The whole of Great Russian literature, the greatest of our creations, and of which we may justly be proud [...] is not renaissance in its spirit. There was only one moment, one outburst in Russian literature and culture, when the possibility of the Renaissance flashed: the phenomenon of Pushkin's creative work, the cultural epoch of Alexander I [...]. But it was only a brief period that did not determine the destiny of the Russian spirit. Russian literature of the nineteenth century, which began with Pushkin's charming genius, was not Pushkinian; it revealed the impossibility of Pushkinian creation and spirit. We created from grief and suffering; great sorrow, a thirst to expiate the sins of the world and salvation lie at the basis of our great literature. We have never had the joy of plentiful creation. Remember Gogol' and the whole character of his works. This was sorrowful and tormented destiny. Such was the destiny of the two greatest Russian geniuses, Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. The whole of their creative work is neither humanist nor Renaissance. The whole character of Russian thought, Russian philosophy, Russian morality and Russian State destiny bears within it something excruciating that is opposed to the joyous spirit of the Renaissance and humanism. At the moment we are living through a crisis of humanism in all spheres of our public life and culture. Herein lies [...] the paradox of our destiny and [...] the originality of our nature. It is given to us to reveal, perhaps more acutely than European nations, the contradictory and unsatisfactory character of middling humanism. Dostoevskii is most typical and most important for an awareness of the inner failure of humanism. It was Dostoevskii who made great discoveries in this area. It was Dostoevskii, who felt such pain about man and his destiny and who made man the only theme of his creative work, it was Dostoevskii, who revealed the inner insolvency and tragedy of humanism. His whole dialectic was directed against the essence of humanism. His own tragic humanism is deeply opposed to that historical humanism on which Renaissance history was founded and which was professed by the great European humanists. These peculiarities of the Russian East denote its unique mission in cognising the end of the Renaissance and humanism [...]. It is no accident that in the loftiest manifestations of religious philosophy Russian thought has always been



addressed to the Apocalypse. Beginning with Chaadaev and the Slavophiles and then in Vladimir Solov'ev, Leont'ev and Dostoevskii, Russian speculation was preoccupied with the theme of the philosophy of history, and this Russian philosophy of history was apocalyptic. And the Russian Revolution in its metaphysical essence is the bankruptcy of humanism, and thereby brings us to the theme of apocalypse.

**[Нам не было дано пережить радость Ренессанса, у нас, русских, никогда не было настоящего пафоса гуманизма [...]. Вся великая русская литература, величайшее наше создание, которым мы можем гордиться [...], - не ренессансная по духу своему. В русской литературе и русской культуре был лишь один момент, одна вспышка, когда блеснула возможность Ренессанса - это явление Пушкинского творчества, это - культурная эпоха Александра I [...]. Но это был лишь короткий период, не определивший судьбы русского духа. Русская литература XIX века, в начале которой стоял чарующий гений Пушкина, была не пушкинская; она обнаружила невозможность пушкинского творчества и пушкинского духа. Мы творили от горя и страдания: в основе нашей великой литературы лежала великая скорбь, жажда искупления грехов мира и спасения. Никогда не было у нас радости изысканного творчества. Вспомните Гоголя и весь характер его творчества. Это скорбная и мучительно-творческая судьба. Такова же судьба двух величайших русских гениев - Толстого и Достоевского. Все их творчество не гуманистическое и не ренессансное. Весь характер русской мысли, русской философии, русского морального склада и русской государственной судьбы несет в себе что-то мучительное, противоположное радостному духу Ренессанса и гуманизма. Сейчас мы переживаем во всех сферах нашей общественной жизни и культуры кризис гуманизма. В этом - [...] парадоксальность нашей судьбы и [...] своеобразие нашей природы. Нам дано раскрыть, может быть острее, чем народам Европы, противоречие и неудовлетворительность серединного гуманизма. Достоевский наиболее характерен и наиболее важен для осознания внутреннего краха гуманизма... Именно Достоевский сделал здесь великие открытия. Достоевский, который так болел о человеке, о судьбе человека, который сделал человека единственной темой своего творчества, именно он и вскрывает внутреннюю несостоятельность**

гуманизма, трагедию гуманизма. Вся диалектика Достоевского направлена против существа гуманизма. Его собственный трагический гуманизм глубоко противоположен тому историческому гуманизму, на котором была основана ренессансная история, который исповедовали великие гуманисты Европы. Эти особенности русского Востока обозначают своеобразную его миссию в познании конца Ренессанса и конца гуманизма [...]. Не случайно на вершинах русской религиозной философии мысль всегда была обращена к Апокалипсису. Начиная с Чаадаева и славянофилов и далее у Владимира Соловьева, у К. Леонтьева и Достоевского, русская мысль была занята темами философии истории, и эта русская философия истории была - апокалиптической. И русская революция, по метафизическому существу своему, есть крах гуманизма и этим подводит к апокалиптической теме.] (pp. 143-44)

Berdiaev comes to the conclusion that humanist European culture had finally reached its end. And contemporary mankind finds itself in the 'twilight', making preparations to enter into (or return to) a new 'nocturnal' historical period which he named, by analogy, the '*New Middle Ages*' (*Novoe srednevekov'e*) (p. 139). Russia and Europe, according to Berdiaev, are far from a cultural Renaissance. In this sense the opposition of the Slavophiles to the Westernizers is no longer valid in the twentieth century. This is firstly because the whole of their polemics takes on an increasingly *abstract-theoretical* character and therefore does not have the same significance as it did in the previous century. Secondly, true Slavophile consciousness as expressed by Khomiakov, Tolstoi and Leont'ev has never been hostile towards Western culture itself, but towards European civilisation. And certainly both the Slavophiles and Westernizers have historically been unanimous that the triumph of civilisation is the death of cultural spirit. In this sense for the twentieth-century Russian national consciousness Chaadaev's figure once again becomes of utmost importance, for it manifests the *synthesis* of these

two mentalities. The idea of synthesis in relation to Chaadaev's thought was first proposed by Mandel'shtam in his now much-cited article 'Petr Chaadaev' (1915):

The best way to describe Chaadaev's thought is as national-synthetic. The synthetic national character does not bow its head before the fact of national self-consciousness but it rises above this fact in sovereign, original and therefore national personality. [...] I think that a country and a people have already justified themselves if they create at least one absolutely free person who wishes and could benefit from his freedom.

**[Лучше всего характеризовать мысль Чаадаева как национально-синтетическую. Синтетическая народность не склоняет головы перед фактом национального самосознания, а возносится над ним в суверенной личности, самобытной, а потому национальной. [...] Я думаю, что страна и народ уже оправдали себя, если они создали хоть одного совершенно свободного человека, который пожелал и сумел воспользоваться своей свободой.]<sup>46</sup>**

Civilisation and Renaissance are two peculiar, and at the same time incompatible states of mind and spirit. The former manifests nothing but death and the latter symbolizes the cult of life and freedom outside their meaning and reality. The whole experience of Modernism, Post-Modernism and the avant-garde does nothing but serve as a vivid illustration of this idea. 'Nothing has value in and of itself', writes Berdiaev in the work 'Will to Life and Will to Culture' [Volia k zhizni i volia k kul'ture] (1922), 'no experience of life has depth, or connection with eternity' [Nichto ne predstavliaetsia samotsennym, ni odno perezhivanie zhizni ne imeet glubiny, ni priobshcheno k vechnosti]<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Osip Mandel'shtam, 'Petr Chaadaev', in *Collected Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (New York: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1966), pp. 326-34 (p. 333).

<sup>47</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, 'Volia k zhizni i volia k kul'ture', in *Smysl istorii* (Moscow: Mysl', 1990), pp. 162-74 (p. 169). This article was written in 1922 and included as a supplement to the book. As

But the failure and tragic result of the New history does not necessarily mean that this history has no meaning. History has an *inner meaning* which should be understood in the following way. The resolution of historical contradictions cannot be realized within history. The solution lies beyond the limits of history itself. If we were to approach history from this point of view then all its fiascos and conflicts would turn out to be full of profound meaning. But at the same time the meaning of history cannot be reduced to the resolution of the problems raised by one or other historical period or moment. For, if we assume that for a very short period of time all contradictions were resolved and man became fully satisfied then this seemingly successful outcome would reveal the complete meaninglessness of history. Hence, Berdiaev sees the authentic significance of history not in finding possible solutions to the conflicts, but in the revelation of all its spiritual potential which makes 'the inner movement of the tragedy' [vnutrennee dvizhenie tragedii] possible.<sup>48</sup> The goal of history cannot be found within history itself. The failure of history illustrates that 'the higher calling' for man and mankind in general is *extra-historical*. History, in its *religious content*, is 'the path to another world' [put' k inomu miru] (p. 154). The problem of history is a problem of the nature of time in that it can never be solved within the framework of human time.

The solution lies in surmounting human time and history, in a transition into the realm of the eternal and extra-historical. This transition presumes the introduction into the closed circle of history of extra-historical forces, that is, a new celestial Event in mundane life - 'the future Coming of Christ' [griadushchee iavlenie Khrista] (ibid.). Furthermore, history is endowed with

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indicated in its preface, Berdiaev considered this work 'essential' for his conception of a philosophy of history.

positive meaning only when it has an end. The whole metaphysic of history is shot through with the idea of the inevitable *finiteness* of history, since history as an infinite process would have no significance whatsoever. Finally, man as an historical being realizes himself not only in history but also in extra-history, bringing into the world the religious unity of his human and at the same time divine personality. Hence, the individual destiny, which lies at the basis of history and which history is incapable of solving, presupposes an extra-historical goal and resolution. Herein lies the fundamental confirmation that history has a *supreme (meta-historical)* meaning.

David Richardson suggests that Berdiaev's idea of the meaning of history can be clearly explained with the help of a symbol. This symbol is an onion. He writes:

The meaning of history for Berdiaev is like a large onion. Beneath the topmost layer of onion is another layer, beneath that is another layer, and so on down to the kernel of the onion. And just as a given area of an inner layer refers to a larger extent of the cover the closer to the centre it is obtained; so in Berdiaev's philosophy of history, the layers of meaning of history become truer as they become more comprehensive and closer to the kernel, the Godman. And just as the outer layer of the onion is a true reality and existential participant in the totality of the onion, though rather dry; so the merest symbols found in history are true realities, participating in the existence of the Godman, in whom the knower participates and in whose image the knower exists. This idea of an onion is useful for understanding Berdiaev. However, the merest symbols in history are less real than the cover of the onion is part of the onion.<sup>49</sup>

The major peculiarity and at the same time originality of Berdiaev's conception of the philosophy of history is that it expresses, with astonishing accuracy, the general aspiration of the twentieth century humanities to find that

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<sup>48</sup> Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii*, 43.

sphere wherein philosophical and religious thinking would be united in such a way as to answer the crucial questions about the essence of history, the 'enigmatic' nature of the historical process, the goal of culture and the role of certain countries in the destiny of the whole of mankind. Richardson rightly maintains that it would be too simple to describe Berdiaev's approach as anti-historical or 'uninterested in human history' (ibid.). Firstly, in Berdiaev's philosophy the theme and the very phenomenon of history are centrally concerned with all the concreteness and reality of human life and destiny. For Berdiaev, history realizes itself through man as much as man lives and creates in history, experiencing it as an inalienable part of his 'spiritual biography'. Without such 'reciprocity' and interrelation between man and history, history does not make any sense. Secondly, the meaning of history in Berdiaev's philosophy *is not concerned* with history itself. For him every individual is the indissoluble unity of both human and divine personality, but the destiny of the latter cannot be solved within the limits of terrestrial, that is, human time and history, it seeks to find its way out into eternal Existence, the realm of the extra-temporal and extra-historical. This explains why Berdiaev's conception is neither historical nor anti-historical, since the very meaning of history is not rooted in history. His philosophy of history should be understood as *Personalism*, that is, a philosophy of the quest for a universal, supra-historical force conducive to the formation of the historical process. Furthermore, despite his outstanding examination of the role played by the ancient world and the Jews in the formation and flourishing of Christian culture, and his profound conclusions on the essence of myth and historical memory, Berdiaev

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<sup>49</sup> David Bonner Richardson, *Berdyaev's Philosophy of History: An Existentialist Theory of Social Creativity and Eschatology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), p. 169.

seems to call into question history itself which gradually (if we ponder over Berdiaev's theory) loses its 'historical' side, and the moment of historical *emergence* is substituted for that of historical *anticipation* and *prophecy*. In this sense Berdiaev's philosophy of history approaches the most topical question which was only raised by the twentieth-century humanities: the problem of the 'historicity' of history. The philosophy of history, in Berdiaev's understanding, is *tragic* in its essence. Mankind must therefore surmount history in order to reach its completion in the traditional-Christian depth of the Godman and Trinity. Finally, in Berdiaev's philosophy the theme of history, harmoniously combining discussions on myth, the essence of memory, the nature of time and the significance of the category of 'the other', offers a useful starting point for recalling Bakhtin's conception of *chronotope* and the metaphor of 'concrete historicity' ('konkretnaia istorichnost'), for historicity, according to Bakhtin's theory, turns out to be that realm where the surmounting of time becomes possible within the limits of time itself.

#### 4. Bakhtin's theory of the chronotopicity of art

In the late 1930s Bakhtin in his work *Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane* [Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel] (written in 1937-38, supplemented in 1973, published only in 1975) proposed a radically new approach to the problem of the study of temporal and spatial interrelations in literary works. Bakhtin's starting point is that artistic thinking and perception, and even any 'point of view' is *chronotopic* in its very nature, that is, 'includes

in itself both spatial and temporal features'.<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin describes the interconnection between temporal and spatial narrative forms as '*chronotope*' (*khronotop*), considering this to be a '*formally constitutive category*' (*formal'no-soderzhatel'naia kategoriia*) of literature and art'.<sup>51</sup> For Bakhtin chronotope always contains a so-called '*emotional and evaluating aspect*', it defines 'a literary work's artistic unity in relation to an actual reality' (p. 243). 'Art and literature', Bakhtin writes, 'are shot through with *chronotopic values* of varying degree and scope. Each motif, each separate aspect of artistic work bears value' (ibid.).

Chronotope is a key notion of Bakhtin's genre theory. According to Bakhtin, major genres are defined by chronotopes, which, in their turn, enable genres to preserve their uniqueness over time. In so doing, chronotopes provide us with in-depth knowledge about the subject of genre identity or '*genre memory*' (*zhanrovaia pamiat'*) and cultural memory. Hence, for Bakhtin, genre is '*a specific way of thinking*' (ibid.).

Bakhtin's analysis of temporal and spatial forms is particularly concerned with narrative genres of literature (especially the novel), for they are 'dense and concrete', and 'the richest discoveries about the relation of people and events to time and space have been made by narrative genres of literature'. Above all, 'having the most complex sense of chronotopicity, the novel offers our most profound image of people, actions, events, history and society'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), p. 338.

<sup>51</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics' [1937-38 (1973)], in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-259 (p.84).

<sup>52</sup> Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaic* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 367; 372.



Chronotopes have their own peculiar features that differentiate one chronotope from another. Touching upon the question of the quality and diversity of chronotopes, Bakhtin also emphasizes that they are not given once and for all, but can, along with their functions, vary in the process of genre development in accordance with the demands of the given situation.

Bakhtin speaks of the *heterochronous* character of literature, stressing the fact that at any given time it represents a multiplicity of chronotopes. 'Within the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author' one can find and determine 'a number of different chronotopes and complex interaction among them'.<sup>53</sup> The general nature of these interrelations Bakhtin describes '*as dialogic* (in the broadest use of this word)' (ibid.).

What is the place of chronotopes 'from the perspective of the literary work as a single whole' [v perspektive proizvedeniia kak edinogo tselogo]?<sup>54</sup> Bakhtin outlines that to them belongs, first and foremost, 'the meaning that shapes narrative': 'they are the organizing centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied'.<sup>55</sup> Chronotopes provide 'the ground essential for the showing forth, the representability of events' (ibid). Thus from this follows their '*representational* importance':

The chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a centre for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel's abstract elements - philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect - gravitate toward the chronotope

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<sup>53</sup> Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', 252.

<sup>54</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Iz chernovykh tetradei', *Literaturnaia ucheba*, 5-6 (1992), 153-65 (p. 163).

<sup>55</sup> Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', 252.

and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work. Such is the representational significance of the chronotope. (Ibid.)

As noted earlier, describing the nature of any artistic perception as chronotopic, Bakhtin tries to illustrate that the principle of chronotopicity also lies at the basis of 'any and every literary image'. In this sense he comes to the following conclusion:

Language, as a treasure house of images, is fundamentally chronotopic. Also chronotopic is the internal form of a word, that is, the mediating marker with whose help the root meanings of spatial categories are carried over into temporal relationships (in the broadest sense) (p. 251).

Thus, engaging Bakhtin's theory of chronotopic analysis, that is, interpreting literary works in terms of their temporal and spatial determinations, we, in essence, examine their concrete and potential historicity. Historicity cannot be studied formally nor understood simply as a sum total of historical data and facts, gravitating towards a certain abstract unity where the literary work remains only as an illustration, incomplete and insignificant. On the contrary, approaching the literary work as an *Event*, we are dealing with the actual context of culture in its *possible emergence and movement*. Herein lies the explanation of Bakhtin's metaphor '*the gates of the chronotope*' (*vorota khronotopa*), through which 'every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished' (p. 258). The chronotope, therefore, turns out to be a dynamic unity, the inner essence of literary work that provides the connection among individual elements of the content and defines, in the end, *the action of artistic meaning*.

In his 'Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff' [Otvét na vopros redaktsii *Novogo mira*] Bakhtin introduces the notion of

'*great time*' (*bol'shoe vremia*) which, for him, is not simply time. He proposes that artistic, that is, '*creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing' and furthermore:

In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture. In the realm of the culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding [...] and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths.<sup>56</sup>

For Bakhtin, *outsideness* is not ahistoricity or timelessness; on the contrary, an artist does not and cannot locate himself outside time and history. In early fragments from 1921, Bakhtin sees the goal of understanding as consisting of releasing our thinking from being ahistorical. This means that everything that we live through, all our experiences, feelings and spiritual values, become the property of time. In this sense one aspect of time turns out to be the profundity and multi-layeredness of our consciousness, Being in general. Broadly speaking, any appreciation of events, anything described and understood by the artist from the position of outsideness, belongs to history (as does the artist himself, but in a different sense). Hence, human and, in particular, artistic outsideness cannot be considered as a timeless category; on the contrary, we can comprehend and express ourselves only because our life takes place in the historical course of time (understanding, realized in *great time* and through *great time*, can only happen from the position of our own time).

## 5. Issues of the poetics of literary time and space in Likhachev

In general, the late 1960s and early 1970s in Russian literary scholarship mark a period of revived interest in the study of temporal and spatial narrative categories and their function and meaning in the literary work. The discussion begins with Shklovskii's short article 'Vremia v romane' [Time in the Novel] where he approaches the problems of the specific character of time in the novel and the method of representing time in literary works.<sup>57</sup> Shklovskii expresses the idea that 'the conventionality' of literary time can only be of interest as a 'particular case of literary conventionality - an agreement between the reader and writer about the laws of the given work, that is, the work being offered at this moment' [частный случай литературной конвенции - договора между читателем и писателем о законах данного, то есть сейчас предлагаемого произведения].<sup>58</sup>

Dmitrii Likhachev emerges as a key figure in this debate, for his ideas on time, history and literary development became quite influential, provoking broad interest in literary-critical circles of that time.<sup>59</sup> A considerable part of Likhachev's monograph of 1971 *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury* [Poetics of

<sup>56</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff' [1970], in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, tr. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp.1-7 (p. 7).

<sup>57</sup> V. Shklovskii, 'Vremia v romane', in *Khudozhestvennaia proza: Razmyshleniia i razbory* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), pp. 326-39.

<sup>58</sup> V. Shklovskii, 'Konventsii vremeni', *Voprosy literatury*, 3 (1969), 115-28 (p. 127).

<sup>59</sup> The Dutch Slavist Katerina Hansen Löve in her book *The Evolution of Space in Russian Literature: A Spatial Reading of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Narrative Literature* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994) which offers a well compiled survey of major contemporary theories (Smirnov, Toporov, Lotman and Van Baak) on the question of the literary development of the narrative category of space in Russian literary scholarship, regards Likhachev's works of this period to be a 'crucial link between the Formalist model of evolution and present-day, notably, Soviet-semiotic, understanding of literary development and cultural development in general' (p. 10). She also provides an exceptionally good example of spatial reading of well-known texts by Lermontov, Gogol', Goncharov, Sologub and Platonov, examining the functions and peculiarities of different types of space: Romantic, Realist, Symbolist and Modernist.

Old Russian Literature] (1971), raises and develops the issue of the poetics of literary time and space, examining artistic time and space along with the different ways and aspects of their reproduction and representation in art and literature. To conclude this chapter it seems appropriate briefly to touch upon Likhachev's conception, for I shall frequently comment on and apply some of his ideas whilst working on Bunin's texts.

Likhachev considers *the factor of time* and the whole evolution of this notion to be one of the most 'significant achievements' of modern literature. According to Likhachev, time, enclosing in itself the idea of variability and alteration, 'conquers and subordinates to itself ever larger fields in human consciousness' [otvoevyvaet i podchiniaet sebe vse bolee krupnye uchastki v soznanii liudei].<sup>60</sup> Time is also closely linked to the idea of *historicity*; historicity, extending to broader spheres of human activity (science, philosophy and all forms of creative thought), lies at the basis of understanding both reality and the 'diversity of forms of movement and at the same time its unity' [mnogoobraziiia form dvizheniia i odnovremenno ego edinstva] (ibid.). 'It is a matter not only of historicity', Likhachev writes, 'and of an aspiration to perceive the whole world through time and in time'; and furthermore:

Literature, more than any other art, emerges as the art of time. Time is its object, subject and instrument of representation. The awareness and sense of the movement and variability of the world in diverse forms of time runs through literature.

**[Но дело не только в историчности, и в стремлении весь мир воспринимать через время и во времени. Литература в большей мере, чем любое другое искусство, становится искусством времени. Время его объект, субъект и орудие изображения. Сознание и ощущение движения и**

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<sup>60</sup> D. S. Likhachev, 'Poetika khudozhestvennogo vremeni. Poetika khudozhestvennogo prostranstva', in *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971), pp. 209-351 (p. 209).

**изменяемости мира в многообразных формах времени пронизывает собой литературу.] (p. 210)**

Likhachev seeks to demonstrate the variety of *aspects* in which time appears in the literary work. Closely examining these aspects, he comes to the conclusion that there are three principal approaches in the study of the literary work. The first approach deals with the study of *grammatical* time, which, in his opinion, is particularly fruitful in the analysis of lyric poetry. The second approach examines *philosophical* aspects of time: various theories on this subject, the meaning and function of time in art and literature. Likhachev attaches great importance to the *artistic* aspect of time and the way it is *reproduced* in literary works, arguing that for literary scholarship this approach is of particular significance and turns out to be far more productive 'for an understanding of the aesthetic nature of verbal art' [dlia ponimaniia esteticheskoi prirody slovesnogo iskusstva] than, for instance, the study of philosophical conceptions of time:

Artistic time is not a way of looking at the problem of time, but time itself, as it is [...] represented in the literary work. [...] Literary time is a phenomenon of the very fabric of the literary work which subjects to its artistic aims both grammatical time and its philosophical understanding by the writer.

**[Художественное время – это не взгляд на проблему времени, а само время, как оно [...] изображается в литературном произведении. [...] Художественное время – явление самой художественной ткани литературного произведения, подчиняющее своим художественным задачам и грамматическое время и философское его понимание писателем.] (p. 211)**

Hence, all elements of the narrative structure, without exception, turn out to be shot through with time; and on examining the text, this penetration can be found and shown to exist on different levels. Likhachev believes that,

taken as a whole, literature has its own '*principle of relativity*' which takes into account several factors. First of all, literary time, by comparison with objective time, uses a diversity of individual, that is, purely subjective *perceptions* of time. The subjectivity of time's perception explains why narrative time is capable of 'stretching' (tiantut'sia), 'shrinking' (szhimat'sia) or 'running' (bezhat'), an instant can 'come to a stop' (ostanovit'sia) or 'last for ever' (dlit'sia vechno) and a long-term period can 'fly by imperceptibly' (nezametno promel'knut'). Secondly, our perception and interpretation of time in literary work are determined not only by causation of events, but also by their psychological and associative connection, that is, their *correlation*, for 'where there are no events', Likhachev writes, 'there is no time' [gde net sobytii - net vremeni] (p. 213). Hence, he approaches an extremely important and complex issue in the study of literary time: the problem of 'the unity of the temporal stream in a narrative with several plot lines' [edinstva vremennogo potoka v proizvedenii s neskol'kimi siuzhetnymi liniiami] (ibid.) and the understanding of that unity as a flow of *historical time*.

Touching upon the issue of time's *portrayal* in literature, Likhachev argues that this problem is not related to the sphere of grammar as such, for:

Grammatical time and time in the literary work are capable of fundamentally diverging from one another. Time of action, author time and reader time are formed by a totality of many factors, among which grammatical time is only one. [...] Moreover, the divergence of grammar from the artistic idea is, of course, only external: the grammatical time of a literary work in itself often enters the highest order artistic idea, that is, the meta-artistic structure of literary work. Grammar appears as a piece of smalt in the general mosaic of a literary work. The real colour of each piece of this smalt may not be the one that it seems to be in the whole picture.

[Грамматическое время и время словесного произведения могут существенно расходиться. Время действия и время авторское и читательское создаются совокупностью многих факторов: среди них – грамматическим временем только отчасти. [...] Расхождение грамматики с художественным замыслом при этом, конечно, только внешнее: само по себе грамматическое время произведения входит часто в художественный замысел высшего рода – в метахудожественную структуру произведения. Грамматика выступает как кусок смальты в общей мозаичной картине словесного произведения. Главный цвет каждого куска этой смальты может быть совсем не тем, каким он кажется в картине в целом.] (p. 215-16)

Likhachev suggests that every type of art develops one or other aspect of time and has its own forms of flow and duration of time. Thus, literary genres and trends establish their own attitude to time and specific character of time's reproduction and representation. He stresses that contemporary literature is 'shot through with a sense of the world's variability' [pronizana oshchushcheniem izmeniaemosti mira] (p. 219). For in order to understand the peculiarities of contemporary usage of time and its diverse manifestations in literature, it is important to appeal to previous literary tradition and especially to consider old literature and folklore. Because literary time reveals itself in so many different ways and forms, we cannot possibly find two writers who would 'make the same use of time as an artistic tool' [odinakovo pol'zovalis' vremenem kak khudozhestvennym sredstvom] (ibid.). Thus, according to Likhachev, time, in all its manifestations (actual time and represented time, plot time and author time, reader time and performer time, that is, folkloric time) becomes, and should be treated as, a phenomenon of *style*.



## 6. Towards a 'definition' of 'historicity'

As has been shown throughout this chapter, the term 'historical' or 'historicity' has different associations and meanings according to the context in which it is used. As also noted earlier, right up to the last two decades of the nineteenth century, history itself was chiefly perceived as an abstract idea except when used to denote a scientific discipline. Here the meaning was clear enough: history emerged as a property of sociology and the historical was in most cases identified with the sociological.

The turn of the century and first three decades of the twentieth century saw human thought pushed towards a different understanding of history and historical life: it was regarded as something concrete, a reality aimed first and foremost at *man*. From now onwards the historical was no longer treated as a sphere of the abstract and supra-personal. On the contrary, it was considered in conjunction with many meanings (anthropological, mystical-religious, mythological and artistic) and categories (time, space, the eternal and so forth) which are significant in their own right and which, when taken separately, can form the basis for or serve as links to various areas of human knowledge and activity: the natural sciences, especially physics and biology, psychology, philosophy, verbal and fine art. Nevertheless, the historical, signifying something primarily concerned with man's existence and experience, does not have a long history.

In the light of the preceding, the question inevitably arises: is there any working definition of this notion by which we can establish or perhaps even compare the extent of the historicity of any given artist? At this stage of the

study I find myself unable to propose any straightforward or even provisional definition of historicity. One of the reasons for this is the risk of misinterpretation associated with the purpose and meaning of the word 'definition', that is, stating the precise nature, marking out limits and declaring degrees of distinctiveness of any term, especially one which, as in this case, has hardly been approached. Nor can I be sure that in the end I shall not have to face the same inability to define what forms the realm and meaning of the historical, not to mention an understanding of all its possible implications. But it is part of my thesis to come as close as possible to finding the context where this notion truly belongs or, more exactly, to uncover the message that the Russian humanities was determined to deliver in the 1920s and early 1930s. It is also my intention, however ambitious it may sound, to rescue the notion of historicity, which was misused and at times simply abused by the vulgar Soviet Marxist scholarship that dominated the Russian humanities from the mid 1930s until the late 1980s, in which anthropology was, along with the issue of the historical, either utterly ignored or assigned to the sphere of sociology. Thus, it seems logical to set aside the problem of the formulation of historicity and rely on a more practical and persuasive approach instead. By subjecting the term to constant examination throughout the study, we should finally be able to see what exactly it means and embraces, particularly with a reference to the works of a writer such as Ivan Bunin, who has never been seriously read in this key.

## 7. The problem of Bunin's historicity and literary criticism

Indeed, it is a common assertion of Bunin criticism that Bunin is an ahistorical artist. Even such combinations of words as ‘historical process’, ‘historical life’, ‘historical time’ and so forth are rare in the vocabulary of Bunin scholarship, which is more familiar with expressions and terms such as ‘tragic disposition’, ‘extra-temporal values’, ‘the eternal’, death, ‘unhappy love’ etc. In his survey of Bunin’s work ‘The Path of Bunin the Artist’ [Put’ Bunina – khudozhnika] Oleg Mikhailov (who was a leading expert on Bunin in Soviet and post Soviet scholarship for some time), insists that history is not something that Bunin’s thinking is particularly concerned with. In fact, if anything, the opposite is the case:

The peculiarity of Bunin’s talent is his well-known narrowness, his belonging to the sphere of ‘literature’ proper, estrangement from the publicistic principle and, at the same time, his robustness, primordial faithfulness to himself, independence of ‘fashion’, ‘the street’. All this conditioned the steadfastness and vitality of Bunin’s works in the most difficult conditions, when he found himself cut off from his motherland.

**[Особенность бунинского таланта – его известная узость, его принадлежность к сфере собственно “литературы”, отчужденность от публицистического начала и, одновременно, крепкость, изначальная верность себе, независимость от “моды”, “улицы”, – все это обусловило стойкость и жизнеспособность творчества Бунина в труднейших условиях, когда он оказался за бортом родины.]<sup>61</sup>**

Mikhailov’s assertion is crucial here because it illustrates a widespread view in Soviet scholarship, with its strong insistence on the primacy of the sociological

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<sup>61</sup> O. N. Mikhailov, ‘Put’ Bunina-khudozhnika, in *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 84, pt. 1 (*Ivan Alekseevich Bunin*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp. 7-56 (p. 36).

over other approaches based on the tendency to interpret historicity in terms of the historical method, reducing, as a result, the understanding of the historical in art to a direct and pure portrayal of historical events.<sup>62</sup>

In his monograph of 1977, *Na rubezhe vekov: O russkoi literature kontsa XIX-nachala XXv.* [At the Turn of the Century: On Russian Literature of the Late 19<sup>th</sup>-Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century], Lev Dolgoplov takes the discussion of the issue of Bunin and history significantly further. Focusing primarily on the aesthetic aspect of the category of the historical, he argues that by looking at Bunin's work only from the position of his direct response to the problems of the current social situation or his association with the literary-philosophical movements of the early twentieth century, it is no surprise that an explicit link to history cannot be found:

It is striking that in the extensive correspondence with N. Teleshov, encompassing more than one decade and numbering 250 letters, not a single problem of any significance connected with the social or literary state of the age was touched upon. There is no movement here, no history.

**[Поразительно, в обширнейшей переписке с Н. Телешовым, охватывающей не одно десятилетие и насчитывающей 250 писем, не затронуто ни одной сколько-нибудь значительной проблемы, связанной с общественным или литературным состоянием эпохи. Здесь нет движения, нет истории.]<sup>63</sup>**

But this alone is not sufficient, in Dolgoplov's view, to justify describing Bunin as an ahistorical artist. The explanation for his ahistoricity

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, L. V. Krutikova, 'Na kraiu sveta – pervyi sbornik rasskazov I. A. Bunina', *Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta*, 20 (1961), 77-88. See also I. D. Bazhinov, *Dooktiabr'skaia proza Bunina* (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk Ukrainskoi SSR, 1963), p. 6; and N. M. Kucherovskii, 'Esteticheskaia sushchnost' filosofskikh iskanii I. A. Bunina (1906-1911 gg)', *Filologicheskie nauki*, 6 (1969), 25-35 (p. 28).

<sup>63</sup> Lev Dolgoplov, *Na rubezhe vekov: O russkoi literature kontsa XIX-nachala XX v.* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1977), p. 285.

lies in Bunin's attitude to the epoch he chronologically belonged to, which was unlike that of Blok or Gor'kii, for whom the contemporary situation manifested itself as a 'process happening before our very eyes' (ibid.). According to Dolgoplov, Bunin, although he lived at a turning point in historical epochs, did not recognize its crisis, its 'hidden and overt tragedy' (ibid.). Even literature, which was essentially 'the product and reflection of this break' with all 'the totality of its peculiarities and contradictions', proved to be absolutely 'alien' to Bunin (p. 299). This alone made Dolgoplov conclude that in Bunin we are dealing with a writer who completely 'fell out' ('vypal') of historical time. And furthermore:

Brought to the idea of the world was socially deeply disturbed by the very process of Russia's historical development (to which idea Bunin's artistic single-mindedness, in its turn, helped him), he, nevertheless, as early as in his works of the 1910's, strives to take the contradictions of reality beyond the framework of social and historical limitations. He is both profoundly historical in his narratives and stories of this period and at the same time patently ahistorical: he is in these years a writer who perceives the slightest of changes in social life with extreme sensitivity and wariness, but immediately seeks to take them beyond the bounds of historical time, elevating them to the level of the extra-temporal and the universally human.

**[Приводимый самим ходом исторического развития России к мысли о глубочайшем социальном неблагополучии мира (чему, в свою очередь, способствовала художественная пристальность Бунина), он, однако, уже здесь, в произведениях 1910-х годов, стремится вывести противоречия действительности за рамки социальных и исторических ограничений. Он и глубоко историчен в повестях и рассказах этого периода, и столь же наглядно неисторичен: он в эти годы писатель, чрезвычайно чутко и настороженно воспринимающий малейшие изменения в общественной жизни, но тут же стремящийся вывести их за пределы исторического**

времени, возвести в степень вневременного и общечеловеческого.] (299-300).

Thus, stressing that Bunin's attitude to history is of a profound and complex nature, Dolgoplov maintains that, on the whole, it is nevertheless thoroughly 'ahistorical',<sup>64</sup> associating, quite contradictorily, the significance and understanding of eternal human values only with the ahistorical and timeless position of the artist. Furthermore, despite some valuable comparisons and remarks on Bunin's literary views, Dolgoplov does not recognize what is surely the real reason for Bunin's alienation from the current literary and political debate. In his perception of reality Bunin proceeded from entirely different principles, which he described in an interview with the newspaper *The New Life* [Novaia zhizn'] in 1917:

The aim of the artist is not to justify some task but to reflect life profoundly and essentially... The artist must proceed not from external data but from life's depths, life's soil, paying heed not to the noise of party regulations and debates but to the inner voices of a living life that speak of the layers and extraneous features in life which are created against all wishes, in accordance with the indisputable laws of life itself.

[Цель художника - не оправдание какого-либо задания, а углублённое и сущностное отражение жизни... Художник должен исходить не из внешних данных, а из глубин жизни, из почвы жизни, прислушиваясь не к шуму партийных положений и споров, а к внутренним голосам живой жизни, говорящим о пластах и наслоениях в ней, созданных вопреки всем хотениям, по непреложным законам самой жизни.]<sup>65</sup>

Clearly, for Bunin's artistic thinking the social, in all its possible manifestations, was never a point of departure, but represented, above all, an

<sup>64</sup> A similar view is taken by V. Ia. Linkov in his book *Mir i chelovek v tvorchestve L. Tolstogo i I. Bunina* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1989), pp. 122-27; 172.

inert and genuinely immobile background. The peculiarity of Bunin's response to social problems, as Colin Wood rightly maintains,

[...] was always to look behind them to the deeper perturbations of the human spirit which have troubled men in every age but perhaps never so acutely, or with such repercussions on literary form, as in the modern.<sup>66</sup>

Dmitrii Likhachev was the first scholar to speak of the notion of historicity in relation to Bunin's work. In his *Poetics of Old Russian Literature* Likhachev, discussing the issue of artistic perception and representation of historical time in literary work, expresses the view that a heightened sensibility to history lies at the basis of Bunin's literary thinking. For him, Bunin, perhaps like no other Russian artist in this century, is a writer who is utterly and completely absorbed by an interest in history, which, moreover, receives its most acute manifestation in the works written in emigration.<sup>67</sup> Although this remark of Likhachev's remained unnoticed in Soviet and Western critical circles alike (which is in itself surprising since the problem of historicity has never really been considered to be an issue with reference to Bunin's writings),<sup>68</sup> it certainly deserves further consideration. Firstly, because of its immediate relevance to the subject of the present study. Secondly, it serves as a crucial link to the discussion of the sources, nature and quality of Bunin's historicity.

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<sup>65</sup> *Novaia zhizn'*, 1 February (?) 1917, p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> C. Wood, 'The Modernity of Ivan Bunin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bradford, 1996), p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> Likhachev, *Poetika*, 217-18.

<sup>68</sup> Having stated this, I intentionally excluded from the discussion at this point D. J. Richards' article 'Bunin's Conception of the Meaning of Life', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 119 (1972), 153-72. Although at the beginning Richards indicates that Bunin is 'concerned' with both personal and supra-personal questions (among which is the question of history), the rest of the article primarily

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focuses on exploring the nature of Bunin's approach to these questions which, as he describes it, 'is not that of a philosopher' but that of 'a lyric poet' (p. 155).



## **Part Two**

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Sacred Time of History:

#### *The Shadow of the Bird.*

Золотое руно, где же ты, золотое руно?  
 Всю дорогу шумели морские тяжелые волны,  
 И, покинув корабль, натрудивший в морях полотно,  
 Одиссей возвратился, пространством и временем полный.

Осип Мандельштам, 1917

#### 1.

In his analysis of the forms of interrelation between time and space in the literary work Bakhtin draws particular attention to the chronotopes of *encounter* and *the road* which function as carriers of broad temporal meaning. The road, moreover, emerges here as a symbol of man's eternal, endless search, his wanderings and aspiration to see, understand and be able to describe:

The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road ('the high road'), the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people - representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages - intersect at one spatial and temporal point. People who are normally kept separate by social and spatial distance can accidentally meet; any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide

and interweave with one another... . [...] The chronotope of the road is both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement. Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course: 'the course of life', 'to set out on a new course', 'the course of history' and so on; varied and multi-leveled are the ways in which road is turned into a metaphor, but its fundamental pivot in the flow of time.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, with the help of the road, man begins to realize his temporality and profound connection with Being which, in its turn, endows him with a strong feeling of the necessity, the '*nontriviality*' (*nepustiachnost'*) of his own existence.

Bunin himself and almost all his characters possess a peculiar passion (which sometimes borders on madness) for travelling, an aspiration to survey the world, dissolving themselves in the unexplored journey. This feature of Bunin's literary thinking is probably best explained in the following way: everything of an unknown nature always scares but at the same time remains mysteriously beautiful, open to cognition and self-knowledge. In accordance with this, the journey cannot be simply a change of spatial place or locality. Journeys are first and foremost, as David Richards says with reference to Bunin's philosophy of travel, 'quests for the truth about life, searches for spiritual enlightenment'.<sup>2</sup> The journey is historical in its very essence, that is, has a profound historical character. It turns out to be a significant source of the acquisition of experience based on the idea of the succession of human existence. The journey greatly changes man's life, helping him to establish his attitude toward culture and his own place within it, fortifying him, above all,

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<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', 243-44.

<sup>2</sup> D. J. Richards, 'Comprehending the Beauty of the World: Bunin's Philosophy of Travel', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 129 (1974), 514-32 (p. 525).

with the idea that there is something 'inscrutably divine in man' [nepostizhimo bozhestvennoe v cheloveke] which cannot perish and which is called life.

Departing on a journey to the East, Bunin seeks to find the answer the following questions: how can one enter this world? How should one understand it? Where can one fasten one's eyes in order to appreciate time, history, humanity and its common roots? The result of these reflections was the collection of travel poems *The Shadow of the Bird* (1907-1911), a remarkable account of Bunin's intimate encounters with different Eastern cultures.

## 2. The symbolic and the historical in the *Khozhenie*: the problem of temporal correlation

The author's own designation of the genre of *The Shadow of the Bird* as 'travel poems' (*putevye poemy*) indicates that we are dealing with a variant on the genre of travel notes (*putevye ocherki* or *khozheniia*). *The khozhenie* is an historical genre of religious journeys (travels) which describes the author's pilgrimage to the Holy Land and holy places.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of this literary genre in Russian literature goes back to the historical events that took place in eleventh-century Russia. This was a time when the Russian Orthodox Church started the process of establishing direct links with the countries of the Christian East. Russians, adopting and mastering Christianity and its traditions, wished to see 'with their own eyes' (*voochiiu*) the places mentioned

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on the history of the genre see V. V. Danilov, 'K kharakteristike *Khozheniia igumena Daniila*', in *Trudy Otdela Drevnerusskoi Literatury*, 10 (1954), 92-105. See also the discussion of the specific character and definition of the genre in V. V. Kuskov, '*Khozhenie igumena Daniila*', in *Istoriia drevnerusskoi literatury*, ed. Kuskov, 3rd edn (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1977), pp. 72-75, 163-65.

in the books of Holy Writ in order to become firmly convinced of the Scriptures' fairness and trustworthiness. The founder of this genre in Russian literature was the Father Superior Daniil. In 1106 he undertook a pilgrimage to Palestine, spent sixteen months there and came back to Russia in 1108. The events which took place during Daniil's journey and the period of his stay in Palestine form the basis of the travel notes *Khozhenie igumena Daniila v Sviatuiu zemliu* [Journey of the Father Superior Daniil to the Holy Land], written by Daniil immediately after his return home. The explanations given by Daniil of the purposes of his journey are of particular interest here: Daniil claims that he felt obliged to go because he 'was forced by his thought and impatience' [ponuzhden mysliiu svoeiu i neterpeniem] wishing to see the 'holy city Jerusalem and the Promised Land [sviatyi grad Ierusalim i zemliu obetovannuiu] and also 'for the sake of love for these holy places' [liubve radi sviatykh mest sikh].<sup>4</sup>

The works written in the genre of *Khozhenie* are noteworthy for their detailed description of the holy places, and of the personality of their authors, who see the sense of the journey not in the journey itself but in a true portrayal of the vista, its philosophical-religious investigation and interpretation:<sup>5</sup>

The pilgrim journeys about holy places, which are filled to overflowing with sacred objects and which represent at every step the material and tangible vestiges of memories drawn from the Old and New Testaments. He carries within himself, in his own consciousness, a special atmosphere of devout feelings, thoughts, moods, and concepts, while the world about him, the external environment of the holy land, acts upon the pilgrim's inner world like a powerful resonator, increasing the intensity of all his experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Both worlds, the external and internal,

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<sup>4</sup> *Khozhenie igumena Daniila*, in *Drevniaia russkaia literatura: Khrestomatiia*, ed. N. I. Prokof'ev (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1988), pp. 47-52.

<sup>5</sup> For more information see P. Zabolotskii, 'Legendarnyi i apokrificheskii element v *Khozhenii ig. Daniila*', *Russkii filologicheskii sbornik*, 41 (1899), pt. 1-2, 220-37 and 3-4, 237-73.

flow together into one, and the pilgrim is unable to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. In that environment, he sees and heeds only those things which are in harmony with his inner world; he drinks this all in, and simultaneously, imposes his own personal religious experiences upon everything he sees and hears.<sup>6</sup>

As a rule, the action of travel notes takes place 'under the open sky' (pod odkrytym nebom), in permanent motion, and embraces different time-spaces, countries and cultures. However, the works written in this genre do not provide the reader with any kind of information concerning the preparations for the journey, or its peripeteias, solely because this is not considered to be worthy of attention. What is important here is the author's aspiration to expound, in condensed and at the same time expressive form, real historical events for cognitive and educational ends, to reproduce the original circumstances which he witnessed or in which he was a participant. In this sense travel notes represent a precious historical document, a peculiar programme of transformation and development of one's thought, the living word of an individual of a certain time. The major feature of the literary portrayal here is a true representation of historical life in combination with a legendary-Christian narrative about biblical figures and events.

Bunin transfers the tradition of the *khozhenie* into a narrative device, finding in *The Shadow of the Bird* that specific correlation between symbolic (mythological) and historical elements which allows him, in the light of the symbolic narration (expressed in the body of the text through a direct re-telling of Biblical legends, depiction of characters from Christian and Greek myths and descriptions of sacred objects), to bring into the narrative ancient and contemporary history. The perception of the Christian East in *The Shadow of the Bird* is based on a vision and understanding devoid, in essence, of any

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<sup>6</sup> Nikolai S. Trubetskoi, 'Afanasii Nikitin's *Journey Beyond the Three Seas* as a Work of Literature', in *Reading in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 199-219 (p. 215).

religious exaltation. The whole of Bunin's collection turns out to be a distinctive pilgrim's tale of our time about Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Ceylon and Greece. The poetic hero here is not simply a traveller searching everywhere for the unexpected and inexplicable, but, in Bunin's case, he is, first and foremost, an investigator of the antiquity, which surrounds him. Meeting people of different nationalities and creeds, speaking to them and listening to their languages, he enters an open dialogue with the ancient world and history, thereby gaining cognisance of its hidden sense and harmony. In the opening poem, which has the same title as the book itself, Bunin states the following:

Any long journey is a sacrament, it brings the soul into communion with the infinity of time and space, which is the cradle of mankind. And I shall go to the exit from the temple of history, from the ruins, the most ancient in the world and look into the misty-blue abyss of Myth.

**[Всякий дальний путь – таинство: он приобщает душу к бесконечности времени и пространства, а там – колыбель человечества. И я пойду к выходу из капища истории, – из руин, древнейших в мире, загляну в туманно-голубую бездну Мифа.]<sup>7</sup>**

As was mentioned above, the time of Bunin's travel notes may be classified in the same terms as that of medieval journeys. This experience of time requires one to consider and portray the past as something utterly inseparable from the present. The fullness of mankind's time was achieved by identifying it with historical time. In this sense, time, representing nothing other than the chain of human generations, was enclosed and strongly involved in human life, activity and acts. In accordance with the specific character of

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<sup>7</sup> I. A. Bunin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (9 vols) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1965-67), III (1965), p. 317. Hereafter all subsequent references to Bunin's works are given in the text as volume number followed by page number (e. g. 3:317).

the genre, the peculiarity of perception and the reproduction of time were based on the idea that side by side with terrestrial, mundane time there also existed sacred time. The latter, moreover, was considered to be the only carrier of true reality for the medieval author (man in general). Likhachev, examining closely the factor of time and its functional behaviour in the works of Old Russian literature, comes to the conclusion that in the Middle Ages, in literature in particular, the 'subjective' aspect of time had not been fully recognized. That is why time for the medieval author 'was not a phenomenon of human consciousness' [ne bylo iavleniem soznaniia cheloveka].<sup>8</sup> Aleksander Gurevich points to the fact that the applicability of such notions or categories as 'objective' and 'subjective' (Likhachev's terms) in relation to man's thinking of that epoch is highly doubtful if not inappropriate. Most probably, this opposition, in its very nature, reveals modern attitudes to the world which deliberately create a differentiation between man's internal world (internal time) and external reality (history) existing apart from him. Gurevich seeks to demonstrate that in the Middle Ages man was seen as a 'microcosm', that is, a miniature model, the embodiment of a 'macrocosm', which reproduces the world picture in all its aspects. Subjective and objective categories, moreover, merged with one another, or more accurately, they were not divided yet, and the individual was not represented as an analogue. And precisely because time 'was not a phenomenon of human consciousness', it was 'cosmic', that is, 'objective'. Thus, time in medieval journeys can be defined as historical:

In medieval society the category of mythological sacred time co-existed with the category of mundane secular time, and both of these categories were united in the category of historical time. Historical time is subordinated to sacred time, but not

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<sup>8</sup> Likhachev, *Poetika*, 248.



dissolved in it. Rather, it is correlated with it in such a way that Christian myth gives a criterion for defining historical time and evaluating its meaning.

[В средневековом обществе категория мифологического, сакрального времени сосуществовала с категорией земного, мирского времени, и обе эти категории объединяются в категорию времени исторического. Историческое время подчинено сакральному, но не растворяется в нем, оно скорее соотнесено с ним таким образом, что христианский миф дает своего рода критерий определения исторического времени и оценку его смысла.]<sup>9</sup>

Bunin's literary treatment and interpretation of time in *The Shadow of the Bird* enabled him to remove the opposition established by genre tradition between eternity and time. In his literary thinking these categories become important criteria of 'human consciousness' based on the idea that man's life is realized only in the course of historical time.

### 3.

Why did Asia, and particularly the East, attract Bunin's attention? It needs to be said that in Russian literature the subject of Eastern, especially Indian journeys, became popular from the end of the fifteenth century, after the appearance of *Khozhenie za tri moria* [Journey Beyond the Three Seas] written by the Tver merchant Afanasii Nikitin (placed under the year 1475 in the *Sofiiskaia letopis'* [Sofiiskaia chronicle]). Nikitin undertook this journey to India, crossing the three seas (Caspian, Indian and Black) in 1466-1472, and

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<sup>9</sup> A. Gurevich, 'Chto est' vremia?', *Voprosy literatury*, 11 (1968), 151-74 (p. 157).

he was one of the first Europeans to reach the so-called 'Brahmanists land' (zemlia brakhmanov), known from translated literary works such as *Aleksandriia* [Aleksandriia] and *Skazanie ob Indii bogatoi* [Tale about Wealthy India]. In contrast to the travel notes and pilgrimage literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which describe journeys to the Holy Land, Nikitin's *Journey Beyond the Three Seas* tells of the events of his travels to the pagan land. Moreover, *Journey Beyond the Three Seas* does not pursue a specific religious-didactic purpose: this indicates a profound difference in the author's religious-psychological situation (this subject will be touched upon later). The main motive here has a cognitive nature, because the East, with its centuries-old history and culture, was always considered by travellers and pilgrims to be a realm of human spirit, the mystical ancestral land of mankind. Perhaps this explains Bunin's interest in the East, his intense desire to study Eastern traditions, literature, folklore and art. India, in particular, was always in the centre of Bunin's literary imagination: he referred to it on one occasion as 'the cradle of human religion' (kolybel' chelovecheskoi religii).<sup>10</sup>

In *The Shadow of the Bird* the East emerges as a great historical chronotope, open to the past as well as the future. With a knowledge of the East one can understand not only ancient civilisations but, through the insights of their sages, the fate of contemporary mankind. Bunin sees in the East a certain meaningful unity that, along with its originality, becomes a significant part of the indivisible and difficult process by which human culture comes into being. As a consequence of such a general approach to the problem, we are at the same time dealing with history, philosophy and religion. A similar combination is formed by aesthetic views and spiritual values, which are brought to life by historical experience.

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<sup>10</sup>*Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 84, pt. 1 (*Ivan Alekseevich Bunin*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), p. 363.

For Bunin, any religion, even the private faith of the individual, is a form of self-manifestation, a moral, philosophical and aesthetic position. This shows the hidden, profound difference of Bunin's traveller from the previous literary tradition (works of medieval pilgrimage literature, Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveller* [Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika] (1791-1801) and Goncharov's *Frigate Pallas* [Fregat 'Pallada'] (1855-7)), where the author had a tendency always to place in the centre of the whole narrative his real Motherland (in this case, Russia). The idea of the narrator's strong attachment to a specific locality and space (for example, Afanasii Nikitin is a *Russian merchant* from Tver), formed the basis of both his thinking and understanding of foreign countries, with their cultures and their literary perception and portrayal. The very fact of the existence and presence of such feelings as feelings for the native land was a significant aesthetic category, which defined the author's vision and interpretation of the world and events and, finally, represented man's statement of the epoch to which he belonged. As was noted earlier, for the author of medieval journeys the memory of the journey was, above all else, the memory of a powerful *religious experience*. This was quite vividly reflected in *Journey Beyond the Three Seas*, where Nikitin feels it his duty to write down everything, 'to record these memories for posterity, since in Old Rus, in principle, only what was recorded and clothed in a literary form was religiously valuable, while everything religiously neutral was, in principle, left as a subject - not for written but for oral literature'.<sup>11</sup>

As a rule, all works written in the genre of travel notes are noteworthy for their relatively lyrical exposition (exclamatory sentences are frequent, and addresses to the reader are also encountered), which constitutes a prayer of a

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<sup>11</sup> Trubetskoi, 'Afanasii Nikitin's *Journey*', 215-16. For a broader discussion of this theme see also G. Lenhoff, 'Beyond Three Seas: Afanasii Nikitin's Journey from Orthodoxy to Apostasy', *East European Quarterly*, 13 (1979), 431-47. See also N. I. Prokof'ev, 'Khozhenie za tri moria Afanasiia Nikitina', in *Drevniaia russkaia literatura: Khrestomatiia*, ed. N. I. Prokof'ev (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1988), pp. 216-23.

'poor servant of God' and consists of the traveller's promises on his path, assurances of his love for God and faithfulness to the Homeland. However, at first glance, the beginning of *The Shadow of the Bird* creates the impression of a parody:

... Russia is already three hundred miles away... Ah, I have never felt love for her and probably shall never understand what love for the motherland is, a love that is supposedly inherent in any human heart! I am well aware that it is possible to love one or other life style, that it is possible to devote all one's strength to creating it... But what does the motherland have to do with this? If however, the Russian Revolution worries me more than the Persian one, I can only regret this. And every moment that we feel we are citizens of the Universe, is, indeed, blessed! The sea, too, in which one feels only one power, the power of Neptune, is thrice blessed!

[... Россия уже за триста миль от тебя... Ах, никогда-то я не чувствовал любви к ней и, верно, так и не пойму, что такое любовь к родине, которая будто бы присуща всякому человеческому сердцу! Я хорошо знаю, что можно любить тот или иной уклад жизни, что можно отдать все силы на созидание его... Но при чем тут родина? Если русская революция волнует меня все-таки более, чем персидская, я могу только сожалеть об этом. И воистину благословенно каждое мгновение, когда мы чувствуем себя гражданами вселенной! И трижды благословенно море, в котором чувствуешь только одну власть - власть Нептуна!] (Bunin 3: 314 [428] )

Undoubtedly, there is a hint of irony here. However, Bunin is not directing this irony at the genre, but rather at himself. He pursues a completely different purpose by choosing centres of the Christian East as the destination of his journey. The inalienable attribute and 'spiritual' companion of his wanderings was the book *Tezkirat*, written by 'the most delightful of the previous and the best of the subsequent writers, sheikh Sadi of Shiraz, may his memory be sacred!' [usladitel'neishogo iz pisatelei predshestvovavshikh i luchshego iz

posleduiushchikh, sheikha Saadi Shirazskogo, da budet sviashchenna pamiat' ego] (p. 314). In *The Shadow of the Bird* the traveller does not part with this book during the whole of his travels in the East. He repeatedly refers to the Persian philosopher-poet, frequently punctuating the narrative with fables and parables from *Tezkirat*. Bunin also finds something close to himself in the life story of Sadi who, 'having been born, spent [...] thirty years in the acquisition of knowledge, thirty in travelling and thirty in reflection, contemplation and creativity' [родившись. употребил [...] тридцать лет на приобретение познаний. тридцать на странствования и тридцать на размышления. созерцание и творчество] (ibid.). Later, in 1921, Bunin would write about his own desire to

[...]strongly especially feel not only my own country, but others, not only myself, but other people... I thirst to live, and live not only my present and past life, but also thousands of other people's lives, my contemporaries, and the past of the whole of history, of all mankind with all its countries... My life is a trembling and joyful communion with the eternal and the contemporary, with the near and the distant, with all centuries and countries, with the life of all that has been and is on this earth, which is so beloved by me.

[[...] особенно сильно чувствовать не только свою страну, но и другие, не только самого себя, но и прочих людей... Я жажду жить и живу не только своим настоящим и своей прошлой жизнью, но и тысячами чужих жизней, современными мне и прошлым всей истории, всего человечества со всеми странами его... Жизнь моя – трепетное и радостное причастие к вечному и современному, близкому и далекому, всем векам и странам, жизни всего бывшего и сущего на этой земле, столь любимой мною.]<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 84, pt. 1 (*Ivan Alekseevich Bunin*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp. 384, 386.

Thus, in Bunin's opinion, only an inquisitive look, love and trust in the earth one walks on enable one to accept Being and life in all its fullness:

- How splendid is a life spent surveying the Beauty of the World and leaving behind an apt imprint of your soul!
- I wandered a great deal on the distant shores of the earth...
- I whiled away the days with people of all races and broke off an ear of corn in every field.
- For it is better to go barefoot than in tight shoes, it is better to endure all the misfortunes of the road than to remain at home!
- For every new spring one must choose a new love: friend, last year's calendar is not suited to the new year!

[ - Как прекрасна жизнь, потраченная на то, чтобы обозреть Красоту Мира и оставить по себе чекан души своей!

- Много странствовал я в дальних краях земли...
- Я коротал дни с людьми всех народов и срывал по колоску с каждой нивы.
- Ибо лучше ходить босиком, чем в обуви узкой, лучше терпеть все невзгоды пути, чем сидеть дома!
- Ибо на каждую новую весну нужно выбрать и новую любовь: друг, прошлогодний календарь не годится для нового года!] (Bunin 3:315)

Thus the journey fortifies one with the idea of time's irreversibility, and it follows that human life is finite in its essence and unique. The very process of a human entering into history takes place in the course of constantly moving time. The spiritual state of a person capable of 'tireless wanderings' (neustannye skitaniia) and 'insatiable perception' (nenasytnoe vospriiatie),

provides him with the opportunity to freely see and penetrate through the cover of habitual life, and enables him, above all, to notice things opposed to human experience. Perhaps this offers an explanation of what Bunin understood by what he called the 'anguish of all countries and times' (*toska vsekhn stran i vremen*), that is, the essence of what for him is the inner tragedy of human cognition: every step we take forward overcomes routine, changes our everyday outlook. Discovery of the world is a complex process, which involves expanding and extending the bounds of the familiar. It oversteps the limits of customary knowledge, signifying, in the end, an alteration of this world and of the individual itself. It seems that from *The Shadow of the Bird* onwards the motif of eternal human wanderings about the endless expanses of the earth becomes a major feature of Bunin's literary thinking. This is clearly shown in his novel *Zhizn' Arsen'eva* [The Life of Arsen'ev] and in the collection of short stories *Temnye allei* [Dark Avenues].

#### 4. The specificity of Bunin's treatment of historical material

In order to define the major features and peculiarities of Bunin's vision of historical time and their disclosure in the text of *The Shadow of the Bird*, it is very important to take into account the specific character of Bunin's approach to historical material, which is of an exclusively personal nature. Fedor Stepun, a critic of émigré literature, suggests that this attribute of Bunin's literary thinking is inherent in all his works. Analysing Bunin's poetry, Stepun offers a comparative critique of Bunin's well-known poem

*Venice* and Briusov's *Italy*. He points out that in contrast to Briusov's poem, full of passionate, historic-philosophical temper, everything historic in Bunin's *Venice* begins with slight, almost accidentally noticed trivialities:

I have not been to Venice for eight years // Every time you pass by the station // And  
go onto the pier // The silence of Venice astonishes // You are intoxicated by the sea  
air of the canals //

**[Восемь лет в Венеции я не был...**

**Всякий раз как вокзал минуешь.**

**И на пристань выйдешь: удивляет**

**Тишина Венеции. пьнешь**

**От морского воздуха каналов.]** (Bunin 1: 360)

'And from these trivialities,' writes Stepun, 'he easily and simply rises to the great, the historical, to what Bunin himself calls the "dust of centuries"' [I ot etikh sluchainostei on legko i prosto podymaetsia k velikomu, istoricheskomu, k tomu, chto Bunin sam nazyvaet 'prakhom vekov'].<sup>13</sup>

Bunin applies exactly the same approach to the historical element in *The Shadow of the Bird*. For him, the senses which are of the most importance in communicating and perceiving the world and the space of the East are sight, hearing and smell. For example, in the first moments 'the smell of rotting oranges and dill, mixed with the intoxication of oriental cuisine' [zapakh gniushchikh apel'sinov i ukropa, smeshannyi s chadom vostochnoi kukhni] reminds one of Istanbul; and only then does Turkey begin to impinge on our

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<sup>13</sup> F. A. Stepun, 'I. A. Bunin i russkaia literatura', in I. A. Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (8 vols; 5 vols to date) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1993- ), I (1993), pp. 5-18 (p. 17). This is an introductory article - a reprint of two articles on Bunin's poetry written by Stepun in 1929 and 1951 (first published in *Vozrozhdenie* [Paris]), which were well received by Bunin. See also Stepun's



senses, with all its orchards, tiled roofs, minarets and cypresses. Greece starts 'with a fine steam, full of brightness, moist air, blue-lilac sea oil and green-violet mountains' [s tonkogo, polnogo bleska para, vlazhnogo vozdukha, sine-lilovogo masla moria i zeleno-sirenevykh gor]. The silhouette of Athens strikes and 'dazzles one with its bright ribbon of sky, which streams above the street corridor with its white carriage way and dusty cypresses stretched out between the houses' [oslepliaet iarkoi lentoi neba, l'iushcheisia nad koridorom ulitsy s beloii mostovoi i zapylennymi kiparisami, vytianuvshimisia mezhdu domami] (Bunin 3:337).

Bunin deliberately draws together the spatial layers of the narrative: in his view this is the only way to experience antiquity, its simplicity and beauty. The feeling is evoked in Bunin's traveller that everything that he sees during the journey he has, somehow, seen before. He begins to distinguish and understand the hitherto mysterious and unknown to him 'deafening din of the East, mixed with the shout of a woman offering to milk a goat and, for a farthing, give some "sweet milk" to anyone who so desires. And all the olden times of Saracenian Cairo are drowned in the Arabian antiquity of this shout' [Оглушительный гам Востока, перемешанный с криком женщины, предлагающей подонтъ козу и за грош напоить "сладким молоком" всякого желающего. И вся старина сарацинского Каира тонет в аравийской древности этого крика] (p. 349).

Stepun's appraisal of Bunin's prose is of particular interest in this case. He speaks of Bunin's literary ability to 'contemplate the world with intelligent

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analysis of the following 'historical' poems: *Stambul* (1905), *Ierusalim* (1907), *Khram Solntsa* (1907), *Malaiskaia pesnia* (1916), *Sviatoi Prokopii* (1916), *Kniaz' Vseslav* (1916).

eyes' [sozertsat' mir umnymi glazami].<sup>14</sup> For Stepun, Bunin is an artist who thinks primarily with his eyes, that is, *visually*:

Bunin has extremely sharp vision; he is gifted not only with eagle eyes for the daytime, but owl's eyes for the night. He truly *sees* everything... All his works, indeed, are first and foremost descriptions of the world, people, events; slow, detailed, thorough, infinitely perfect, but at first glance apparently external. [...] He does not teach the world perfection but perfects it with his art, does not set it upon the true path but verily transfigures it. Moreover, Bunin accomplishes this transfiguration like a true artist, wholly imperceptibly, lightly touching things with his hands, without any forcible interference in the world, without arbitrary destruction of its forms, without arbitrary re-design. In all Bunin's writings the world which appears before us is both thoroughly familiar and yet unrecognisable, entirely external and yet infinitely profound.

[У Бунина же зрение предельно обострено: ему отпущены не только орлиные глаза для дня, но и совиные для ночи. Поистине он все *ВИДИТ*... И действительно, все его вещи – прежде всего описания: мира, людей, событий: медленные, подробные, тщательные, бесконечно совершенные, но на первый взгляд как будто внешние. [...] Он не учит мир совершенству, а усовершенствует его своим искусством, не наставляет его на путь истинный, а вопреки преобразует его. Причем преобразование это совершается Буниным, как настоящим художником, совсем незаметно, легким положением рук на вещи, без всякого насильнического вмешательства в мир, без самовольного разгрома его форм, без самовольного переоформления. Во всех писаниях Бунина перед нами предстает мир, до конца знакомый и все же неузнаваемый, совершенно внешний и все же бесконечно глубокий.] (Ibid.)

At this point is useful to recall Bakhtin's conception of *chronotopic imagination*, and in particular his appraisal of Goethe. Discussing the issue of

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<sup>14</sup> F. A. Stepun, 'Ivan Bunin', in *Vstrechi* (Munich: Tovarishchestvo zarubezhnykh pisatelei, 1962),

time and space in Goethe's works, Bakhtin frequently uses the term *chronotopic imagination* to denote perceiving and interpreting the world as an ongoing or *emerging event*. He considers that Goethe had such an understanding, hence he had a *truly* chronotopic imagination which enabled him 'to see time' and 'to read time in the spatial whole of the world'.<sup>15</sup> To see time requires first and foremost seeing '*heterochrony*' (*raznovremennost'*); to read time, according to Bakhtin, means to show how time runs through and enriches the world. On the other hand he speaks of Goethe's ability

to perceive the filling of space not as immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event - this is the ability to read in everything *signs that show time in its course*, beginning with nature and ending with human customs and ideas (all the way to abstract concepts). (Ibid.)

Bakhtin also emphasizes that 'Goethe attached great significance to the *art of the eye*' and that 'his understanding of this art was extremely broad and deep' (p. 27). In this sense he considers *visibility* to be an exceptionally important aspect of Goethe's literary thinking, where:

All other external feelings, internal experiences, reflection, and abstract concepts are joined together around the *seeing eye* as a centre... . For him visibility was not only the first, but also the last authority, when the visible was already enriched and saturated with all the complexity of thought and cognition. (Ibid.)

Bakhtin describes Goethe as 'one of the high points of visualising of historical time in world literature' (p. 26), a writer who, moreover, 'searches for and finds primarily the visible moments of *historical time*' (p. 32).

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pp. 87-102 (repr. in Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, III (1994), pp. 5-18 (p. 10)).

<sup>15</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)' [1936-38 (1975)], in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed.

As noted earlier, Stepun is fascinated with this feature of Bunin's literary thinking. Furthermore, he links this artistic sharp-sightedness, which lies at the basis of Bunin's artistic imagination, with Bunin's reading and understanding of Goethe:

Bunin loves and values Goethe higher than almost anything else. The words from the first section of *Maxims and Reflections* are the best definition of Bunin's creative work: 'The artist is always a portrayalist. The highest form of representation is that which is capable of successfully competing with reality, that is, endowing of things with spirit in a way that makes them absolutely alive for all of us. Art, at its peaks, always *seems* completely external. The more it plunges inside, the closer it is to falling'.

[Бунин любит и ценит чуть ли не выше всего Гете. Слова первого отдела *Максим и рефлексий* являются лучшим определением бунинского творчества: "Художник всегда изобразитель. Высшая форма изображения та, что способна на успешное соревнование с действительностью, т.е. на такое одухотворение вещей, которое делает их для всех нас абсолютно живыми. На своих вершинах искусство всегда *кажется* совершенно внешним. Чем больше оно погружается вовнутрь, тем оно ближе к падению"].<sup>16</sup>

Bunin's traveller, in his observations of 'The Beauty of the World' ('Krasota Mira'), begins to see and distinguish traces and signs of historical time almost everywhere he treads. For him, the whole space of the East, with its legendary past, people and nature, is profoundly saturated with historical time, where different epochs and ages do not simply indicate certain periods. They exist and function in history as creative, structurally significant and repeatable cultural images and mythologies. In Bunin's view, it is only thanks

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Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, tr. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 10-60 (p. 25).

to them that one can both vividly feel the 'fall into the depth of times' (padenie v glub' vremen) and touch the heart of antiquity, and this helps one to understand what the future bears with it and how it is associated with the past and present. Thus, Bunin's traveller attaches great significance to the search for a connecting link between the times, especially between past and contemporary life. He is overcome by doubts about the hopes placed on the East, to which, for Bunin, the future of humanity belongs. One important moment should be mentioned in connection with this. Initially, Bunin wanted to call the collection *Fields of the Dead* [Polia Mertvykh], in an attempt to express through the book's title his own misgivings and fear concerning the question of the past. The past, as he sees it, has lost its eternal, God-given creative nature in the present and for the present. That is why contemporary Turkey appears to be a country of ruins and cemeteries, with decrepitude and desolation reigning everywhere. A sepulchral cold is in the air of Palestine, 'the land of ancient barbarians and the earthly days of Christ' [zemli drevnikh varvarov i zemnykh dnei Khrista] (Bunin 3:336). And if 'in The Old Testament Judea was still a part of the historical world, in The New Testament it became a waste land, sown with bones, which could only compare with the Field of the Dead in Ezekiel's nightmare' [v Vetkhom zavete Iudeia vse zhe byla chast'iu istoricheskogo mira, to v Novom ona stala takoi pustosh'iu, zaseiannoii kostiami, chto mogla sravnit'sia lish s Polem Mertvykh v strashnom sne Iezekiilia] (p. 367). Hence, the East turns out to be an unbroken 'field of the dead' with the link between times (an essential component in the process of historical development) broken. What made Bunin give up the

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<sup>16</sup> Stepun, 'Ivan Bunin', 10-11.

original idea of calling the book *Fields of the Dead* and turn instead to the ancient oriental legend of the *Khumai Bird* (*Ptitsa Khumai*)?

Who knows what the Khumai Bird is? Saadi says of it: 'No one would thirst for the shelter of the owl's shadow even if the Khumai Bird did not exist in the world!' Saadi's commentators explain that it is a legendary bird and that its shadow brings to anything on which it falls supremacy and immortality.

[Кто знает, что такое птица Хумай? О ней говорит Саади: "Нет жаждущих приюта под тенью совы, хотя бы птица Хумай и не существовала на свете!" И комментаторы Саади поясняют, что это - легендарная птица и что тень ее приносит всему, на что она падает, царственность и бессмертие.] (p. 331)

To illustrate this idea it is perhaps worth recalling Pasternak's words from *Safe Conduct* [*Okhrannaia gramota*] about the role of legend in the history of culture. He expresses the view that anything created by man is vital, not when it is binding but when it is receptive to all assimilations which the 'outgoing centuries look back on' [*ogliadyvaiutsia iskhodiashchie veka*]. Furthermore:

I understood that, for example, the Bible is not so much a book with a solid text as a mankind's notebook. [...] I understood that the history of culture is a chain of illustrated equations, connecting in pairs one after the other unknown and known qualities, while this well-known, constant for the whole of mankind, is a legend which lies at the foundation of tradition, while the unknown, new every time, is an actual moment of the current culture. [...] I loved the living essence of historical symbolism, in other words, that instinct, with the help of which we, like swallows, built the world, an enormous nest, woven from the earth and sky, from life and death, and from two times - the present and the absent. I understood that it is prevented from collapsing by the power of accumulation, enclosed in the pervasive imagery of all its particles.

[Я понял, что, к примеру, Библия есть не столько книга с твердым текстом, сколько записная тетрадь человечества. [...] Я понял, что история культуры есть цепь уравнений в образах, попарно связывающих очередное неизвестное с известным, причем этим известным, постоянным для всего рода, является легенда, заложенная в основании традиции, неизвестным же, каждый раз новым – актуальный момент текущей культуры. [...] Я любил живую суть исторической символики, иначе говоря, тот инстинкт, с помощью которого мы, как ласточки саланганы, построили мир, – огромное гнездо, сплетенное из земли и неба, жизни и смерти и двух времен, наличного и отсутствующего. Я понимал, что ему мешают развалиться сила сцепления, заключающаяся в сквозной образности всех его частиц.]<sup>17</sup>

Pasternak's appraisal of human culture helps us to clarify Bunin's attitude toward the problem of the interaction between times in history. In *The Shadow of the Bird* Bunin attempts to show that the idea of human history's development remains crucial for all legends and religious mythologies. And only thanks to their existence can one feel a profound inner connection between previous epochs and times, the continuity of mankind's spiritual development in general. Bunin sees the figurative embodiment of the dream of 'divine discoveries in the name of humanity' [bozhestvennye otkrytiia vo imia roda liudskogo] in ancient Oriental beliefs and doctrines, Christianity and Islam. In the beginning, all Eastern countries were created by space, for instance, Greece by the sea, Egypt by the sun, Africa and Palestine by the desert and sky. In this Bunin sees the mysterious power of the East, the power of its originality. The space of the East is penetrated throughout by time, which is creative in its very essence and consolidated in people, nature and

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<sup>17</sup> Boris Pasternak, *Okhrannaia gramota*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (5 vols) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989-91), IV (1991), pp.149-240 (p. 208).

folklore. Bunin asserts this several times in the text, taking it as serious proof of his own thoughts about the East, which, he believes, contains great opportunities for the future, the grain of revival capable of giving rise to a new, full and intensive life. And its manifestation in the present alone guarantees the future. Perhaps this is precisely what lies at the basis of Bunin's sense of time in *The Shadow of the Bird*; for him, historical time is, indeed, all. The idea of man's historical existence forming the basis of Being finally defines Being as a unique phenomenon, an open and, in Bakhtin's term, 'emerging' Event. Hence the line of historical development can never be broken. It is an ongoing process which is, as M. I. Kagan describes it in his work *On the Course of History* [O khode istorii], 'open to constantly renewed opportunities' [otkryti dlia postoianno obnovliaiushchikhsia vozmozhnostei] and outside which 'historical Being' itself (istoricheskoe bytie) is simply 'unthinkable' (nemyslimo).<sup>18</sup> 'In reality', concludes Kagan, 'history is always beginning' [Real'no - istoriia nachinaetsia vseгда] (ibid.).

The East represents for Bunin an irrational principle, the very place which is covered with the shadow of the legendary Khumai Bird. He calls the East 'Temple of the Sun' ('Khram Solntsa'): after all, it is no accident that all the famous temples of the East were devoted to the Sun, a source of light and the symbol of eternal life and of world harmony. In honour of the Sun, monk-dervishes perform their 'excruciating-delightful' (muchitel'no-sladostnyi) dance, 'Mysteries of Whirling Dervishes' ('Misterii Kruzhashchikhsia Dervishei'), the origin of which brings us to the very origins of mankind. This

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted from Iu. M. Kagan, 'Liudi ne nashego vremeni', in *Bakhtinskii sbornik II: Bakhtin mezhdu Rossiei i zapadom*, ed. D. Kuiuindzhich and V. Makhlin (Moscow: n. p., 1992), pp. 87-98 (pp. 94-5).



dance represents a visual blending, complete human dissolution and ‘terrifying and delightful disappearance in God and Eternity’ [strashnoe i sladchaishee ischeznovenie v Boge i Vechnosti], where space ‘seems to swim’ (tochno plyvet) and the ‘misty-blue distant spot of sky draws one into its endlessness’ [tumanno-golubaia dal’neba tianet v beskonechnost’]:

Dervishes’ vortexes derive from the ancient round dances which signified, at first, the vortex of the planets around the Sun and later, the vortex of worlds around the Creator...

But once there were different dervishes.

They were rightfully called poets, saints, and contemplative people. And they were outside legitimized religions, outside states, outside societies.

And I want to say:

Brother dervishes, I am not seeking to trespass against the visible world. Maybe, twisting your word, I am saying that I am looking for ‘intoxication’ in contemplation of the earth, in love of both the earth and freedom, to which I call you too in the face of this immortal, great and in the future universally human city. We will serve the people of the Earth and the God of the Universe - the God, whom I call Beauty, Reason, Love and Life, and who penetrates everything that exists.

Let us be in love with life and make merry.

**[От древнейших хороводов, знаменовавших сперва вихрь планет вокруг солнца, а потом вихрь миров вокруг творца, идут вихри дервишей...**

**Но когда-то были иные дервиши.**

**Они по праву носили имена поэтов, святых, созерцателей. И были они вне узаконенных религий, вне государств, вне обществ.**

**И мне хочется сказать:**

**Братья дервиши, я не ищущу согрешения от видимого мира. Может быть, искажая ваше слово, я говорю, что ищущу “опьянения” в созерцании земли, в любви к ней и свободе, к которой призываю и вас перед лицом**

**этого бессмертного, великого, в будущем - общечеловеческого города.  
Будем служить людям земли и богу вселенной, - богу, которого я называю  
Красотою, Разумом, Любовью, Жизнью и который проникает все сущее.**

**Да пребудем в любви к жизни и в веселии.] (Bunin 3:332-3 [435])**

Looking at the dervishes' dance, Bunin's traveller comes to the conclusion that the East will be the very place that history will need, not only because this is the point of intersection of almost all ancient religions and civilisations (which are, indeed, very important for an understanding of the current state of contemporary mankind and its future development), but even more importantly, because the East owns the gift of Being which man does not possess. The East turns out to be a unique unity which exists between and in time and enables one to directly feel eternity in terms of God and the Universe. This feeling rises in Bunin's traveller from some great cosmic sensation that makes him feel and think of himself as a cosmopolitan, a 'citizen' of the world – the world of communication and interaction of cultures. This, above all, is the starting point of Bunin's conception of God as neither Christian nor Hindu, Buddhist nor Mohammedan. In his understanding, God is primitive and nameless, the same for all people - Beauty, Reason, Love and Life. Bunin thus believes that people will find salvation in cosmopolitanism, which was inherent in ancient man. They will be full of that passionate, 'all-conquering' (vsepokoriaiushchei) faith, incomparable in its strength and simplicity, which is rooted in a belief in Christ, Mohammed and Buddha, and does not require 'gold, brocade, diamonds and organs'. Describing the Galata embankment in Constantinople, which had a reputation for being the 'cesspit' (pomoinaia iama) of Europe and therefore comparable perhaps only with Babylon or Sodom, Bunin says:

But Galata does not perish; the riffraff inhabiting it work zealously. They are poverty-stricken and desperately thirst for life. Without realising it themselves, they are raising a new tower of Babel - and are not afraid of the confusion of tongues; a new language is already coming into being in Galata - the language of labour, an unprecedented tolerance is arising towards all languages, all customs, all beliefs...

And only in Galata's houses does there exist that which is not to be found anywhere else in the world: one may find that a quarter of a house belongs to an Armenian, a quarter to a Greek, a quarter to a Romanian and a quarter to a man of completely unknown origin. In coffee-houses, hairdressers', offices and shops portraits of sovereigns from every country on earth often hang together - and Galata does not feel even the slightest respect for any of these sovereigns! It is possible to be a monarchist, an anarchist or a republican - it matters not to anyone in Galata. It is possible to be a heathen, a Christian, a worshipper of the devil or of a prophet - this too is of no concern to anyone... And Galata writes its signboards simultaneously in almost all languages and dialects of Europe and Asia! And I joyfully lose myself in the crush of a warm dark southern evening, in the exciting atmosphere of the crowd, which seizes the soul and body with the hot breath of life and draws one to merge with the life of the whole world. I am intoxicated by the sweet consciousness that I too am in this new Sodom and am free, as only a man in Galata can be free.

**[Но Галата не гибнет: сброд, населяющий ее, кипит в работе. Он нищ и бешено жаждет жизни. Сам того не сознавая, он создает новую вавилонскую башню - и не боится смешения языков: в Галате уже нарождается новый язык - язык труда, нарождается беспримерная терпимость ко всем языкам, ко всем обычаям, ко всем верам... И только в домах Галаты существует то, чего нет нигде в мире: бывает, что четверть дома принадлежит армянину, четверть - греку, четверть - румыну, четверть - человеку совершенно неизвестного происхождения. В кофейнях, в парикмахерских, в конторах, в магазинах зачастую висят рядом портреты властителей всех стран земли - и ни к одному-то из этих властителей Галата... не чувствует ни даже малейшего почтения! Можно быть монархистом, анархистом, республиканцем - до этого в Галате нет никому никакого дела... Можно быть язычником, христианином, поклонником**

дьявола или пророка – это тоже никого не касается... И дружно, чуть ли не на всех языках и наречиях Европы и Азии, пишет свои вывески Галата!... И я с наслаждением теряюсь в этой толкотне теплого и темного южного вечера, в той возбуждающей атмосфере толпы, которая охватывает душу и тело горячим веянием жизни и тянет к слиянию с жизнью всего мира, я пьянею от сладкого сознания, что и я в этом новом Содоме и свободен так, как может быть свободен человек только в Галате.] (p. 321-2 [431-2])

Hence, Bunin is convinced of the idea that Constantinople, which had already been proclaimed by the Greek chronicles ‘the capital of the earth’ (stolitsa zemli), ‘the Song of Songs’ (Pesnia Pesnei) and ‘the Miracle of Miracles’ (Chudo Chudes), will become the first great cosmopolitan city of the future in history - a ‘city of mixed mankind’ (gorod smeshavshegosia chelovechestva). This is the place where the cultures of the East and West will finally merge and start building the foundation of a new Temple, in place of the deserted temples of Greece, India, Egypt and Palestine. Bunin develops the idea of a cosmic religion, or, to be more precise, a cosmic religious feeling, based on the idea of ‘primitive brotherhood’ (pervobytnoe bratstvo) where ‘everything is in one Creator and one Creator is in everything’:

There are no more slaves, kings, priests, gods, fatherland, death. I am an Egyptian, Jew and Hellene, I am the son of the earth and Spirit. The Spirit revives and links everything that exists.

[Нет более ни рабов, ни царей, ни жрецов, ни богов, ни отечества, ни смерти. Я – египтянин, иудей и эллин, я сын земли и духа. Дух животворит и роднит все сущее.] (p. 339)

At this point Bunin’s traveller is undoubtedly close to the humanist views of Afanasii Nikitin. During his journey beyond the three seas, Nikitin began to feel that, despite all the internal and material differences between his

own Russian Orthodox faith and the alien Moslem and Brahman environment, 'there was still a certain formal parallelism between them, a formal analogy, which he constantly emphasized' and furthermore: 'Every man, Nikitin says, believes according to his own way; there is no need to judge others, but only to look after oneself, to keep the faith, not to fall away from God.'<sup>19</sup> At the end of his journey Nikitin proclaims the equality of all creeds and peoples before God because, after all, God is one; and if any individual or people all together serve the truth, then beliefs only help them in this:

His God was the God who was Creator of the earth and sky, that is, not a Christian God with three persons and not simply a single God with a single person as God is represented in Mohammedanism or Judaism. It was not a single God but a united God, a kind of highest point of intersection of the ideal motives of all people, all nations.

**[Его богом был бог – творец земли и неба, т. е. не христианский бог в трех лицах и не просто один бог в одном лице, каким он представляется в магометанстве или иудаизме. Это был не один бог, а единый бог, некая наивысшая точка пересечения идеальных побуждений всех людей, всех народов.]<sup>20</sup>**

Egypt, with its catacombs and pyramids, confirms Bunin's idea of the inner connectedness of times, the close relationship between generations separated by centuries:

Here I stand and touch the stones, maybe the most ancient among those that people have shaped! Since they were laid, on a similar sultry morning to this, the face of the earth has changed thousands of times. Moses was born only twenty centuries after this morning. Forty centuries later Jesus came to the shore of the Tiberian sea... But

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<sup>19</sup> Trubetskoi, 'Afanasii Nikitin's *Journey*', 216-17.

centuries disappear, millennia, - and now my hand fraternally unites with the blue-grey hand of the Arabian prisoner who laid these stones...

[Вот я стою и касаюсь камней, может быть, самых древних из тех, что вытесали люди! С тех пор как их клали в такое же знойное утро, как и нынче, тысячи раз изменялось лицо земли. Только через двадцать веков после этого утра родился Моисей. Через сорок - пришел на берег Тиверналского моря Иисус... Но исчезают века, тысячелетия, - и вот, братски соединяется моя рука с сизой рукой аравийского пленника, клавшего эти камни...] (Bunin 3: 335).

Since Egypt has, from time immemorial, been considered the 'concluding stage of history' (posledniaia stupen' istorii), then it should have the answer to the question which so worries Bunin: Is the existing decline transient? After all, nothing, in essence, remained of the 'Country of Sun and Life' ('Strana Solntsa i Zhizni'), that is Egypt, except stones, ruins and mummies. Looking at the Sphinx, the holiest of holies for Egypt and Egypt's legendary defender against the God of Death, Bunin comes to the conclusion that nothing disappears in history. Everything comes from the 'dust of the past' (prakh proshlogo):

Yes, there is a 'Light of the Zodiac'... It is not yet understood. But the divine sciences of the sky call it the luminescence of the primordial lightbearing matter from which the Sun was spun... Now, by the Sphinx, in the catacombs of the world, the zodiacal light of primitive faith rises... in all its terrifying greatness.

[Есть "Свет Зодиака"... Он еще не разгадан. Но божественная наука о небе называет его свечением первобытного светоносного вещества, из которого склудилось солнце... Теперь, возле Сфинкса, в катакомбах мира, зодиакальный свет первобытной веры встает... во всем своем страшном величии.] (p. 356-7)

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<sup>20</sup> A. I. Klebanov, *Reformatsionnye dvizheniia v Rossii v XIV - pervoi polovine XVI vv.* (Moscow:

Moreover, there will always remain nature, imperishable human daring and cognition. And also (this is perhaps of the utmost importance in Bunin's case) *memory* as a key to the time of history. Stepun describes this peculiarity of Bunin's creative thinking in the following way:

Depth of religious consciousness (the great mystics of all epochs attest to this as one) is always connected with the utmost intensification of memory. Remembering the past, internally knowing the secret of 'eternal memory', it is impossible not to believe in eternity. [...] Nothing so strongly bears witness to the authentic religiosity of Bunin's muse as its connectedness with memory. [...] This [...] thought was formulated by Bunin with near perfect precision in the sonnet *In the Mountains*:

Poetry is not about, absolutely not about what the world calls Poetry// It is about my heritage// The richer I am in it, the more I am a poet.// I say to myself, sensing the dark trace which my forefather perceived in ancient childhood:// There are no different souls in the world and there is no time in it.//.

[Глубина религиозного сознания (об этом согласно свидетельствуют величайшие мистики всех эпох) всегда связана с предельным углублением памяти. Помня прошлое, внутренне зная тайну "вечной памяти", нельзя не верить в вечность. [...] Ничто с такою силою не свидетельствует о подлинной религиозности бунинской музы, как ее связанность с памятью. [...] Эта ... мысль с прекрасной точностью почти что сформулирована Бунинным в сонете, озаглавленном *В горах*:

Поэзия не в том, совсем не в том, что свет

Поэзией зовет. Она в моем наследстве,

Чем я богаче им, тем больше я поэт.

Я говорю себе, почуяв темный след

Того, что пращур мой воспринял в древнем детстве:

- Нет в мире разных душ и времени в нем нет.]<sup>21</sup>

In sum, in Bunin's artistic imagination memory is regarded as a way of entering time and providing the eternal with history. Only thanks to memory does it become possible to displace temporal layers and occurrences: appealing to memory, one first and foremost appeals to historical time and experience. Hence the essence of historical memory for Bunin is in saving images of life from the power of time, for 'time absorbs everything' [vremia vse pogloshchaet]. It 'absorbed' the pagan gods and has already started 'eclipsing with its breathing the countenance of Jesus' [zatmevaet svoim dykhaniem lik Iisusa] (Bunin 3: 341 [437]). By rescuing the past, memory enables it to pass through history, thus endowing it with the quality of temporality, that is, eternity.

Finally, *The Shadow of the Bird* serves as the starting point of Bunin's artistic search for the meaning and sources of the historical as well as an answer to the question of what forms the basis of the profound unity of human life with time, history and culture in general. These problems receive their final solution in *The Life of Arsen'ev* and *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* which will be closely analysed in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>21</sup> Stepun, 'Ivan Bunin', 16 -17.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Genre and History in *The Life of Arsen'ev*.

This is perhaps the central assertion of the modern novel – nothing is simply one thing.

David Lodge, 'The Language of Modernist Fiction:  
Metaphor and Metonymy'

#### 1. 'Inventing a story': human 'things and deeds'

In his monograph of 1977 on Russian literature of the turn of the century Lev Dolgoplov, surveying the general state of Bunin's post-Revolutionary works, expresses the opinion that they do not have any links with time, marking, as he puts it, 'the end of a certain great historical period' [konets kakogo-to bol'shogo istoricheskogo perioda].<sup>1</sup> What does Dolgoplov mean by this? And is it true?

In the short sketch *A Blind Man* [Slepoi] Bunin writes:

We are all, in our essence, good. I walk, breathe, see and feel: I bear life in me, its fullness and joy. What does this mean? It means that I perceive and accept everything that surrounds me, that it is dear, pleasant and kindred to me, that it provokes love in me. Thus life is, undoubtedly, love and goodness and a lessening of love and goodness is always a diminution of life, is already death. And there he is, this blind man, calling me as I pass by: 'Look at me too, feel some love for me too; everything is kindred to you in this world on this wonderful morning, hence, I, too, am kindred to you; and if I am kindred, you cannot be insensitive to my solitude and

helplessness, for my flesh, like the flesh of the whole world, is one with yours, for your sense of life is a sense of love, for any suffering is our common suffering which destroys our common joy of life, that is, our sense of each other and all that exists.'

[Все мы в сущности своей добры. Я иду, дышу, вижу, чувствую, – я несу в себе жизнь, ее полноту и радость. Что это значит? Это значит, что я воспринимаю, премлю все, что окружает меня, что оно мило, приятно, родственно мне, вызывает во мне любовь. Так что жизнь есть, несомненно, любовь, доброта, и уменьшение любви, доброты есть всегда уменьшение жизни, есть уже смерть. И вот он, этот слепой, зовет меня, когда я прохожу: "Взгляни и на меня, почувствуй любовь и ко мне; тебе все родственно в этом мире в это прекрасное утро, – значит, родствен и я; а раз родствен, ты не можешь быть бесчувствен к моему одиночеству и моей беспомощности, ибо моя плоть, как и плоть всего мира, едина с твоей, ибо твое ощущение жизни есть ощущение любви, ибо всякое страдание есть наше общее страдание, нарушающее нашу общую радость жизни, то есть ощущение друг друга и всего сущего!"<sup>2</sup>

Many studies of Bunin's works written in the mid and late 1920s note a gradual strengthening of the late-Tolstoyan motifs of kindness, forgiveness and praise of life and love. The latter in particular, according to Bunin, runs through the whole space of human life, for it is directly linked to the most inexplicable and at the same time simple, natural and very human desire to live and love.<sup>3</sup> As is evident from diary notes of October and November 1921, Bunin often reflects on the specific character of his artistic vision of the world, stressing the incredible complexity associated with the comprehension of truth in passing through life. He writes:

<sup>1</sup> L. K. Dolgopopolov, in *Na rubezhe vekov: O russkoi literature kontsa XIX – nachala XX v.* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1977), p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, IV (1995), p. 424.

<sup>3</sup> See D. J. Richards, 'Bunin's Conception of the Meaning of Life', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 199 (1972), 153-72. The article is an engaging discussion of the specificity of Bunin's quest for the meaning of life throughout his literary career. A stimulating exploration of this issue is offered in James B. Woodward's article 'Eros and Nirvana in the Art of Bunin', *Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970), 576-86. Both these articles also contain valuable remarks on Bunin's prose style.

All my days, as often before, and especially these past few accursed years, which perhaps have already ruined me, there is torment, at times despair, fruitless quests in the imagination and attempts to invent a story. But to what end? Attempts to disdain it and do some new, long ago wished for thing. But there is a shortage of courage, perhaps, or ability, or strength (or, maybe, legitimate artistic grounds?) to begin the book that Flaubert dreamt of, *A Book About Nothing*, without any external connection in which one would unburden oneself, retell *one's own* life, that which one had chanced to see in this world, to feel, to think, to love and to hate.

[Все дни, как и раньше часто и особенно эти последние, проклятые годы, м. б., уже погубившие меня, – мучения, порою отчаяние – бесплодные поиски в воображении, попытки выдумать рассказ, – хотя зачем это? – и попытки пренебречь этим, а сделать что-то новое, давным давно желанное и ни на что не хватает смелости, что-ли, умения, силы ( а м. б. и законных художеств. оснований? ) – начать книгу, о которой мечтал Флобер, “Книгу ни о чем”, без всякой внешней связи, где бы излить свою душу, рассказать свою жизнь, то что довелось видеть в этом мире, чувствовать, думать, любить, ненавидеть.]<sup>4</sup>

Thus Bunin is absorbed by an active quest for a literary form which would make possible, as Vladislav Khodasevich remarked in 1933 in his review of *The Life of Arsen'ev*, ‘the re-making of the world or the creation of a new one that does not arise from any idea, because in itself it is already an idea. The meaning of this world is the world itself. Ideas can be extracted from its images’ [пересоздание мира или создание нового, который не возникает ни из какой идеи, потому что сам по себе уже есть идея. Смысл этого мира – он сам. Из его образов могут быть извлечены идеи].<sup>5</sup> In other words, Bunin and Khodasevich foregrounded a new characteristic of *novelistic form*: its ability to create something within its own internal structure, to construct a

<sup>4</sup> Militsa Grin, *Ustami Buninykh: Dnevnik Ivana Alekseevicha i Very Nikolaevny i drugie arkhivnye materialy*, 3 vols (Frankfurt-am-Main: Posev, 1977-82), II (1981), pp. 66-67.

<sup>5</sup> Vladislav Khodasevich, ‘O “Zhizni Arsen'eva”’, *Vozrozhdenie* [Paris], 22 June 1933.

single imaginary space based not so much on an account of external events as on the author's attempt to understand people and life, bringing together a variety of themes through the form of a novel. It was Bunin's *The Life of Arsen'ev* that became this very 'book about nothing', a book about things sharply noted and vividly felt; a novel of man's awareness of his kinship with everything that lives, feels and moves; a narrative capable of reflecting the actual experience that one goes through whilst discovering the world, feeling oneself to be living in it and finding in its colours, tastes, smells and sounds the vital breath of life, its very possibility.

Working on the text of *The Life of Arsen'ev*, my original intention was to leave out an analysis of genre, believing it to be outside the scope of this study. My aim would have been to deal with the literary sources of the novel, which would eventually bring me to a discussion of a more significant issue: the problem of Bunin's prose style. Subsequently I realized that it is precisely the question of generic distinctiveness that operates as a controlling, central issue, providing not only a clue to the pattern of the novel itself but also serving as an organic link between everything written by Bunin before *The Life of Arsen'ev* and thereafter.

*The Life of Arsen'ev* has become firmly established in literary criticism as an *autobiographical novel* or 'novelized autobiography',<sup>6</sup> although Bunin always tried to avoid such a reductive genre formulation. To begin with, he

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<sup>6</sup> Gleb Struve, 'The Art of Ivan Bunin', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 11 (1932-33), 423-36 (p. 429). Among the scholars who have viewed Bunin's work in relation to the genre of autobiography or autobiographical discourse, see A. G. Colin, 'Ivan Bunin in Retrospect', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 34 (1955), 156-73 (p. 163); S. Kryzyski, *The Works of Ivan Bunin* (The Hague-Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 215; A. F. Zweers, 'Proustian Passages in Ivan Bunin's *The Life of Arsen'ev* in the Context of the Genre of Literary Memoirs', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 30 (1) (1988), 17-33 (p. 18); Andrew B. Wachtel, *The Battle for Childhood: Creation of a Russian Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 178; and Colin Wood, 'The Modernity of Ivan Bunin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bradford, 1996), p. 290.

rarely referred to it as a novel, using the title instead, or simply calling it by the name of its protagonist, 'Arsen'ev'. Soon after the appearance of the final version in 1930, the book received unanimous acclaim from critics and writers alike. In his review of the novel Konstantin Zaitsev states that it represents 'an enormous literary fact, one of those few and rare facts whose appearance should give rise to a sense of pride among his contemporaries' [ogromnyi literaturnyi fakt, odin iz tekh nemnogikh i redchaishikh, poiavlenie kotorykh dolzhno rozhdad' chuvstvo gordosti u sovremennikov].<sup>7</sup> While readily agreeing that the book had brought something fundamentally new into twentieth-century literary practice, commentators on Bunin's work have made no serious attempt to define what they are dealing with or what lies at the basis of the originality of *The Life of Arsen'ev*. Among the few attempts to look into this problem there are, however, some pronouncements which deserve our attention because of their immediate relevance to the preceding.

In 1962 Fedor Stepun, reflecting on Bunin's total literary output, considers Bunin's novel to be a curious blend of 'philosophical poem' and 'symphonic picture' of pre-Revolutionary Russia that was always so close and engaging to Bunin.<sup>8</sup> In his monograph of 1976 Oleg Mikhailov, extending Stepun's formulation, tends to use the term 'lyrical diary' (liricheskii dnevnik) with reference to *The Life of Arsen'ev*, implying the twofold nature of the novel.<sup>9</sup> In his book of 1980 James Woodward shares Mikhailov's view, suggesting, moreover, that the work should be read, for similar reasons, as a

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<sup>7</sup> Konstantin Zaitsev, "'Zhizn' Arsen'eva'", *Rossia i slavianstvo* [Paris], 9 November 1929.

<sup>8</sup> F. A. Stepun, 'Ivan Bunin', in *Vstrechi* (Munich: Tovarishchestvo zarubezhnykh pisatelei, 1962), pp. 87-102 (p. 100).

<sup>9</sup> O. N. Mikhailov, *Strogii talant. Ivan Bunin: Zhizn', sud'ba, tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1976), p. 204.

'lyrical monologue'.<sup>10</sup> One of the consequences of this duality, as the last two scholars maintain, is the difficulty of defining which perspective dominates the narrative, which is both lyrical (subjective) in its general mood and epic (objective) in form because of the scope of its reality.

In his review of Bunin's novel, Khodasevich offered a definition that caused a certain amount of confusion and ultimately halted the search for genre identity or, more exactly, revealed this search as a false direction. Khodasevich proposes that *The Life of Arsen'ev* should be read as a 'fictitious autobiography' (*vymyshlennaia avtobiografiia*) or an 'autobiography of an imaginary person' (*avtobiografiia vymyshlennogo litsa*). He stresses, moreover, the fact that the genre of autobiography is genuinely 'the most simple and the most profound thing that can be shown in art: a direct vision of the world by the artist; not philosophising about what is seen, but the very process of seeing, the process of *intelligent sight*' [самое простое и самое глубокое, что может быть показано в искусстве: прямое виденье мира художником: не умствование о видимом, но самый процесс виденья, процесс умного зренья].<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to decide what Khodasevich's description of the work's genre peculiarities is chiefly based on, but there is something about these words that recalls the view, shared by virtually all scholars, that Bunin, like no other Russian artist, could work with a truly large mass of time and space, especially, a *biographical* one. Speculating further, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it was the dominant tenor of the literature at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, with its epic domestic memoirs, determinedly or even at times obsessively autobiographical in

<sup>10</sup> James Woodward, *Ivan Bunin: A Study of His Fiction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 176.

<sup>11</sup> Vladislav Khodasevich, 'O "Zhizni Arsen'eva"', *Vozrozhdenie* [Paris], 22 June 1933.

character, that led Khodasevich to such a conclusion. And yet even when such works were not openly autobiographical, they would still be intensely and intentionally *personal-lyrical*, containing this prevailing, all-submissive element of the *Self* that persistently and densely imbues the whole narrative.<sup>12</sup> Thus, notwithstanding some observations on the typological ambiguity of *The Life of Arsen'ev*, all other attempts to clarify the issue of the generic distinctiveness of Bunin's novel have been concerned mainly with elucidating its autobiographical basis and how and to what extent it coincides with real-life characters and events.

On the one hand, the title of the book points to the presence of a strong autobiographical element. On the other hand, as indicated in Vera Bunina's diary note dated 21 May 1929, it was precisely the autobiographical aspect that proved to be the most confused moment and presented certain obstacles, not only for Bunin as he worked on *The Life of Arsen'ev*, but also for interpreters of his work. On one occasion, according to Vera Bunina, Bunin expressed regret at entitling the book as he had, for he felt that its title did not entirely correspond to its content:

'You would smile if you knew the stress I have been under for three days, with nothing coming of it. Why did I entitle it *The Life of Arsen'ev*!' 'It is difficult to write, I should have written either an autobiography or something completely different.'

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<sup>12</sup> For a broader discussion of autobiographical discourse (including memoirs and documentary literature), see the collection of essays *Autobiographical Statements in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), edited by Jane Gary Harris. It is significant that this volume is concerned not so much with the classification of the autobiography as with, as Jane Harris stresses in her introductory article 'Diversity of Discourse: Autobiographical Statements in Theory and Praxis', 'introducing the reader to the range of strategies and approaches involving autobiographical discourse and constituting autobiographical statements adopted by Russian writers over the course of the twentieth century' (pp. 3-36 (p. 11)). See also the selected bibliography appended to the collection.

[“Есть чему улыбаться, если бы ты знала, в каком напряжении уже 3 дня, и ничего не выходит. Зачем я озаглавил *Жизнь Арсеньева!*” “Писать трудно, или уже надо было писать автобиографию или совсем другое.”]<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Bunin was very much opposed to the idea of treating his novel as an autobiography, insisting that this was an incorrect approach. In his letter to the editorial staff of the newspaper *Poslednie novosti* [The Latest News] in 1928 Bunin states:

I do not at all want my work (which, whether it is good or bad, nevertheless aspires to be, in its intention and tone, a work of art) to be either distorted, that is, to be called by the inappropriate term autobiography, or to be linked with my life, that is, to be discussed not as *The Life of Arsen'ev* but as the life of Bunin. Perhaps *The Life of Arsen'ev* indeed contains a good deal that is autobiographical, but it is not the business of *literary* criticism to talk about this.

[Я вовсе не хочу, чтобы мое произведение (которое, дурно ли оно или хорошо, претендует быть, по своему замыслу и тону, произведением все-таки художественным) не только искажалось, то есть называлось неподобающим ему именем автобиографии, но и связывалось с моей жизнью, то есть обсуждалось не как *Жизнь Арсеньева*, а как жизнь Бунина. Может быть, в *Жизни Арсеньева* и впрямь есть много автобиографического. Но говорить об этом никак не есть дело критики художественной.]<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the presence both of the word ‘life’ in the title and of an autobiographical element is not sufficient to justify designating the work as autobiography. This was rightly argued by the writer Konstantin Paustovskii, who offers a somewhat different account of the genre of Bunin’s novel, arguing that *The Life of Arsen'ev* is ‘far from autobiography’ (*daleko ne avtobiografiia*) by virtue of the indicators of its genre. And furthermore:

<sup>13</sup> Grin, *Ustami Buninykh*, II, 203.

<sup>14</sup> The text of Bunin’s letter is quoted in full in A. Baboreko, ‘Kommentarii’, in Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, V (1996), pp. 559-90 (p. 565).



It is an ingot formed from all earthly afflictions, charms, reflections and joys. It is an astonishing collection of events from one human life, wanderings, countries, cities and seas... [...] *The Life of Arsen'ev* is one of the most remarkable phenomena in world literature. [...] In this wonderful book poetry and prose have merged together, merged organically, indissolubly, creating a remarkable new genre.

[Это - слиток из всех земных горестей, очарований, размышлений и радостей. Это - удивительный свод событий одной человеческой жизни, скитаний, стран, городов, морей... [...] *Жизнь Арсеньева* - это одно из замечательнейших явлений мировой литературы. [...] В этой удивительной книге поэзия и проза слились воедино, слились органически, неразрывно, создав новый замечательный жанр.]<sup>15</sup>

This new genre, according to Paustovskii, is synthetic in character and is without predecessors in literary tradition.

In Russian literature *The Life of Arsen'ev* could be ranked alongside such works as Gertsen's *Past and Thoughts* [Byloe i dumy], Tolstoi's trilogy *Childhood, Adolescence and Youth* [Detstvo, Otrochestvo, Iunost'] and Aksakov's *A Family Chronicle* [Semeinaia khronika] and *The Childhood Years of Bagrov-Grandson* [Detskie gody Bagrova vnuka]. Moreover, as Oleg Mikhailov suggests, Bunin's novel, along with Aleksei Tolstoi's *The Childhood Years of Nikita* [Detstvo Nikity], in a sense marks the end of a whole cycle of literary autobiographies devoted to the life of the Russian landed gentry.<sup>16</sup> It is significant that when Bunin was writing *The Life of Arsen'ev*, Kuprin wrote his *Cadets* [Iunkera] (1928-32), while Shmelev published *The Pilgrimage* [Bogomol'e] (1931) and began working on *God's*

<sup>15</sup> Konstantin Paustovskii, 'Ivan Bunin', in I. A. Bunin, *Povesti, rasskazy, vospominaniia*, ed. P. L. Viacheslavov (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1961), pp. 3-18 (pp. 13-14).

*Summer* [Leto gospodne] (1933-48): these are novels which have a purely autobiographical, almost documentary grounding, pursuing the reproduction or resurrection of days which, in Mikhailov's words, 'had irrevocably passed away' (bezvozzratno otoshedshie) (ibid.) in order to 'evoke in the memory a bitter-sweet dream of the past – a recollection of childhood and youth' [vyzvat' v pamiati gor'kii i sladkii son proshlogo – vospominaniia detstva i iunosti] (p. 203). Here Mikhailov also makes a crucial remark, one which indicates a new direction for our discussion of the genre of Bunin's novel. He suggests that the place of *The Life of Arsen'ev* is as much inside this group of novels as outside it. Mikhailov's explanation of this similarity lies in the rather traditional assertion that the novel comes out of an elegiac and at the same time nostalgic sense of the past, strengthened by 'a fear of oblivion' (strakh zabveniia) (ibid.). Finding themselves in emigration, and hence feeling cut off from Russia and all that is associated with her, and lacking direct impressions of Russian reality, almost all Russian artists (and Bunin is no exception) respond more or less uniformly by writing literary memoirs, striving to 'animate the past' (odushevit' proshloe) (ibid.) through words, through text. The difference between *The Life of Arsen'ev* and these other works lies, in Mikhailov's view, merely in the *degree* of representation and treatment (transformation) of the biographical material. Mikhailov therefore points out only superficial differences which do not, however, explain the principal peculiarity of Bunin's novel, but rather stress Bunin's artistic skill in using actual events and facts from his own life. Nevertheless, Mikhailov's indication that *The Life of Arsen'ev* 'falls out' (vypadaet) of the list of works

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<sup>16</sup> Mikhailov, *Strogii talant*, 204. See also V. Afanas'ev, *I. A. Bunin: Ocherk tvorchestva* (Moscow:

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<sup>16</sup> Mikhailov, *Strogii talant*, 204. See also V. Afanas'ev, *I. A. Bunin: Ocherk tvorchestva* (Moscow:

written in the genre of literary memoirs itself begs the question: should we look for the source of the peculiar genre of Bunin's book within the framework of nineteenth-century Russian literary tradition (despite the fact that most of the narrative concentrates on showing life and daily occurrences in Central Russia at the end of the last century)?

In 1952 Georgii Adamovich expressed an important view on the generic specificity of Bunin's novel:

However rich the narrative is in national content and however sad at this level it is in tone, the true theme of *Arsen'ev* is a different one. In Bunin the whole world, all life which resists definition, with which Arsen'ev feels kinship, and to which he is tied, is beyond Russia. One could repeat Tiutchev's famous line: 'Everything is in me and I am in everything'. [...] But irrespective of plot, at times even athwart it, in the book there is so much delight in Being, so much gratitude and a kind of indefatigable greed for it that it is impossible not to succumb to its spirit.

[Но как ни богато повествование этим национальным содержанием, как в этой плоскости ни горестно оно по тону, истинная тема *Арсеньева* – иная. За Россией у Бунина – весь мир, вся не поддающаяся определению жизнь, с которой Арсеньев чувствует свое родство и связь. “Все во мне и я во всем”, можно было бы повторить знаменитую тютчевскую строку. [...] Но, независимо от фабулы, порой даже вопреки ей, в книге столько восхищения бытием, признательности за него, какой-то неутомимой жадности к нему, что не поддаться ее духу невозможно.]<sup>17</sup>

As Adamovich aptly remarks, *The Life of Arsen'ev* is shot through with an acutely developed sense of life. And Tiutchev's words are indeed crucial here because they formulate the true theme of Bunin's artistic quest in the

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Prosveshchenie, 1966), pp. 323-24.

novel: discovery and portrayal of the sensual image of the world. Furthermore, what emerges from this discussion is that the designation of the generic specificity of the novel is deeply rooted in an understanding of the original idea on which *The Life of Arsen'ev* is based: for Bunin, the world never exists as a static, motionless state. And man can never possess all possible, ultimate knowledge about the world. Rather he approaches it as an enigma, as a developing and moving Event. The whole problem of existence and cognition in the novel is closely associated with new, broadened perceptions and senses. For, according to Bunin, we are made of impressions, and are made raw by our senses, among which the most powerful is 'a sense of our wellspring' (*chuvstvo svoego istoka*),<sup>18</sup> expressed in the aspiration to recognize ourselves, to learn who we are and what is, in Mandel'shtam's words, our 'place in the Universe' ('*mesto vo Vselennoi*')<sup>19</sup>. In his early drafts of the opening of the novel Bunin writes:

Life, perhaps, is given to us only so that we can compete with death; man struggles against death even from beyond the grave: it takes away his name, he writes it on a cross, or on a stone. It wants to shroud in darkness what he has lived through, but he tries to revive it in the word.

**[Жизнь, может быть, дается нам единственно для состязания со смертью. человек даже из-за гроба борется с ней: она отнимает от него имя – он**

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<sup>17</sup> G. V. Adamovich, "Zhizn' Arsen'eva" [1952], repr. in Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, V (1996), pp. 5-13 (pp. 6; 8).

<sup>18</sup> The original idea of translating the Russian word *istok* ('source' or 'origin') as 'well' belongs to the first translators of Bunin's novel Gleb Struve and Hamish Miles. They do not offer any explanation for their choice, but I assume that the translators' intention is to convey the archaic as well as poetic-figurative connotation of this word, symbolising the beginning of all beginnings which is, in the novel's context, the beginning of human life. I give preference to 'well' (or 'wellspring') instead of 'source' for similar reasons.

<sup>19</sup> Osip Mandel'shtam, '*Pust' imena tsvetushchikh gorodov...*' [1914], in *Stikhotvoreniia. Perevody. Ocherki. Stat'i*, ed. G. G. Margelashvili (Tbilisi: Merani, 1990), p. 84.

**пишет его на кресте, на камне, она хочет тьмой покрыть пережитое им, а он пытается одушевить его в слове.]<sup>20</sup>**

It is interesting to note that in the final version Bunin expresses this idea through a quotation from the eighteenth-century manuscript *A Concise History in These Answers* [Istoriia kratkaia v otvetakh sikh] by a Coastal Region preacher Ivan Filippov:<sup>21</sup>

‘Things and deeds which are not written down are shrouded in darkness and committed to the grave of oblivion, whilst those which are written down are like things animated...’

**[“Вещи и дела, аще не написани бывають, тмою покрываються и гробу беспамятства предаются, написанныи же яко одушевленнии...”] (Bunin 6: 7)**

Hence, Bunin’s novel does not aim to describe a specific reality or social environment in the first place (his choice of Russia is explained by the fact that he knew these surroundings best of all), because this would dim the portrayal of the whole complexity of what enables man to become, to be, to move and to change in the chronotope of life. Furthermore, from the outset Bunin’s narrator declares his intention to spell out, that is, to textualize, bringing into the arena of knowledge all that human life is composed of, to use written text, in Chaadaev’s expression, ‘to initiate’ the reader ‘into the mystery of time’ (posviatit’ v tainu vremeni),<sup>22</sup> to sense the rhythm of the communication of

<sup>20</sup> Bunin, *Povesti, rasskazy, vospominaniia*, 616.

<sup>21</sup> For more detailed information about this book and the personality of its author see Baboreko’s ‘Kommentarii’, 569.

<sup>22</sup> In a letter to Pushkin of 1829 Chaadaev wrote: ‘My most ardent wish, my friend, is to see you initiated into the mystery of time. There is no more distressing spectacle in the moral world than the spectacle of a man of genius who does not understand his century and his vocation.’ [Мое пламеннейшее желание, друг мой, – видеть вас посвященным в тайну времени. Нет более огорчительного зрелища в мире нравственном, чем зрелище гениального человека, не понимающего свой век и свое призвание.]: see P. Ia. Chaadaev, ‘Pis’ma’, in *Stat’i i pis’ma* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989), pp. 218-53 (p. 218).

times. In this sense, for Bunin the novel proves to be the very form by means of which he could offer his interpretation of the events of reality. The novel, moreover, becomes here the major, if not the only way of addressing and studying *relived experience*, that is, all that man's senses have to go through during the process of their coming into being. Thus, using literary terminology, it is possible to say that in *The Life of Arsen'ev* we are dealing with the tradition of the novel of human emergence, that is, the novel of education or *Bildungsroman*,<sup>23</sup> to which Bunin adds a modern, twentieth-century interpretation. In nineteenth-century European literature Goethe's *Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister* and Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education* serve as examples of such novels. In our century the principal representatives of this tradition are Proust, Joyce and, in part, Musil. But it would appear that it was not until Bunin's novel that Russian literature could offer such an example, for, as Merab Mamardashvili rightly notes:

Russian literature is social, edifying and educational but it is always, by comparison with the novel of 'sentimental education', static. It confirms the reader in what he knows about the world and never offers him any tools for change.

[Русская литература социальна, назидательна, воспитательна, но она всегда, по сравнению с романом "воспитания чувств", статична. Она

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<sup>23</sup> The term is used by Mikhail Bakhtin with reference to the novel of education in his work 'The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)' [1936-8 (1975)], in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, tr. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), pp. 10-60. In addition to stimulating discussion of this tradition of the novel, Bakhtin's study points to the difference between autobiographical discourse and the novel of education. Among the works which deal with similar issues see also Patricia Sparks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, and William Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

утверждает читателя в том, что он знает о мире, и никогда не дает ему орудий изменения.]<sup>24</sup>

Hence, within the framework of this literary tradition Bunin's artistic experiment represents a new departure.

Bunin's novel, perhaps for the first time in Russian literary practice, attempts to give a new dimension and meaning to the term '*road (or path) through life*' (*zhiznennyi put'*). It is important to demonstrate what lies at the basis of this notion and how it is linked with the foregoing discussion of the generic specificity of *The Life of Arsen'ev*. My views on this problem owe much to Merab Mamardashvili's study of 'the psychological topology of the road' (*psikhologicheskaiia topologiia puti*), with particular reference to the works of Proust, in particular *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. Some of Mamardashvili's observations and conclusions on the genre typology of Proust's novel are equally applicable to *The Life of Arsen'ev*, allowing us to read Bunin's novel in an entirely new light. It is also worth mentioning here that in one of his letters to Bitsilli Bunin remarked on the striking similarity between *The Life of Arsen'ev* and Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu*:

When something is in fashion, 'out of spite' I turn away from the fashionable. So it was with Proust. I only recently read him and was even frightened: there are many passages in *The Life of Arsen'ev* (and in *The Well of Days*, and in that beginning of the second volume that I published three years ago) which are almost Proustian! Just try to prove that I had never even seen Proust when I was writing both these works!...

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<sup>24</sup> Merab Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaiia topologiia puti: M. Prust, 'V poiskakh utrachennogo vremeni'* (St. Petersburg: Universitetskaia kniga, 1997), p. 211. The book is based on a course of lectures Mamardashvili delivered in 1984-85 at the Faculty of Arts, Tbilisi State University, and is the



[Когда на что-нибудь мода, я “назло” отвертываюсь от модного. Так было с Прустом. Только недавно прочел его – и даже испугался: да ведь в *Жизни Арсеньева* (и в *Истоках дней*, и в том начале 2-го тома, что я напечатал три года тому назад...) немало мест, совсем прустовских! Поди доказывай, что я и в глаза не видал Пруста, когда писал и то, и другое!...] <sup>25</sup>

## 2. A sense of Path

Mamardashvili ascribes Proust's epic to the tradition of '*the novel of wish and motive*' (*roman zhelaniia i motiva*), that is, the novel of education. He suggests that we approach it as '*a novel of Road*' (*roman Puti*) or '*a novel of liberation*' (*roman osvobozhdeniia*) in association with existing traditions and metaphors, in particular those that are religious in nature, where the terms 'salvation' and 'liberation' retain their direct, easily-recognized connotations. It is worth quoting Mamardashvili at some length:

The word 'Road' does not simply have the meaning of the ordinary road through life, that is, the Road to *salvation* or, if you wish, Road to *redemption*. And the more you apply traditional terms which exist in texts termed sacred, the sooner this will make it easier for you to master what I shall be telling you about. They will, of course, be just associations and metaphors, but we shall need them in order to understand what the topic of discussion is. So then, the Road of coming to oneself or, playing with the possibilities of language, we might put it like this: the Road of a passing through life that means that you arrive at yourself and realize yourself. Proust's major driving

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second variation on the themes of Proust's epic. The first variation of 1982 was published posthumously in Moscow in 1995 under its original title *Lectures on Proust* [Lektzii o Pruste].

motif, pathos and passion were what can be summarized as *'realising yourself'*. Realising yourself in the full wealth of the desires that you have, but which you do not know and whose nature you do not understand. If you do not understand your own desires you cannot realize yourself. For Proust, therefore, as perhaps for any person, the words 'to realize yourself' coincide with the words 'to understand what, in fact, you are and what is your true situation'.

[Слово "Путь" имеет смысл не просто обыденного пути жизни - Пути спасения. Или, если угодно, Путь искупления. И чем больше вы будете прикладывать к этому традиционные термины, существующие в текстах, называемых священными, тем скорее это облегчит вам работу вашего собственного усвоения того, о чем я буду говорить. Это, конечно, будут только ассоциации, метафоры, но они пригодятся нам для того, чтобы понять, о чем идет речь. Итак - Путь прихождения к себе. Или - можно, обыгрывая возможности языка, сказать так: Путь такого прохождения жизни, в результате которого ты приходишь к себе и реализуешь себя. Основной движущий мотив и пафос и страсть Пруста состояли в том, что можно резюмировать словами "реализовать себя". Реализовать себя во всем богатстве своих желаний, которые у тебя есть, но ты их не знаешь, природа их тебе непонятна. Если ты не поймешь своих собственных желаний, то ты себя не реализуешь. И поэтому для Пруста, и для любого человека наверно, слова "реализовать себя" совпадают со словами "понять, что ты есть на самом деле и каково твое действительное положение."]<sup>26</sup>

In order to clarify Mamardashvili's point we should briefly discuss the notion of road itself. Generally speaking, the category of road is, as Dolgoplov describes it, a category of *'epoch-making'* (*epokhal'noe*)<sup>27</sup> significance which was discovered and interpreted anew by twentieth-century artistic thinking. One of those who immediately felt this was Aleksandr Blok, an artist with an astonishingly acute, almost morbid 'sense of road or path'

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in A. Meshcherskii, 'Neizvestnye pis'ma Bunina', *Russkaia literatura*, 4 (1961), 152-58 (p. 154).

<sup>26</sup> Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaia topologiia puti*, 19.

(*chuvstvo puti*). In his article 'The Soul of the Writer' [*Dusha pisatel'ia*] (1909) Blok states:

The first and major indication that a given writer is not an accidental or temporary figure is his sense of path. This too well-known truth should be recalled constantly, particularly in our time. [...] The inner writer's 'tact', his rhythm is defined only by the presence of the *path*. The most dangerous thing is the loss of this *rhythm*.

[Первым и главным признаком того, что данный писатель не есть величина случайная и временная, является чувство пути. Эту истину, слишком известную, следует напоминать постоянно, и особенно в наше время. [...] Только наличием *пути* определяется внутренний "такт" писателя, его ритм. Всего опаснее - утрата этого *ритма*.]<sup>28</sup>

Dolgoplov, analysing the literary-philosophical context of the turn of the century, makes an interesting and important observation that the notion of road begins to receive this type of treatment only at the beginning of the twentieth century. But what is even more significant here is how this category came to be considered, not only as a phenomenon of figurative thinking, but also as an important issue in relation to literary genre. Thus for literary discourse of the early twentieth century and onwards the notion of road greatly extended the boundaries of understanding and portrayal of historical time in all its different aspects. Dolgoplov comes to the following conclusion:

The sense of complete dependence on what happens in the great world now became virtually the major feature of the literary hero's inner structure. The world itself that surrounds and absorbs man was perceived by the writer not as a closed segment of time and space but as a single moving chain of life, a panorama of events, characters

<sup>27</sup> Dolgoplov, *Na rubezhe vekov*, 349.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksandr Blok, 'Dusha pisatel'ia', in *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (8 vols) (Moscow-Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1960-63), V (1962), pp. 369-71 (p. 369).

and phenomena. This is why man at the turn of the century apprehended both his time and himself as it were on two levels: as a certain 'result' and as a certain 'beginning'.

[Ощущение полной зависимости от происходящего в большом мире стало теперь едва ли не основным качеством внутреннего строя героя литературных произведений. И сам мир, окружающий и взирающий в себя человека, воспринимался писателем не в виде некоего замкнутого отрезка времени, места, - а в виде единой движущейся жизненной цепи, панорамы событий, лиц, явлений. Именно поэтому человек рубежа веков воспринимал и свое время, и себя самого как бы в двух планах - и как некий "итог", и как некое "начало".]<sup>29</sup>

It is only thanks to this, according to Dolgopolov, that the significance of the literary category of *subject* gradually diminishes: it becomes either fully 'dissolved' in (or 'replaced' by) plot (*ibid.*), which is closer to the natural course of events, or a renunciation of both subject and plot takes place (as in Bunin's novel - and herein lies, in part, the root of its risky innovation).<sup>30</sup> The narrative, therefore, is no longer supported by actual events, but purely by the author's interpretation of these events. Furthermore, Dolgopolov proposes that in the literature of the early twentieth century, the extreme manifestation of the idea of road, and its associated idea of destiny, is an 'artistic-

<sup>29</sup> Dolgopolov, *Na rubezhe vekov*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Linkov in his study *Mir i chelovek v tvorchestve L. Tolstogo i I. Bunina* [The World And Man in the Work of Tolstoi and Bunin] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1989) is strongly opposed to the idea of treating *The Life of Arsen'ev* as 'a novel about the history of life and becoming of the artist' [роман об истории жизни и становления художника] (p. 162), claiming that it is based on 'different principles' and hence there cannot be becoming or history of 'anything', including becoming of the artist (*ibid.*). Forgetting, however, to name these 'principles', Linkov believes that an explanation of the originality of Bunin's novel can be found in a conventional classification of literary modes. He emphasizes that such categories as 'development', 'coming into being' and 'history' can be employed strictly with reference to the epic and lose their meaning outside the epic form. But most importantly, they form the subject which is responsible for the movement of events and is a property of the epic. Linkov comes to the conclusion that by depriving his novel of subject, Bunin establishes 'an anti-epic attitude to history' [антиэпическое отношение к истории] (p. 165), that is, offers an immovable picture of the world. It is nevertheless surprising that Linkov can be

philosophical realisation of Plato's conception of cognition as recollection', of which Bunin's creative work serves as a vivid example:

For him [Bunin] to go into the depths of history means to go into the depths of himself. Man, according to this theory, simultaneously conceals within him several historical epochs and a multitude of historical layers. In the consciousness and works of writers and thinkers of the beginning of the century the problem of the road is not only a problem of the formation of human personality and human emergence as a certain historical and psychological type. It is also a problem of movement in general, of the meaning of history (which was extremely acute for the turn of the century), of the presence or absence of 'outcome'. [...] History itself led people to these kinds of problems.

[Для него [Бунина] идти в глубь истории значит идти в глубь самого себя. Человек, согласно этой теории, одновременно скрывает в себе несколько исторических эпох и множество исторических пластов. Проблема пути в сознании и творчестве писателей и мыслителей начала века - это не только проблема формирования человеческой личности, становления человека как определенного исторического и психологического типа. Это и проблема движения вообще, смысла истории (что было крайне острым для эпохи рубежа веков), наличия или отсутствия "исхода". [...] Сама история подводила людей к проблемам подобного рода.]<sup>31</sup>

### 3. 'Where is the boundary between my reality and my imagination'?

In order to continue the discussion of the generic distinctiveness of Bunin's novel and finally turn to the textual analysis, I need to introduce two short stories: *Fragment* [Otryvok] (1927) and *Mirror* [Zerkalo] (1907 [1929]),

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so conventionally categorical when approaching such a complex and endless issue as the problem of the status of the epic categories in twentieth-century novelistic discourse.

both published after the appearance of the final version of the novel in the Parisian newspapers *Revival* [Vozrozhdenie] and *The Latest News* [Poslednie novosti] and representing the earliest drafts of *The Life of Arsen'ev*. Notwithstanding Baboreko's claim, made in the most recent edition of Bunin's complete works, that there are no grounds whatsoever for placing the finished short story *Mirror* among draft versions of the novel<sup>32</sup> (even if Bunin suggested the opposite by giving it the sub-title 'old sketch' (davnii nabrosok), which was taken into account in the editions of 1965 and 1987), both these stories deserve our attention in the light of what has been said so far.

The story *Fragment* opens with the following passage:

The beginning of my life.

But where shall I stop on the way to my beginning?

How and what was it that formed what is called my earthly life, my recollections?

Does it not really seem to me now that I all but remember the creation of the world?

[...]

Yet since my very first days, Abraham's sacrifice and Joseph's flight to Egypt had been entering my life as something that I seemed to have lived through myself, so that even in that time I did not believe that I began in some Tambov Kamenka.

But then, later!

During my nevertheless already long life with its thoughts, reading, wanderings and dreams, I grew so accustomed to the idea and sense that I knew and imagined vast expanses of space and time, I lived so many alien and remote lives in my imagination,

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<sup>31</sup> Dolgoplov, *Na rubezhe vekov*, 349.

<sup>32</sup> See A. Baboreko, 'Kommentarii', in Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, II (1994), pp. 525-53 (p. 547).

that it seems to me as though I have always existed, for all time and everywhere. But where is the border between my reality and my imagination, which, too, is reality, something that undoubtedly exists.

[Начало моей жизни.

Но где остановиться мне по пути к своему началу?

Из чего и как составлялось то, что называется моей земной жизнью, моими воспоминаниями?

Разве мне не кажется теперь, что я помню чуть не сотворение мира? [...]

Ведь еще в самые первые дни мои входило в мою жизнь, как нечто будто бы мной самим пережитое, то жертвоприношение Авраама, то бегство Иосифа в Египет, так что уже и в ту пору не было у меня веры, что я начался в какой-то тамбовской Каменке.

А потом, потом!

За свою все-таки уже долгую жизнь с ее думами, чтением, странствиями и мечтами я так привык к мысли и к ощущенью, будто я знаю и представляю себе огромные пространства места и времени, сколько жил в воображеньи чужими и далекими жизнями, что мне кажется, будто я был всегда, во веки веков и всюду. А где грань между моей действительностью и моим воображеньем, которое есть ведь тоже действительность, нечто несомненно существующее?] (Bunin 6: 305)

Right from the beginning, one senses the hero's vividly expressed, passionate desire to elucidate who he is, where his roots are, what, in reality, is happening to him and where, in the end, the wellspring of all that which now takes place in his life is. It is interesting that Bunin begins by declaring the idea (which strikes one almost at once as a familiar one from *The Shadow of the Bird* and which will eventually form the basis of the philosophical content

of *The Life of Arsen'ev*) of an open unity between man and culture. As Bunin tried to demonstrate in *The Shadow of the Bird*, because of the existence of such unity, nothing that man lives through and creates during his allotted time (a certain 'segment' of history, an instant of Being) dies with him. Only now does Bunin look at this aspect from the point of view of *man's personal experience*, something which he was not much concerned with in the collection of travel poems. It is precisely this that is so crucial in this passage and must be realized in order to understand the meaning of the novel itself: the discovery of a fundamentally new quality of man's existence, namely, the problem of *remembrance*, or *time*, which was always for Bunin first and foremost a problem of *the past*.

For Bunin the past always lives in us, but can help us only if we can establish the right way to approach it, that is, to address it with our, very human, gift of recollection and imagination. The ability to remember, which lies at the basis of historical memory, has a strong psychological power that gives Bunin's hero a sense of the past as the present, at the level of a day, a detail or even a patch of light and colour. The past for Bunin does not merely exist for its own sake; rather, it finds its meaning, begins to function as the present, whereas the present is already a part of the future. The essence of time's development in man is founded on this dialectic. Thus, the addressivity and return in temporal flow to the past enables one to experience both Mandel'shtam's 'distance' (*otstranenie*)<sup>33</sup> from time and Bunin's reunion with it, that is, a reunion with oneself in order to find oneself, one's own identity. Furthermore, memory is not only a quality of subjective and personal unity of



human consciousness but also a category of culture which helps one to overcome time within time itself, returning one to the wellspring, to the beginning as though renewing it, deeply engaging the individual with the historical. For Bunin, therefore, the reality of the past begins its formation in memory, receiving its final revival and embodiment through (in) the process of recollection. Memory and time, moreover, control human psychological capabilities and the content of our imaginations. To them (and not to chronological data) belongs the ability to define man's exact whereabouts in time, that is, the reality of his consciousness, sensibility and understanding. This is a peculiar search in historical time, which Bunin undertakes not as a researcher, whose goal is usually to establish a cause- and-effect relation, but primarily as an artist, bringing it to the level of artistic mastery and showing this infinite world which grows from man in all the complexity of its feelings and defiance.

It is here, in *Fragment*, that Bunin also raises the question essential for understanding the major themes of *The Life of Arsen'ev*: the problem of 'the wellspring'. In other words, the question of whether it is possible at all to speak of 'the beginning' in relation to human life:

It is very strange, moreover, to recall this beginning on a sultry Provençal day, looking out of the wide-open window at the palm trees, the olive trees, the enormous blue valley beyond them, the Mediterranean and the ridges of the Esterel, blue in the sun's haze!

Half a century ago...

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<sup>33</sup> Osip Mandel'shtam, *Shum vremeni*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (2 vols), ed. G. P. Struve and B. A. Filippov (Washington: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1966), II, pp. 83-149 (p. 137).

Tambov fields, an old log house under a thatched roof, dove-coloured from age, a neglected garden with raspberry-canes, a yard, overgrown with grass, with a stone trough in the middle, a stable, a servants' hall with fields of corn coming right up to its back wall...

The face of the whole earth has changed since then... [...]

A thousand years have passed since then for me.

'To be born, to live and to die in the same, your own house...' And as for me, how many times have I changed home in my lifetime?

And this foreign country which has been like a homeland for me for many years now, is it my last refuge? [...]

But what am I here for? Why am I here?

Gaul, the Caesars, the Saracens, Provence...

Is it really true that once upon a time Kamenka existed?

Is it possible that this sun which is now baking my garden dry is the same one as in Kamenka?.

**[Очень странно, кроме того, вспоминать это начало в знойный провансальский день, глядя в раскрытое окно на пальмы, на оливки, на огромную голубую долину за ними, на Средиземное море, на синеющие в солнечном дыму хребты Эстереля!]**

**Полвека тому назад...**

**Тамбовские поля, старый бревенчатый дом под соломенной крышей, сизой от времени, запущенный сад с малинниками, заросший травой двор с каким-то каменным корытом посредине, варок, конюшня, людская изба, к задней стене которой вплотную подступают хлеба...**

**Лицо всей земли изменилось с тех пор... [...]**

Тысячелетие протекло с тех пор для меня.

“Родиться, жить и умереть в одном и том же, в родном доме...” А я – сколько домов переменял я на своем веку?

И эта чужая страна, уже много лет заменяющая мне родину, последнее ли это мое прибежище? [...]

И все же зачем я здесь, почему я здесь?

Галлия, цезари, сарацины, Прованс...

Точно ли, что существовала когда-то какая-то Каменка?

Ужели это солнце, которое печет сейчас мой сад, то же, что было в Каменке?] (pp. 306-7)

The answer to this question can be found in the opening of the final version of *The Life of Arsen'ev*, where the above is reduced to just a single sentence, striking in its laconic brevity: ‘I was born half a century ago in Central Russia, in the country, on my father’s country estate’ [Ia rodilsia polveka tomy nazad, v srednei Rossii, v derevne, v ottsovskoi usad’be]. This sentence is accompanied by the following passage:

We do not have a sense of our own beginning and end. And it is very regrettable that I was told exactly when I was born. If I had not been told, I would not now have the faintest idea of my age, especially as I still do not feel its burden at all and would therefore be spared the thought that I am apparently supposed to die in ten or twenty years’ time. But had I been born and lived on a desert island, I would not have suspected even the existence of death. ‘What luck that would have been’, I feel like adding. But who knows? Perhaps, a great misfortune. Besides, is it really true that I

would not have suspected? Are we not born with a sense of death? And if not, if I had not suspected, would I love life in the same way that I do and have done.<sup>34</sup>

[У нас нет чувства своего начала и конца. И очень жаль, что мне сказали, когда именно я родился. Если бы не сказали, я бы теперь и понятия не имел о своем возрасте, – тем более, что я еще совсем не ощущаю его бремени, – и, значит, был бы избавлен от мысли, что мне будто бы полагается лет через десять или двадцать умереть. А родился я и живи на необитаемом острове, я бы даже и о самом существовании смерти не подозревал. “Вот было бы счастье!” – хочется прибавить мне. Но кто знает? Может быть, великое несчастье. Да и правда ли, что не подозревал бы? Не рождаемся ли мы с чувством смерти? А если нет, если бы не подозревал, любил ли бы я жизнь так, как люблю и любил] (р. 7)

For Bunin human life emerges as that very space wherein historical time finds its full realisation. Hence, in reality, as Bunin's hero notes, we cannot begin or end anything (this in part explains why *The Life of Arsen'ev* does not have a 'beginning' or an 'end' in the traditional sense), for it is essential for conscious human life to be without beginning. In other words, any 'exact' chronological indicators such as birth, age and so forth, as well as the categories 'beginning' and 'end' themselves, seem to lose their meaningful content in the context of *the history of human life*, and this is precisely the understanding that Bunin wants the reader to come to. As Mamardashvili rightly maintains, in reality it is not possible to know when and where any given history commenced, or by whom it was begun. Man's situation, in fact, is that everything 'happens continuously, nothing begins in an absolute sense'

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<sup>34</sup> Ivan Bunin, *The Well of Days*, tr. Gleb Struve and Hamish Miles (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1934; repr. Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, INC., Кеп., 1977), p. 3 (trans. modif.).

[proiskhodit nepreryvno, nichego ne nachinaetsia v absoliutnom smysle].<sup>35</sup>

The same law applies to history:

History, like thought, cannot be begun. It is only possible *already to be* in it. [...] Our history is the totality of those objects (and these objects may be people, places and things) that have stolen a part of our soul from us and carry it on by virtue of their own existence. But in order to steal our soul from us we had to work, to endure, to suffer, to be anxious and to do. This is precisely what I call *having a history*. Having: we have a history in the sense that we *are set in motion*. We move in the world.

[Историю, как и мысль, нельзя начать. В ней можно только *уже быть*. [...] Наша история есть совокупность тех предметов – а такими предметами могут быть люди, места, вещи, – которые похитили у нас часть души и продолжают ее своим существованием. Но для того, чтобы похитить у нас душу, нам нужно было работать, переживать, страдать, волноваться, делать. [...] Вот что я называю *иметь историю*. Иметь – мы имеем историю в том смысле, что мы *приходим в движение*. Мы двигаемся в мире.] (p. 253)

Furthermore, by stressing in the first lines of the novel his intention to lay bare, to retain in the *word* the story of human ‘things and deeds’, Bunin gives to the narrative that special, laconic, measured tone which he maintains throughout the novel, as though constantly reminding the reader of the complexity and delicacy of the chosen theme. Above all, to tell the life story of just one individual (or even some fragments of one’s life), to see in it and to show through it, as Mamardashvili puts it, ‘the whole life of mankind in all its combinations’ [vsiu zhizn’ chelovechestva vo vsekh ee spleteniiakh] (p. 394) is at times far more difficult (from any point of view, particularly from the

<sup>35</sup> Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaja topologija puti*, 534.

position of artistic perspicacity) than to reconstruct the events of some war or great social crisis. Such an approach goes a long way to explaining why Bunin succeeded in avoiding what Mamardashvili termed 'the temptation of sociality' (soblazn sotsial'nosti) (ibid.): human conflicts, whatever they are, can be better understood, and need to be interpreted, only with reference to the material of human life.

To illustrate this idea it is perhaps worth recalling the very beginning of Pasternak's novel, the words that belong to Nikolai Vedeniapin (Iurii Zhivago's uncle, an unfrocked priest) about the essence of history and man's place in it:

You do not understand that it is possible to be an atheist, it is possible not to know whether God exists and what he exists for and at the same time to know that man lives not in nature but in history. [...] But what is history? It is a fixing of the centuries-long work on the steady attempts to solve the riddle of death and on its future overcoming. [...] ... Man does not die somewhere on the street, under a fence, but in his own history, at the height of work devoted to the conquest of death, he dies himself dedicated to this theme.

**[Вы не понимаете, что можно быть атеистом, можно не знать, есть ли Бог и для чего он, и в то же время знать, что человек живет не в природе, а в истории. [...] А что такое история? Это установление вековых забот по последовательной разгадке смерти и ее будущему преодолению. [...] ... И человек умирает не на улице под забором, а у себя в истории, в разгаре работ, посвященных преодолению смерти, умирает сам, посвященный этой теме.]<sup>36</sup>**

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<sup>36</sup> Boris Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* (5 vols) (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989-92), III (1990), p. 14.

Hence, for Pasternak and for Bunin history is accomplished in the depths of the human spirit, and all the historical is linked to and revealed through man, for every one of us, in Mamardashvili's words, is 'a small mirror of infinity or of something infinitely bigger than man himself' [maloe zerkalo beskonechnosti ili chego-to beskonechno bol'shego, chem sam chelovek]<sup>37</sup> in both space and time.

The opening passage of *The Life of Arsen'ev* concludes with Arsen'ev's thoughts on his attitude to death: should it be understood tragically? There are several episodes of death in the novel: the sudden death of Arsen'ev's younger sister Nadia; the tragic death of the peasant boy Sen'ka, who falls, together with his horse, into a ravine; Arsen'ev's grandmother's death; the death of the landowner Pisarev; the solemn burial service of some Russian Grand Duke; and finally Lika's death. It is, however, significant that Bunin's hero begins the history of his life with an assertion that he will dispute through out the novel: death is by no means something that occurs when no life remains. On the contrary, it is here, it participates in life itself, existing as an integral part of it. Every treatment of this theme in the novel both renovates and crystallizes life's true essence without which everything else finds itself under threat of numbness and collapse. The declaration of his own mortality, finiteness of Being in general, enables man, in Bunin's view, to feel life more acutely, to understand its non-transient, eternal value. For in reality man always appears as historical man and yet as man who realizes and confirms his finiteness. But in order to confirm these eternal values, man, first and foremost, must properly appreciate and understand death, since it is precisely

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<sup>37</sup> Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaiia topologiia puti*, 423.

that with which we begin our search for 'the wellspring', that which is fundamental, pure, firm and therefore wide open to all possible interpretations, open towards the *future*. This is a quest for an all-subordinating element, which bears life in itself, its universality and demotivating, 'infantile-festive' mood. Through this search man finally finds the strength to stay faithful to himself and, hence, a capacity for changing himself. Herein lies for Bunin the promise of the future, the changeability of human existence in the chronotope of life. This idea, above all, justifies the acts and philosophy of Arsen'ev, who is merely 'possessed by life', by the sense of its singularity and uniqueness. And whatever he does there is always the presence of this sense. And yet '*just to live*' (*prostozhit'*) is far from enough for Bunin's hero. It is to live, and something else that could be described as striving to 'fit' himself into the world which is not, in fact, closed and finite:

Why is man, from his childhood onwards, drawn by distance, width, depth, height, the unknown and dangerous, by the possibility to swing his life round or even to lose it for the sake of something or somebody? Would it really be possible if our lot was confined to that 'which God gave', only to the earth, only to this life alone? God, obviously, gave us much more. Recalling the fairy tales read and heard in childhood, to this day I feel that the words about the unknown and unusual were the most captivating in them.<sup>38</sup>

[Почему с детства тянет человека даль, ширь, глубина, высота, неизвестное, опасное, то, где можно размахнуться жизнью, даже потерять ее за что-нибудь или за кого-нибудь? Разве это было бы возможно, будь нашей долей только то, что есть, "что бог дал", – только земля, только одна эта жизнь? Бог, очевидно, дал нам гораздо больше. Вспоминая сказки, читанные и слышанные в детстве, до сих пор чувствую, что



САМЫМИ ПЛЕНТЕЛЬНЫМИ БЫЛИ В НИХ СЛОВА О НЕИЗВЕСТНОМ И НЕОБЫЧНОМ.]

(Bunin 6: 21)

Having been born with such an acute sense of life and death, Arsen'ev fairly early on begins to realize that we are given an incredibly short time to learn, to see and to encounter all that exists in this world. What is more, it is not only man's temporal, but also his spatial-geographical possibilities that are significantly limited. Using the example of his hero's life Bunin tries to demonstrate how this feeling can influence and define man's attempt to extend, at times, overstep these spatial boundaries, thereby giving a detailed account of how a response to 'the call of space and the course of time' [zov prostranstva i beg vremeni] (p. 9) gradually grows and develops in Arsen'ev. From childhood onwards Arsen'ev claims to be hunted by an astonishingly powerful, though contradictory, feeling, namely a sense of the inexplicable immenseness of this world in which there is also an inexhaustible memory that knows no bounds. For this memory his life did not at all begin in his father's remote country estate, surrounded with expansive fields, but rather long before the awakening of his consciousness. Even some things, and in particular words, although heard for the first time, seem to be perfectly familiar to Arsen'ev, as though they were known and used by him:

But I knew all this even then. The depth of the sky, the distance of the fields were telling me about something different that exists as though apart from them, provoking a dream and a longing for something I lacked, moving me with an incomprehensible love and tenderness... .

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<sup>38</sup> Bunin, *The Well of Days*, 26 (trans. modif.).

[А я уже и тогда знал все это. Глубина неба, даль полей говорили мне о чем-то ином, как бы существующем помимо их, вызывали мечту и тоску о чем-то мне недостающем, трогали непонятной любовью и нежностью... ]

(Ibid.)

Bunin shows with astonishing accuracy, chiefly based on the content of the hero's impressions, how the spatio-temporal locality of Arsen'ev's world ceases to be limited by his father's manor with its vegetable and animal life and how different people, events, first Russian towns and then other countries begin to enter his life. Herein also lies the root of Arsen'ev's passion for travelling, expressed in the desire to envelop ever larger parts of the earth's expanse, to meet as many people as he can, for this is the only way for him to take full delight in 'the joy of earthly existence' [радост' zemnogo bytiia] (p. 12), to feel his connection with all that lives:

People are in constant expectation of something sweet, interesting, they dream of some joy or event. This is why the road is so attractive. Then freedom, expanse... and novelty, which is always festive and heightens the sense of life. After all, it is only this that all of us want and are looking for in any strong feeling.

[Люди постоянно ждут чего-нибудь счастливого, интересного, мечтают о какой-нибудь радости, о каком-нибудь событии. Этим влечет и дорога. Потом воля, простор... новизна, которая всегда празднична, повышает чувство жизни, а ведь все мы только этого и хотим, ищем во всяком сильном чувстве.] (p. 260).

But what is, perhaps, the most fascinating experience of travel for Bunin's hero is *the poetry of transference* along the earth's surface itself. This gives Arsen'ev *impressions* which are, as noted earlier, valuable to him not so much for their aesthetic aspect as for their richness of content. Impressions are

important and captivating because of their immediate relation to history: they are its moulds. Arsen'ev speaks of the 'enigmatic', inexplicable nature of his impressions. For him they are something more than simply psychological conditions of the human mind. They bear within them, first and foremost, a strong and well-developed element of eventness, chronotopic concentration. This above all explains why the major part of the hero's recollection is based only on impressions: impressions enter us significantly earlier than we enter the world and ourselves. In fact, to them belongs the role of maintaining and strengthening the status of human consciousness, thoughts and feelings, Being in general. In Bunin's view, it is only through impressions that man learns about reality itself; they therefore play an inestimable role in the process of human sentimental becoming. Impressions, above all, enable us 'to work on time' (*rabotat' nad vremenem*),<sup>39</sup> providing us with what Bunin calls '*the gaze of memory*' (*vzor pamiati*) which is, in its turn, capable of freeing time (in Proust this process is called 'finding time'), that is, the past, its sense and quality of living reality, an animated instant of Being with its sounds, colours and smells. Finally, the presence of impressions is evidence of the integral character of both our mental life and our inner world which is, in Bunin's view, always under threat of disintegration if simply left to the action of temporal flow. With their help we can, in essence, define, as A. V. Gulyga says, 'how the past looks at us – with intelligent radiance or indifferent and impersonal existence' [*kak smotrit na nas byloe – osmyslennym siianiem ili bezrazlichnym i bezlichnym bytiem*].<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaia topologiia puti*, 158.

<sup>40</sup> A. V. Gulyga, *Estetika istorii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), p. 124.

Speaking of his early years, Arsen'ev points out two things which proved crucial in the process of his becoming a personality: his aristocratic origins and literature. From the very beginning we understand and feel the extent to which his ancestral past attracted Bunin's hero, who learned to read from *Don Quixote* in translation, not to mention Walter Scott's tales of chivalry, which, as he says, he 'was quite mad about' [sovsem sveli ... s uma] (Bunin 6: 35). What is, however, important to realize here is that we are not dealing with a case of bald snobbery, because for Bunin, as well as for his hero, the aristocracy was always 'an emblem', a universal symbol which serves as the embodiment of emergence, 'a unity of all that exists' [edinstvo vsego sushchego ] (ibid.) in time:

How to convey those feelings with which I sometimes look at our family coat of arms? A knight's armour, breastplate and helmet with ostrich feathers, underneath which there is a shield on whose azure field, in the middle, there is a ring, an emblem of loyalty and eternity towards which the tips of three rapiers with cross-shaped hilts merge from above and below.

In the country that has replaced my motherland there are many towns similar to the one that has given me refuge, towns which were in the old days glorious but have now died away, poor, living out a petty everyday existence. And yet over this life there always, and not without reason, reigns some grey tower from the Crusaders' times, the mass of a cathedral with its invaluable portal watched over for centuries by a guard of sacred graven images; on the cross, in the sky, there is a cock, God's tall herald, summoning to the celestial City.

**[И как передать те чувства, с которыми я смотрю порой на наш родовый герб? Рыцарские доспехи, латы и шлем с страусовыми перьями. Под ними щит. И на лазурном поле его, в середине - перстень, эмблема**

верности и вечности, к которому сходятся сверху и снизу своими остриями три рапиры с крестами – рукоятками.

В стране, заменившей мне родину, много есть городов, подобных тому, что дал мне приют, некогда славных, а теперь заглохших, бедных, в повседневности живущих мелкой жизнью. Все же над этой жизнью всегда – и недаром – царит какая-нибудь серая башня времен крестоносцев, громада собора с бесценным порталом, века охраняемым стражей святых изваяний, и петух на кресте, в небесах, высокий господний глашатай, зовущий к небесному Граду.] (Bunin 6: 8)

Arsen'ev's keen interest in literature, his desire to write, is of particular significance in this sense. It is not at all accidental that Bunin offers a vivid description of the books (by Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, Batiushkov, Zhukovskii, Venevitinov, Baratynskii, Pushkin, Lermontov, Nadson and Fet) that his hero reads, the people (his mother, his nanny, his teacher Baskakov) he grew up with and was brought up by, and the images which became crucial for Arsen'ev's formative period as a poet, telling, above all, how he experiences the coming of poetic inspiration:

Quietly leaving the church, I again inhaled the pre-spring winter air, saw the dove-coloured twilight. Below, a beggar with feigned humility bent his thick, grey head before me, his hand ready cupped. As he caught and clasped a five-kopeck piece, he looked up at me and I was suddenly struck: the watery-turquoise eyes of a chronic drunkard and an enormous triple strawberry nose, consisting of three large, bumpy, porous strawberries... Oh! Once again how excruciatingly delightful: a triple strawberry nose!

I walked down Bolkhovskaia Street, looking at the darkening sky in which the outlines of the old houses' roofs, their incomprehensible, sedating charm, tormented me. An old human shelter, who wrote about it? The street lamps lit up, the shop windows became warmly illuminated, the figures of the pedestrians grew black, the

evening turned blue like laundry blue and it became sweet and cosy in town. I, like a detective, followed first one, then another passer-by, looking at his back, at his galoshes, trying to understand, to catch something in him, and enter him... To write! Roofs, galoshes and backs are what I should write about... .

[Тихо выйдя из церкви, я опять вдыхал предвесенний зимний воздух, видел сизые сумерки. Низко, с притворным смирением, клонил передо мной густую седую голову нищий, приготовив ковшиком ладонь, когда же ловил и зажимал пятак, взглядывал и вдруг поражал: жидко-бирюзовые глаза застарелого пьяницы и огромный клубничный нос – тройной, состоящий из трех крупных, бугристых и пористых клубник... Ах, как опять мучительно-радостно: тройной клубничный нос!

Я шел вниз по Болховской, глядя в темнеющее небо, – в небе мучили очертания крыш старых домов, непонятная успокаивающая прелесть этих очертаний. Старый человеческий кров – кто об этом писал? Зажигались фонари, тепло освещались окна магазинов, чернели фигуры илущих по тротуарам, вечер синел, как синька, в городе становилось сладко, уютно... Я, как сыщик, преследовал то одного, то другого прохожего, глядя на его спину, на его калоши, стараясь что-то понять, поймать в нем, войти в него... Писать! Вот о кпрышах, о калошах, о спинах надо писать... ] (p. 233)

For Bunin's hero, poetry is a peculiar way or 'act' of understanding what happens to the world and man in this world. At first poetry attracted Arsen'ev with its 'lyrical timelessness', then slowly he discovered in it an opportunity to break free from what seemed to him the limitations of life, to reconsider the problem of man's existence in general. Poetry, in his view, like no other art, is capable of catching, imprinting on the mind the imperceptible, unique moments of man's inner and outer life. It acts against man's narrowness and finiteness. The same meaning is ascribed to different texts cited by Bunin's hero in the novel. In writing poetry, Arsen'ev finds what he has always been

looking for in all his activities, namely, a sense that 'life should be revelled in' [zhizn' dolzhna byt' voskhishcheniem] (p. 261).

Lastly, to complete the discussion on the generic specificity of *The Life of Arsen'ev* it remains only to touch, however briefly, upon the short sketch *Mirror*, as already mentioned, one of the earliest drafts of the novel. The plot of the story is very simple: using every opportunity to be alone in the corner room of the house, neglected by everyone, a boy looks long at himself in the mirror, thinking about who he is and who in fact is reflected there. Here the mirror is directly linked to the theme which Bunin's unnamed hero describes as an attempt to 'peep into', to fathom 'the well of days'. It is interesting how Bunin extends the meaning of an object: from being an attribute of a house's interior, the mirror suddenly finds itself in possession of enormous psychological power, turning into the subject of the narrator's meditation. Bunin wants to demonstrate that while studying ourselves in the mirror (this, of course, could be done in many different ways: remotely or closely, briefly or fixedly) we can hide from our true Self, or remember our former Self, giving up that image and, finally, encountering our current Self. Hence, what we see in the mirror is ourselves and yet not ourselves; and only the voice of our consciousness can identify what in reality we are dealing with and whether there is any deception involved. Our self-consciousness, in its turn (and this is of particular importance for Bunin) helps us to overcome the reserved nature of the Self and reveal our true face, engaging us in the process of recollection and reflection. The latter points out that the *bifurcation* that occurs at this stage should not be interpreted negatively but rather treated as a condition of integrity. Furthermore, the mirror is declared here to be a tool by means of

which the hero is able to look impartially into himself and his memory. This is a symbol<sup>41</sup> of self-recognition and self-cognition, an aesthetic element which is present in all key periods of Bunin's hero's life, beginning with 'a feeling of himself being a child, struck and astonished by the mirror' [oshchushchenie sebia rebenkom, porazhennym i udivlennym zerkalom] (Bunin 6: 294) and onwards.

The encounter with the mirror turns out to be the most important moment of his conscious life, for it puts an end to timelessness, 'emptiness' and 'non-existence', signifying the beginning of 'Being itself' (ibid.). The themes of *Mirror* in this sense also vividly illustrate the idea of the *boundary character* of Bunin's novel (this aspect was discussed earlier in conjunction with the problem of *The Life of Arsen'ev* being within and yet outside the focus of the artistic strivings of Russian literature of that period). The subject of Bunin's study, that is, the personality that goes through the process of its coming into being, the personality that creates and recognizes itself and finally finds its place in historical time, feeling its own association with the 'greater' experience of culture, is presented here not as an 'objective' historical or social crisis but as conscious introspection,<sup>42</sup> in other words, the history of recollected life. The narrative method which Bunin employs in *Mirror* largely defines that used in the novel and can be described as an aspiration to show man, not as a reserved body, but as an amazingly undiluted, though tense amalgamation, a blending of the cultural-historical and personal, spatial and

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<sup>41</sup> Not to mention the rich cultural-literary and diverse mythological-metaphorical interpretation of this image, which is deliberately left out of the scope of this study.

<sup>42</sup> As Vladimir Veidle defines it, 'the theme of the book is not life but a contemplation of life' [tema knigi ne zhizn', a sozertsanie zhizni]: see V. Veidle, 'Na smert' Bunina', in *Russian Critical Essays*:



temporal, who is, above all, capable of synthesising times in himself, reflecting the past in the present and visa versa. It is therefore important to note that none of Bunin's heroes is set up to be an observer of the happening, just as none of them simply narrates the past: they are as it were placed in the past with all the multi-layeredness of its associations. In *Mirror* the process of remembrance is shown as a spontaneous process in which there is an element of the irrational or mystical that, in part, reminds one of the way an image appears in the fortune-telling mirror. The only difference here is that the mirror in the story cannot foretell the future, nor can it give a sense of *fate*. But what remains is the hero's overwhelming feeling that the mirror is something complex and mysterious, whereas it is simply a piece of glass, 'greased with some "quicksilver"' (p. 297). The story concludes with the following passage:

To this day you can still see a scratch on this mirror made by my hand many, many years ago, at the moment when I tried to catch a glimpse, even out of the corner of my eye, of the unknown and incomprehensible that has accompanied me all my life from the very spring of my days.

I saw myself in this mirror as a child, and now I can no longer imagine that child: he has vanished forever and without return.

I saw myself in the mirror as a boy, but now I do not remember him either.

I saw myself as a young man and only from portraits do I know whom the mirror once reflected.

Is it really mine, this young, slightly haughty face? In the mirror there is reflected a sad and, alas, now calm face.

The day will come and it too will disappear forever from the world.

And of all my attempts to guess the meaning of the mirror there will remain only one trace: a scratch on the glass, greased with miraculous 'quicksilver'.

[На этом зеркале и до сих пор видна царапина, сделанная моей рукой много, много лет тому назад, - в ту минуту, когда я пытался хоть глазком заглянуть в неведомое и непонятное, всю жизнь сопутствующее мне от самого истока дней моих.

Я видел себя в этом зеркале ребенком, - и вот уже не представляю себе этого ребенка: он исчез навсегда и без возврата.

Я видел себя в зеркале отроком, но теперь не помню и его.

Видел юношей, - и только по портретам знаю, кого отражало когда-то зеркало.

Но разве мое - это юное, слегка надменное лицо? В зеркале отражается теперь печальное и, увы, уже спокойное лицо.

Настанет день - и навсегда исчезнет из мира и оно.

И от всех попыток моих разгадать зеркало останется один след: царапина на стекле, намазанном дивною "ртутью".] (p. 299)

Thus, Bunin's hero arrives at the idea of the futility of his attempt to exhaust memory, for it is infinite and, therefore, cannot be reduced only to one's own experience. Moreover, here Bunin raises the question (the answer to which he offers in *The Life of Arsen'ev*) about the existence of what Bakhtin calls 'great memory' (*bol'shaia pamiat*). This is a memory, according to Bakhtin, 'not limited by practice' (*ne ogranichennaia praktikoi*), nor 'disinterested' in its nature; it revives and makes everything universal, giving meaning to all things:

This great memory is not memory about the past (in the abstract-temporal sense); time is relative in it. It is that which returns eternally and at the same time irrevocably.

**[Эта большая память не есть память о прошлом (в отвлеченно временном смысле): время относительно в ней. То, что возвращается вечно и в то же время невозвратно.]<sup>43</sup>**

It follows from the concluding passage of the story that Bunin's hero realizes one important truth (this also explains why the fragment was never included in any published versions of the novel): the essence of human life is not 'mirrorness' (zerkal'nost'), that is, motionless and timeless contemplation and impassive observation. In *The Life of Arsen'ev* Bunin implements the idea of the unity of man and time, endowing it, above all, with a modern, broadened interpretation, namely, the notion of the open unity of culture.

A significant part of the novel is devoted to the development of the relationship between Arsen'ev and Lika which tragically ends with Lika's death. In the concluding lines of the narrative, Bunin's hero says that he dreamt of her:

Not long ago I saw her in my dreams, the only time in all my long life without her. She was the same age as then, during our shared life and youth, but in her face there was now the charm of faded beauty. She was thin, wearing something like mourning garb. I saw her vaguely but with a strength of love and joy, with a bodily and mental intimacy which I have never felt for anyone else.

**[Недавно я видел ее во сне - единственный раз за всю свою долгую жизнь без нее. Ей было столько же лет, как тогда, в пору нашей общей жизни и**

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<sup>43</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'K voprosam samosoznaniia i samoosnki', in *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, V, (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1996), pp. 72-80 (p. 78).

общей молодости, но в лице ее уже была прелесть увядшей красоты. Она была худа, на ней было что-то похожее на траур. Я видел ее смутно, но с такой силой любви, радости, с такой телесной и душевной близостью, которой не испытывал ни к кому никогда.] (Bunin 6: 288)

There are several passages in the novel where Bunin's hero expresses his, at times contradictory, attitude to love. Nevertheless, it is not until Lika's death that he begins to understand love, not as one man's ownership, but as a transformation. In the end he comes to the conclusion that in this feeling there is no such thing as a proprietor or driving force because, together with selfishness, it destroys not only the feeling itself but, albeit indirectly, as with Lika, those whom we love. Hence his love for Lika helped Arsen'ev to see the face of reality, to extract a certain experience. He became convinced of one idea: we live, or to be more exact, do not lose *an ability to live* only because we have '*the gift*' of remembrance that keeps alive those whom we love but who are no longer with us. For through every act of remembrance we make a move into external space, thus giving our past a new life in time. That part of Arsen'ev's soul which loved Lika did not die. On the contrary, as a result of his liberating himself from this love, letting it go, a sense of this feeling still lives as a part of his soul and consciousness to the fullest possible extent.

#### 4. Unfinished completion

*The Life of Arsen'ev* creates the impression of an intentionally *unfinished novel*. It is, however, important to remember that in the opening passage Bunin's hero makes clear that he does not have any particular reason to begin writing a book. But it now seems that neither does he have a reason to finish it. This fact (along with the '*fragmentary*' (fragmentarnost') and '*variative*' (variativnost') nature of the narrative) Mamardashvili describes as the major feature of twentieth-century narrative art.<sup>44</sup> For, in the end, we see a person who 'has completed his journey' (proshel put') (ibid.) and hence is capable of writing a book in which he can look back at himself without any impediment. Mamardashvili also makes the important observation that in such types of narrative we are dealing with the phenomenon of '*continuous writing*' (*nepreryvnoe pis'mo*) (p. 468), which is a discovery and characteristic of twentieth-century novelistic discourse. Continuous writing is in its own way a metaphor of 'continuous becoming' (*nepreryvnoe stanovlenie*) (ibid.), movement, development and transformation in relation to which everything else, all possible interpretations and perceptions receive meaning. The whole paradox of this prose is that its unfinished character manifests at the same time, according to Mamardashvili, its 'arbitrary completion' (proizvol'naia okonchennost')

In the fact of the unfinished character of the novel we see a very ancient thing, noted even in mythology, which realizes the ancient symbol of the snake as a symbol of conscious life, or of the infinity of conscious life, or of conscious life without beginning. The coming into being - becoming fully oneself - might seem to be the end, but is, in fact, the beginning.

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<sup>44</sup> Mamardashvili, *Psikhologicheskaiia topologiia puti*, 323.

[В факте неоконченности романа мы видим очень древнюю, уже в мифологии отмеченную вещь, реализующую древний символ змеи как символ сознательной жизни или бесконечности сознательной жизни. Или безначальности сознательной жизни. Возникновение – стать полностью самим собой, – казалось бы конец, а он и есть начало.] (p. 469)

The whole appeal of Bunin's artistic mastery and the continuing relevance of his novel lies in the fact that it vividly reproduces, intuitively fixes the growth of the human soul, all that happens to man during the process of his coming into being. It is interesting that the contemporary Russian writer Sasha Sokolov in an account of art and the current literary situation expresses the view that all artists are divided by their belonging to two different trends in art, namely, *what* and *how*, which embody the 'game', or 'disposition' of realism and modernism, form and content, matter and spirit and so forth. In Russian literature, for Sokolov, the manifestation of this polarity is the work of Tolstoi and Dostoevskii. Although Sokolov does not establish the exact border between these two trends (for, if it exists at all, it is obscure), he nevertheless proposes that the adherents of *what* in art are such writers as Sholokhov and almost all representatives of Soviet socialist realism who did not stand their ground, could not resist 'the temptation of sociality', writing on 'the topic of the day', gaining thereby 'cheap popularity'. Among the followers of *how* in art are Kandinskii, Flaubert, Rimbaud and Joyce. To Bunin belongs a special place on this list. He is singled out, in Sokolov's view, not only because he is 'an acknowledged master of prose' [priznanniy master prozy], but primarily because he answers the question *how?* with 'language which is rich, precise, refined and without any official or ideological tinge' [языком богатым, изысканным и лишенным какой-либо официальной

или идеологической окраски].<sup>45</sup> ‘Everyone can answer the question ‘what?’, concludes Sokolov, ‘but ‘how?’ is the key to artistic truth, and this key is given to the chosen’ [Всякий может ответить на вопрос “что?”, но “как?” – это ключ к художественной правде, и ключ этот дается избранным] (ibid.). In this sense Sokolov’s words seem to echo the point made by Khodasevich that being lyrical and highly sensitive to language should not necessarily be understood as being ahistorical and certainly does not mean failure to encompass the historical, for, as Khodasevich puts it, ‘the road to Bunin’s philosophy lies through Bunin’s philology, and only through it’ [put’ k buninskoi filosofii lezhit cherez buninskuiu filologiiu – i tol’ko cherez nee].<sup>46</sup>

Hence it should be stated once more that sociality was never a point of departure in Bunin’s artistic thinking, but that he was not necessarily, as a consequence, an ahistorical artist. History is represented here not so much on the ‘official’, explicit level as on the ‘unofficial’, or, using Bakhtin’s expression, ‘human-coparticipatory’ (‘chelovecheski-souchastnyi’), *creative* level. This means that in Bunin’s artistic world the historical does not thrive on outward experience. Rather it commences when man, whilst emerging, begins to master ‘the truth’ of human interrelationships, to sense the moment of development and movement in his soul, realising, within his inner experience, the uniqueness of life, the singularity of his own destiny. It is important that in *The Life of Arsen’ev* the concept of life as history is formed from that very instant when the hero decides, or wishes, to look into the spiritual world of other people, begins to learn to think of the world not as a

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted from D. Barton Johnson, ‘Sasha Sokolov: Literary Biography’, in Sasha Sokolov, *Palisandriia* (Moscow: Glagol, 1995), pp. 271-91 (p. 286).

pure sphere of absolute, eternal existence and ultimate values but as a certain process of *life*, the only reality left to man. The *history* of the human soul, 'things and deeds', is a 'small world', 'a mirror' into which the great world of history looks and in which it is reflected and finds its place. In other words, for Bunin history becomes *humanized* only when it is taken in by man, and by *any* man. And it is, indeed, at this point that the juxtaposition of Bunin and Pasternak once more inevitably suggests itself. It is enough to recall Zhivago's famous statement in his conversation with Gordon on the 'reality' of history: 'Facts do not exist until man has endowed them with something of his own, some grain of human free-making genius, some fairy-tale' [Фактов нет, пока человек не внес в них чего-то своего, какой-то доли вольничаящего человеческого гения, какой-то сказки].<sup>47</sup> A sense of history, along with a sense of time, is a discovery of associations and connections, all that is eternal and integral in all of us. This is, in Pasternak's words, a 'giving' of ourselves to 'the passion with which mankind ran into' us [otdacha toi strasti... s kakoi vbezhalo... chelovechestvo].<sup>48</sup> Hence man and history are always in the unity of senses, thoughts, experience and the small details of daily occurrences which initially form life. This is the first principle of Being. In *The Life of Arsen'ev* history proves to be a real, absolutely vital category. Bunin seeks to demonstrate that it is the world itself that grows from man but man does not grow into the world; there is no mystery in the world, the enigma lies within man. Hence, the world and history receive their significance only when man fastens his gaze on them. Any history of life always has its own

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<sup>46</sup> Vladislav Khodasevich, 'Bozh'e drevo', *Vozrozhdenie*, 30 April 1931 (repr. in I. A. Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (8 vols) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1996), V, pp. 13-18 (p. 17)).

<sup>47</sup> Boris Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago*, 123.



place in the history of the world, one which corresponds only to it. In short, history, as an approved process, does not exist outside man. What exists, rather, is his direct perception of this process, its sense and refraction in human consciousness. To sense history, for Bunin, means to sense, first and foremost, Being itself, the elementarity of everyday life. This lies at the basis of our imagination of reality, forming the realm of the cultural. Our discovery of the world is as much a creative act of the spirit as is the formation of the world of spiritual-cultural values. Hence, historicity can be defined as a realisation of oneself in two temporal planes: in the sphere of the local, transient life and that of history. Intersecting and intertwining with each other, they receive a new, supreme and non-transient meaning. It is precisely this that makes Bunin a historical artist.

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<sup>48</sup> Boris Pasternak, *Okhrannaia gramota*, in *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, IV (1991), pp. 149-240 (p. 211).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 'Without Beginning and End': The Idea of Extra-temporality in *Chang's Dreams*, *God's Tree* and *The Emancipation of Tolstoi*.

Gerfühl ist alles - чувство всё. *Гёте*.  
 Действительность - что такое действительность?  
 Только то, что я чувствую. Остальное - вздор. [...]  
 Grau, lieber Freund, sind alle Theorien,  
 Doch ewig grün das goldne Baum des Lebens -  
 Все умозрения, милый друг, серы.  
 Но вечно зелено золотое Древо Жизни.

И. А. Бунин. *Дневник*. 7/12 августа 1923

#### 1.

The questions of what is destiny and what is the essence of the relationship between life and death in the chronotope of human life began to engage Bunin's artistic thinking deeply as early as in the group of stories *Ioann Rydalets* [Ioann the Weeper], *Lirknik Rodion* [The Minstrel Rodion] and *Chasha Zhizni* [The Chalice of Life] of 1913, *Brat'ia* [Brothers] (1914), *Gospodin iz San-Frantsisko* [The Gentleman from San Francisco] (1915) and *Syn* [The Son], *Sny Changa* [Chang's Dreams], *Sootechestvennik* [The Compatriot] and *Petlistye ushi* [Gnarled Ears] of 1916. Bunin also addressed the same issues in the mid to late 1920s when he was working on the collection of short stories *Bozh'e drevo* [God's Tree] (1927) and the novel *The Life of Arsen'ev*, and had begun to select the material for his principal book of non-fiction *Osvobozhdenie Tolstogo* [The Emancipation of Tolstoi] (1937).

In his diary notes of 1919, entitled *Okaiannye dni* [Cursed days], Bunin writes: 'What a generally huge place death occupies in our already tiny existence' [Какое вообще громадное место занимает смерть в нашем и без

того крохотном существовании].<sup>1</sup> Six years later, in his conversation with the Stepuns about life after death and the possibility of personal resurrection, Bunin, although denying the existence of both, makes, according to Vera Bunina, the following remark: 'But I do not believe in death' [Ved' ia ne veriu v smert'].<sup>2</sup> So what is death in Bunin's understanding? Does one's knowledge and awareness of death have any significance in solving the enigma of existence? And if so, how should one accept one's own fate and relate to life and the world in general? What is the nature of this relationship? Does non-belief in death necessarily mean that mortality, that is, finiteness, and, broadly speaking, time cannot be taken seriously? If this is the case, what, on the whole, should be one's attitude to Being? Bunin, in one way or another, touches on these problems in all the stories listed above. However, two of them, *Chang's Dream* of 1916 and *God's Tree*, written a decade later, prove to be especially revealing on this point.

The connection between these two stories can be expressed as follows: essentially they are about *trust in the world*. Extending this formulation, both stories are about an aspiration to find the meaning of life in what is given. But for 'every creature on earth',<sup>3</sup> be it an animal, plant or human being, this given, according to Bunin, is *life* itself, that is, a certain time and space, and the *link* between all that lives.

The first story, *Chang's Dreams*, tells the life story of a dog called Chang, the greater part of which, moreover, is conveyed through his dreams, so that, from the very beginning, Chang admits that it is not always clear what

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<sup>1</sup> I. Bunin, 'Okaiannye dni', in *Lish' slovu zhizn' dana...: Dnevnik 1881-1953* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1990), pp. 241-344 (p.268).

<sup>2</sup> Grim, *Ustami Buninykh*, II, 138.

is dream and what is real. Chang's master, the Captain, is a hard drinker, which in turn was the main cause of his rather early retirement (the Captain has yet to reach forty), from long voyages. Now Chang and the Captain live 'ashore', somewhere in Odessa, though it might be anywhere, 'in a narrow, rather dismal street in the attic of a five-story building which smells of coal' and furthermore:

The ceiling of Chang and the Captain's present home is low and their room is large and cold. Furthermore, it is always dark because the two windows set into the sloping wall under the eaves are small and round and reminiscent of portholes. Something that vaguely resembles a chest-of-drawers stands between these windows, and an old iron bedstead leans against the left-hand wall: and that completes the appointment of this melancholy abode, not counting the fireplace which blows a constant draught of cold air into the room. (p. 29)

When Chang and the Captain are not sleeping they are wandering from one low bar or restaurant to another. The Captain tries to find, in the bottle and by confiding in a friend, solace from the pain associated with his professional (ship-wreck) and personal (wife's infidelity and ultimately her departure, taking their only daughter) losses which were, in their turn, the major reason for his alcoholism, unhappiness, solitude and misery.

But there were other, better times, which, from time to time, rise to the surface of Chang's memory, when his master 'was, in spite of all, a very happy man', full of life energy and delight in Being, a devoted husband and loving father:

'A happy man in spite of all, Chang!' he said, and continued: 'That daughter, Chang, [...] what an adorable creature she is! I love her so much, old fellow, that I'm even afraid of my love: she's the whole world to me, or let's say near enough the whole

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<sup>3</sup> Ivan Bunin, *Chang's Dreams*, in *Long Ago*, ed. David Richards, tr. David Richards and Sophie Lund

world – and can that be right? Yes, are we in general meant to love anyone so much?', he asked. 'Do you think all those Buddhas were any more stupid than you or me, and yet just listen to what they have to say about loving the world and all material things – no matter whether it's sunlight or waves or air, or a woman, or a child, or the scent of white acacia! And do you know about Taoism [...]? There is a Great Mother of the Abyss who gives the birth to all creation – in other words that is The Way of all creation, against which no creature on earth should rebel. But we rebel at every turn, at every turn try to alter not only, shall we say, the soul of a woman we love but the entire universe to suit ourselves. Life is a frightening on this planet, Chang', said the Captain, 'very sweet, but frightening – especially for people like me. I'm so very greedy for happiness and so often I come to grief. Is The Way dark and cruel, or is it exactly the opposite?' [...] 'Shall I tell you the point of all this? *When you love someone no power on earth can make you believe that you may not be loved in return.* And that, Chang, is where the trouble lies. But, my God, how wonderful life is, how wonderful!' (pp. 36-7)

These were moments when the Captain was firmly convinced that there exist two truths in the world that 'endlessly revolve' around each other. The first is that 'life was unutterably beautiful', and the second that 'life was only to be contemplated by madmen' (p.29). At these moments Chang also credulously shared his master's realisation of the world consisting of two truths.

Now, after all the Captain had seen and experienced, he had become a staunch supporter of the idea that:

[...] there is, and was, and forever and ever will be, only one truth – the latter, the truth that belongs to the Jew Job and to the wise man from that mysterious tribe, Ecclesiastes. These days, sitting in the beer parlour, the Captain will often pronounce: 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years drawn nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them'. (pp.29-30)

In his conversation with his friend, a painter by profession who becomes, after the Captain's death at the end of the story, Chang's new master, the Captain describes this one and only truth as 'cruel and loathsome':

'Just look around you', he says, 'and consider all those people we meet day after day in the beer parlour, the café or the street. My friend, I've travelled the world over – life is the same everywhere you go. All those things people are supposed to live by are nothing but lies and rubbish: they have no God, no conscience, no rational goals in life, no love, no friendship, no honesty – there isn't even simple pity. Life is a dismal winter day in a filthy tavern, that's all...' (p. 39)

What is Chang's position in relation to all this? Greatly though he appreciates his master's ability to diagnose the morbid, the artificial, the hypocritical and the talentless in life, Chang is nevertheless confused. He is no longer sure whether to agree with the Captain: he 'neither knows nor understands', and 'that being the case, things must be bad' (ibid.). Bunin draws attention to two episodes in Chang's life that brought him to the idea of the inevitability and necessity of another, third truth in the world, whose existence for Chang is indisputable. However, for Chang there remains the problem of naming it.

The first time that Chang experienced the close presence of something in his life, something that was incomprehensible and yet spiritually and emotionally charged, placing an ineffaceable imprint on Chang's soul, was on the deck of the Captain's ship when Chang, at the time still a foolish, trusting puppy, watched the picture of the sunset and rapidly falling night in the middle of the Red Sea. The night sea was 'terrifying and magnificent' (p.41) at the same time, 'bewitching' both the Captain and Chang with its 'sublime and fearful spectacle' (ibid.) along with 'the blind, dark, but endlessly teeming,

dully mutinous Abyss' (p.42). It was at precisely this moment that Chang felt all the substantiality of nature's existence, its self-sufficiency, independence, uncontrolled might and, above all, its mastery over everything in this world and in whose face all that lives is unprotected and helpless as a child. But conversely, bearing in itself the harmonious idea of the universe, nature draws all living creatures together, linking them to each other as it linked Chang to the Captain during that unforgettable night, making their hearts beat in unison. Insisting on the universal dissolution of the living in nature, Bunin is particularly fascinated by the idea of the spiritual kinship and unity between people and animals that he vividly expresses in the poem *Vaulting-horse* [Kobylitsa] written at the same time as *Chang's Dreams*:

All God's creations are one // Blessed is he who created them // And combined all desires // And all languor in mine.

**[Едины Божии созданья.**

**Благословен создавший их**

**И совместивший все желанья**

**И все томления - в моих.]**

The second episode that made Chang believe in the third truth's existence was his meeting with the painter on the porch of a church after the Captain's burial service when man and dog found themselves drawn together, united by the same feeling of grief for the loss of someone dear:

He touches Chang's head with a trembling hand, bends down further still, and their eyes meet brimming with tears and such love for one another that, silently, all of Chang's being cries out to the world: 'No, oh no, there's another truth on earth, one I can't see, a third truth!' (p. 46)

Although the name of this truth remains unknown to Chang, he understands its meaning and acutely feels its presence and effect here, in this earthly, finite life. It keeps the Captain alive, that is, it is capable of conquering death:

For if Chang loves the Captain, and feels his presence, and sees him through the eyes of memory, that God-given sight which none of us can understand, then the Captain is still with him; in that world which has no beginning and no end and is beyond the reach of Death. In that world there can be only one truth – the third – but what it is is known only to the final Master to whom Chang too must soon return. (Ibid.)

Hence, memory, as one of the manifestations of the third truth, along with our awareness of death and recognition of our physical finiteness, offer us the long awaited opportunity to cognize and accept time as well as the opportunity to overcome it, to feel something which is already beyond reach, beyond temporal limitations. As for the essence of the third truth, it is rooted in the many-sided meaning of Being itself; it is, as perhaps only Fate can be, in Vladimir Linkov's words, 'inaccessible both to man and animal': 'all that is living has a presentiment of it' [nedostupna ni cheloveku, ni zhivotnomu. Ona predchuvstvuetsia vsem zhivym].<sup>4</sup>

There is a crucial issue that requires further clarification. It is important that in the story the discovery of the third truth and the words about its significance and necessity belong to an animal. And in Bunin, this animal, moreover, is neither, for instance, a horse nor a cat but a dog, which in itself may seem, to some extent, ironic since, in the hierarchy of animal images, a dog is traditionally regarded by other animals as an ignoble, despicable creature that always needs to be dependent on his master, whose guidance and orders he blindly follows. But most importantly, a dog is noteworthy for its



unquestioning obedience and a complete lack of intellect. For Vladimir Linkov the matter seems to be very simple: since the nature of the third truth is 'non-human' ('nechelovecheskaia') (ibid.), only an animal can know it. However, this still would not explain adequately why, in exemplifying the whole notion of the third truth, Bunin's chooses to do so through an animal. Firstly, the image of an animal has rich cultural-symbolic, religious and mythological-folkloric roots and content. As Mikhail Epshtein puts in his study of the system of animal imagery in Russian literature:

The animal is, for man, the most obvious form of spirit existing in a different manner which he can appraise both as super-human and not-quite-human but which in either event defines his place in the hierarchy of the universe.

[Животное – самая наглядная для человека форма инобытия духа, которую он может оценивать как сверхчеловеческую и нечеловеческую, но которая так или иначе определяет его место в иерархии мироздания.]<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, animals are noteworthy and, in a sense, unique because of their boundary position. They are situated exactly in-between man and the rest of nature, combining in their existence both spiritual elements and qualities (such as feeling and character) and natural ones: for any animal is already, in essence, an organic part of nature whereas man is, in Epstein's expression, 'only potentially' (p. 91) part of nature. Lastly, the period of the turn of the century and first two decades of the twentieth-century was distinguished by the rise of a new animalistic philosophy (the poetry of Konevskii, Zenkevich, Esenin, Kliuev, Maiakovskii, Blok, Bal'mont, Briusov, Gumilev, Mandel'shtam, Khlebnikov and Bunin himself) expressed in the urge to

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<sup>4</sup> V. Ia. Linkov, *Mir i chelovek v tvorchestve L. Tolstogo i I. Bunina* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1989), p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> M. N. Epshtein, *Priroda, mir, tainik vselennoi...: Sistema peizazhnykh obrazov v russkoi poezii* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1990), p. 88.

question not only the significance of traditional human values but also to reconsider man's position in and attitude to nature which resulted in a broadening and, according to Epshtein, 'qualitative renewal' (p. 98) and diversification of animalistic themes and motifs. Bunin's poem *Sobaka* [The Dog] of 1909 is perhaps the most revealing in this respect. What is distinctive about Bunin's approach here is the introduction of the motif of the brotherhood of man and animal as opposed to Tolstoi's advocacy of the pre-eminent and edifying role of animals in relation to man and of the concept of animals having a generally greater access to 'truth' than intellectuals. In this poem Bunin outlines, above all, the idea of the biological and psychological-mental relationship between man and dog which has deep and firm roots, on the level of pre-historic existence, and which mutually enriches and links both man and animal:

But I always share my thoughts with you // I am a man // Like God I am doomed //

To come to know the anguish of all countries and all times.

[Но я всегда делю с тобою думы:

Я человек: как Бог я обречён

Познать тоску всех стран и всех времён.]

In *Chang's Dreams* Bunin's choice of a dog is associated with the fact that this image does not have any complex symbolic or mythological-folkloric connotation. And precisely because (and thanks to) a dog's ordinary and profoundly prosaic qualities, Bunin singles it out for its proximity to the rhythm of human life and high engagement in man's everyday existence. Furthermore, in Bunin's story the dog is not a passive observer of man's life and emotional state. Chang becomes a life companion to the Captain, sharing moments of happiness with him as well as feeling tenderness towards him and,

at the same time, pity for all the Captain's pain, misfortune and despair. The dog emerges here as a philosopher of life whom Bunin allows to reflect on the essence of the third truth that consists of the harmonious unity of all that lives, the necessity for them to join in and maintain a communication with each other in order to feel its bracing energy which provides the connection between times.

There arises one more important question: what is man's contribution, actual and possible, in the affirmation of the third truth? In other words, to what extent does its existence relate to and interact with the human sphere? Can man experience its presence in and interference with his everyday life? Bunin attempts to offer a partial answer to this question in *God's Tree* and in *The Emancipation of Tolstoi*.

## 2.

*God's Tree* is written as a fragment from diary notes, a deliberately subjectless form familiar from *The Shadow of the Bird* and *Many Waters*, and favoured by Bunin for, as he puts it in a letter to Bitsilli of 17 May 1931, its 'intentional documentary quality, the visibility of the experienced' [umyshlennaia protokol'nost', vidimost' perezhitogo].<sup>6</sup> The notes cover a fifteen-day period of their author's life, beginning with the arrival on his country estate of Iakov Nechaev, a workman-*odnodvoret*s, to watch over the orchard rented by some petty bourgeois for the summer. The notes are unexpectedly interrupted because of the author's decision to go on holiday. The main focus of the diary

notes is on the sphere of language, that is, on the author's conversations with Iakov Nechaev about the meaning of life and death and the place of God and nature in human life.

It is interesting that despite its primitive composition and the abrupt nature of the narrative, *God's Tree* leaves us with the impression of a finished work. In Vladislav Khodasevich's view, the artistic integrity of *God's Tree* is created by means of what he describes as 'psychological gesture' (psikhologicheskii zhest).<sup>7</sup> Khodasevich asserts:

It is, moreover, especially characteristic that Bunin should express this psychological gesture not through action, not through act, but only through verbal formulation, in a remark or exclamation which now harmonizes with, now disharmonizes with the picture that has just been portrayed.

[Притом особенно характерно. [...] что этот психологический жест Бунина [...] выражает не в действии, не в поступке, а лишь в словесной формуле, в замечании, в восклицании, то гармонирующем, то дисгармонирующем с только что изображённой картиной.] (Ibid.)

Khodasevich also makes an important discovery by stressing that it is precisely 'observations of language' (nabliudeniiia nad iazykom) (p. 15) that condition both the eventful and the meaningful content of the story, making language itself 'the true and principal, if not the only, *hero*' [истинным и главным, если не единственным *героем*] of *God's Tree*: after all, the philosophical 'ideas are contained here in the verbal material itself and are revealed in no other way than by penetrating it' [идеи заключены здесь в самом словесном материале и раскрываются не иначе, как путём проникновения в него] (p. 16). In his appraisal of Bunin's story, Bitsilli

<sup>6</sup> A. Meshcherskii, 'Neizvestnye pis'ma I. Bunina', *Russkaia literatura*, 4 (1961), 152-8 (p. 153).

<sup>7</sup> Vladislav Khodasevich, 'Bozh'e drevo', *Vozrozhdenie*, 30 April 1931 (repr. in Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, V (1996), pp. 13-18 (p. 14)).

argues that this is also true of Bunin's 'artistic method' ('khudozhestvennyi metod') in general:

Proceeding from the same sentimental-'realist' dross from which the symbolists, too, proceeded, Bunin created his own method that turned out to be the direct opposite of the symbolists'. The latter went from words to things. Bunin went from things to words... [...] After *The Journey to Arzrum* and *Old-world Landowners* there is no work in Russian prose which, *from the stylistic point of view*, might be ranked alongside *God's Tree*. Here the author's attitude to life is expressed exclusively through vivid verbal description. [...] One can find few books where the form is in such absolute accord with the content. *God's Tree* is as impossible to 'interpret' as any of Pushkin's poems [...].

[Отталкиваясь от той же самой sentimentalно-“реалистической” дешевки, от которой отталкивались и символисты, Бунин создал свой метод, который оказался прямой противоположностью методу символистов. Последние шли от слов к вещам. Бунин шёл от вещей к словам... [...] После *Путешествия в Арзрум*, после *Старосветских помещиков* нет в русской прозе памятника, который можно было бы с точки зрения стиля поставить наряду с *Божьим деревом*. Здесь отношение автора к жизни выражено исключительно путём словесного живоописания. [...] Но немного найдётся книг, в которых форма была бы столь абсолютно согласована с содержанием. *Божье дерево* так же невозможно “истолковать”, как любое стихотворение Пушкина [...].<sup>8</sup>

What is particularly attractive about Iakov Nechaev's character is his deep serenity and emotional stability, which are rooted in his belief in humanity and the world in general. Moreover, Bunin's hero is striking in his ability always to see life as though anew, as though for the first time, to accept its every manifestation, however trivial it may seem, in all its freshness and significance. This idea is organically woven into all the story's dialogues,

<sup>8</sup> P. M. Bitsilli, 'Bunin i ego mesto v russkoi literature' [1931], in Meshcherskii, 'Neizvestnye pis'ma', 152.

which, as the following passage reveals, contain proverbs, sayings, and slightly modified apophthegms from *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs*:

'Iakov Demidych, why do you live in this world?'

'What do you mean? To watch over your orchard.'

'No, I don't mean that. Why were you born? Why do you exist on the earth?'

'God knows.'

'So, you don't know?'

'But who does know?'

'But one must know. One must think, work it out.'

'I do think.'

'And what have you decided?'

'What have I decided? To be honest, I don't know.'

'But maybe you live only to eat, drink, sleep, reproduce and enjoy yourself?'

'No. That would be boring.'

'So, you don't live for that? What for then?'

'So that there is joy in the world.'

'For joy! But isn't it a joy to eat and drink well, to sleep with a beautiful wife, to be rich and respected?'

'That goes without saying.'

'So this isn't all that matters?'

'I guess not.'

'What does matter?'

He thinks, than laughs, 'What matters! Once my late father and I were carting crops from the field and I began to pester him, - what, how, why, - I used to be very bothersome. He was silent for a while then finally said, 'You will know why when I hit you between the eyes with this whip, lad!'

[**- Яков Демидыч, для чего ты на свете живёшь?**

**- Как для чего? Вот ваш сад караюлю.**

**- Да нет, я не про то. Для чего ты на свет родился, для чего на земле существуешь?**

- А господь его знает.
  - Значит, не знаешь?
  - А кто ж знает?
  - Да ведь надо знать. Надо думать, подумываться.
  - Я и думаю.
  - Ну, и что ж надумал?
  - Надумал-то? По совести сказать, не знаю.
  - А может, ты живёшь только для того, чтобы есть, пить, спать, потомство плодить, жить в своё удовольствие?
  - Нет, это я бы заскучал.
  - Значит, ты живёшь не для этого? Но тогда для чего же?
  - А чтоб радость была.
  - Радость! А это разве не радость, - сладко есть, сладко пить, с женой красивой спать, богатым и почётным быть?
  - Это сама собой.
  - Значит, не в этом в одном дело?
  - Стало быть, что нет.
  - А в чём же?
- Думает. Потом смеётся:
- В чём да дело! Мы вот так-то возили раз с покойником родителем хлеб с поля, а я и пристаю к нему, - что, да как, да зачем, - я тогда совсем коростовый был, - а он молчал, молчал, да и говорит, наконец: "Вот как пушу тебе, малый, по ушам кнутом, тогда узнаешь зачем!" (Bunin 5: 364)

Hence, Iakov is convinced (and this is exactly what he has in common with Chang) that it is *simply impossible* for life not to have a meaning. As for death, to it, as to everything in this world, there is a season: death is an integral part of life and should be accepted as such, simply and stoically: 'What is there to be afraid of! All the same, no one is going to grieve. The forest does not regret the passing of a single tree!' [Вона, чаго єє боятися! Всє равно, никто жалеть не будя. Лес по дереву не тужит!] (p. 356), and furthermore:

'We can grieve when we die' [**Когда будем помирать, тогда будем горевать**] (p. 360), or 'We cannot die twice but we can't avoid dying once' [**Двум смертям не быть, одные не миновать**] (p. 363). Expressing his general attitude to life, Bunin's hero compares himself with a tree: 'I am a man in the world... I live as God directs, I am, as they say, God's tree: it bends with the wind...' [**Я человек мирской... Я живу, как бог вялит, я, как говорится, божья древо: куды ветер, туда и она...**] (p. 354). This combination of words - God's tree - with which Bunin entitles the story, is very important, revealing the very originality of Bunin's approach. Here Bunin is neither concerned with exploring to its full Tolstoi's motif of man's learning from trees (whose, 'moral example is affirmed by the laws of Nature itself', in Epshtein's expression, [**учения человека у деревьев, нравственный образец которых утвержден законами самого естества**]);<sup>9</sup> nor is he 'reverential' towards the peasants whose ignorance (unawareness) and spontaneous, child-like response to life supposedly grants access to a greater understanding of the essential.<sup>10</sup> God's tree is rather a symbol of the fullness of life whose each moment and manifestation must be accepted for what they are destined to be. This is the idea of man's eternal and everyday quest for a kinship with everything that lives and breathes. Moreover, as in *Chang's Dreams*, Bunin speaks here of one more possible way for man to commune with Nature: the real *unity* of two living elements, human life and nature, their merging and dissolution in one another in order that the former can find a way to exist freely in this endless world, confronting and eventually overcoming the fear of death. Only for

<sup>9</sup> Epshtein, *Priroda, mir*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> For Mikhailov, if anything, the opposite is the case. In his view the story is shot through with Bunin's 'reverential affection' (*blagostnoe umilenie*) towards the Russian peasantry: see Mikhailov, *Strogii talant*, 188-9.



some (including Bunin's hero) is this trivial truth already a way of life (or a state of mind); for others (to which group belongs, according to Bunin, Tolstoi) it is a lifelong philosophical and spiritual quest.

### 3.

As is evident from Bunin's diary notes, memoirs and critical remarks, as well as from the reminiscences of Bunin's contemporaries, the desire to write a book about Tolstoi arose in Bunin long before 1937, when the idea finally found its embodiment in the essay *Osvobozhdenie Tolstogo* [The Emancipation of Tolstoi]. *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* is, in a sense, a direct continuation and result of the many years of meditation on the meaning of life, the role of death in man's existence and his attitude towards it, begun in the stories *Nad gorodom* [Above the Town] (1900), *Ptitsy nebesnye* [Heavenly Birds] (1909), *The Chalice of Life* (1913), *Brothers* (1914), *The Gentleman from San Francisco* (1915) and *Chang's Dreams* (1916). The same themes dominate the majority of Bunin's works written between 1924 and 1931, including numerous subjectless fragments, nameless sketches, sometimes consisting of just a few lines, and such substantial works as the novel *The Life of Arsen'ev* and the stories *Nadpisi* [The Inscriptions] (1924), *Pod Serpom i molotom* [Under the Hammer and Sickle] (1930), *God's Tree* (1927), *Many Waters* (1925-6) and *Noch'* [Night] (1925). The latter two are particularly noteworthy: in addition to being, according to James Woodward, 'the most

explicit statement'<sup>11</sup> of Bunin's philosophy, they serve as a creative laboratory where this theme finally takes shape, merging with Bunin's understanding and reading of Tolstoi. Moreover, in the story *Night* Bunin not only introduces the term 'osvobozhdenie' (*emancipation* or *liberation*), attaching to it the very meaning which is later used in *The Emancipation of Tolstoi*, but also writes a number of passages which are subsequently directly transferred to the text of the essay.

*The Emancipation of Tolstoi* focuses on two issues. Firstly, it attempts to disclose the content of the notion 'emancipation' and its significance for an understanding of most of Tolstoi's substantial writings and the inner life of his personality which, as Bunin seeks to demonstrate, by virtue of its many-sided and contradictory nature is not susceptible to a reductive definition. For the question of what prevailed over what in Tolstoi – a thinker over a writer, a philologist over a teacher or a theosopher over a jurist – will probably remain unanswered, open to many interpretations and speculations. This is, in a sense, the very nature of Tolstoi's works, which, according to Bunin, prove impossible to read 'tersely'. Secondly and most importantly, the essay considers the notion of emancipation as a key concept of Tolstoi's literary-philosophical strivings, the unifying principle of his creative thinking which sheds light on the complex and rich system of Tolstoi's language, imagery, reflections and comparisons, allowing one, above all, to look into Tolstoi's ideas in all the wealth of their associations and integrity. These two issues at first appear to intersect with one another, then to be working in parallel and finally parting, giving a new direction to an analysis of Tolstoi's texts. They

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<sup>11</sup> James B. Woodward, 'Eros and Nirvana in the Art of Bunin', *Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970),

create a compositional ellipsis, which defines, in its turn, the inner intensity of Bunin's polemics, allowing one to feel the living nerve of Tolstoi's thought.

It is significant that criticism has been repeatedly directed at the fact that the most distinguishing features of Bunin's writings are the absence of strict moral convictions and the lack of a consistent rational-intellectual quest, which together resulted in Bunin's inability to create his own philosophical system. Mikhailov holds the idea of 'abstraction-free' thinking against Bunin, arguing, moreover, that it defines an important artistic property: 'the capacity for generalisation' (*sposobnost' k obobshcheniiu*).<sup>12</sup> For Mikhailov, the lack of this capacity chiefly explains Bunin's constant need for 'a guiding, external generalisation' [*putevodnoe, idushchee izвне obobshchenie*], an infallible authority, a bearer and 'creator of absolute values in the realm of art and thought' [*sozdatel' absoliutnykh tsennostei – v sfere iskusstva i mysli*] (*ibid.*), - which is precisely what Tolstoi became for Bunin. However, if we are to presume that such an appraisal, as Woodward remarks,

[...] finds confirmation in many, perhaps even the majority, of Bunin's works, it reflects a failure to take adequate account of some of the important distinction between his pre-Revolutionary fiction and that of the *émigré* period and, in addition, to appreciate the true nature of his response to Tolstoi.<sup>13</sup>

Two important points emerge from Mikhailov's and Woodward's observations and require further clarification. The first is associated with the notion of a 'system' with reference to Bunin's thinking and work. It is, perhaps, correct to say that Bunin is one of those artists who do not have a

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576-86 (p. 579).

<sup>12</sup> O. Mikhailov, 'Primechaniia', in Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh*, IX (1967), pp. 551-67 (p. 554).

philosophical system, but only if the word 'system' is used in its strict, not to say narrow, sense. For Bunin does not have what is traditionally thought of as a system - the presence of a *unifying working pattern* in the light of which all other ideas can be explained and interpreted and which can be employed in order to implement an ethical-philosophical purpose; a *principle* that underlies the logic of all arguments, comparisons and conclusions. A system's most distinguishing feature is its strong tendency towards *universalisation*, something alien to Bunin's artistic thinking. Thus, by describing it as 'unsystematic', we reveal the most crucial aspect of Bunin's thinking and writings, an aspect which, in essence, has very little, if not nothing, to do with his 'dependence' on Tolstoi. In fact (and here we approach the second point), herein lies the root of one of Bunin's challenges to Tolstoi. For Bunin, the universalisation of certain things or phenomena of reality, historical events or the experiences of a single individual's life to which Tolstoi aspired in his thinking and works, immediately rules out the possibility of appreciating their true value and significance, of considering them in all the complexity of their associations and interrelation, singularity and uniqueness. Moreover, the reduction of the individual approach, as an inevitable result of the search for a universal key, makes literary characters less convincing and more schematic, turning them in the end, as Bunin says with reference to Tolstoi's *Smert' Ivana Il'icha* [The Death of Ivan Il'ich], into 'words and literature': everything is 'true' about them - 'only the living image is not there' [tol'ko zhivogo obraza net].<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Woodward, 'Eros and Nirvana', 576. The same view on this question was expressed a decade earlier by I. A. Il'in in his work 'Tvorchestvo I. A. Bunina', in *O t'me i prosvetlenii* (Munich: Tipografiia Obiteli prep. Iova Pechaevskogo, 1959), pp. 29-81 (p. 33).

<sup>14</sup> Grin, *Ustami Buninykh*, I (1977), 234.

The ambiguous nature of the situation that Bunin finds himself in as an author – a writer writing about another writer – is also noteworthy: it invites not various accusations of tendentiousness and partiality, but is also likely to be regarded as a rather ambitious attempt by Bunin to offer his own *alternative* analysis of Tolstoi's thinking and writings in order to demonstrate the extent to which Tolstoi was misread by criticism and, above all, misunderstood on a personal level even by those closest to him, in particular his wife and children. To realize how misleading such reproaches are, it is enough to try to grasp the logic of Bunin's thought, which displays a somewhat different attitude to the whole issue of writing about the phenomenon of Tolstoi. As Colin Wood rightly points out:

What Bunin recognizes and values here in Tolstoi are not those qualities of order, clarity and 'solidity' which made Tolstoi the greatest exponent of classical realism, but rather those moments of feverish intensity when the dividing line between outer and inner reality, between the solid external world and the writer's consciousness of it, seems to dissolve and make way for another reality which is neither objective nor subjective but a shimmering spectrum of both.<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, the essay can be read as a priceless source of biographical commentary, shedding light on certain aspects of Tolstoi's life, in particular those that Bunin finds crucial to the development of Tolstoi's literary career in general, and in relation to the turning point or 'crisis' in Tolstoi's philosophy. Here Tolstoi is perceived and represented as an organic part of Russian aristocratic culture, both symbol and climax of its intellectual and spiritual development. The narrative's atmosphere is pervaded by Bunin's fascination with the history of Tolstoi's clan and the role played by some of its

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<sup>15</sup> Wood, 'The Modernity of Ivan Bunin', 159.

representatives in Russian culture. On the other hand, *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* can be regarded as a study of Tolstoi whose primary concern is to deal with the questions of a philosophical and moral-religious nature in which Tolstoi was chiefly interested throughout the whole of his life. The present study is not concerned with either of these readings, since there is an extensive and respectable tradition of scholarship devoted to the aspects of Tolstoi which Bunin comments on (though Bunin's approach was indeed original at the time).<sup>16</sup> Both approaches have, however, one thing in common which is crucial in the context of this study: they provide the key to the idea of emancipation, which underlies the thematic core of Bunin's essay, and to some important issues of Bunin's philosophy and artistic world, turning *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* into a work which is, in a sense, as much about Bunin as it is about Tolstoi.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* emerges as a conclusive stage, a solution to Bunin's meditations on the meaning of the 'third truth' begun in *Chang's Dreams* and *God's Tree*, outlining, using Tolstoi's life as an example, various problems central to this particular problem of extra-temporality. So Tolstoi, in a sense, here becomes (or is endowed with the qualities of) a literary character whose development Bunin the author follows up and appreciates in accordance with his views. This is precisely the perspective from which Bunin's essay is examined in the present chapter.

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<sup>16</sup> See André Gide's response to Bunin's book in his *Journal 1939-42* (Paris: n. p., 1946; repr. in *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 84, pt. 2 (*Ivan Alekseevich Bunin*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp. 380-88 (p. 383)). See also Aleksandr Bakhrakh, *Bunin v khalate* (New York: Tovarishestvo Zarubezhnykh Pisatelei, 1979), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> But not in the sense that Oleg Mikhailov sees it. His claim that *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* is a work in which Bunin 'sums up his own life' [podvodit itogi sobstvennoi zhizni], 'a kind of requiem which, with outstanding power, reflected the tragedy of an artist ageing in a foreign land' [своего рода реквием, с незаурядной силой отразивший трагедию стареющего на чужбине художника], suggests a complete misunderstanding of Bunin's work. See Mikhailov, 'Primechaniia', 557.

One of the difficulties in dealing with *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* is establishing *which* Tolstoi Bunin writes about, what he discovers in this personality that makes it both so deeply intriguing and thought-provoking, and why or in what form, in Bunin's view, Tolstoi should be liberated. It is important to note that in addressing these issues, Bunin, instead of producing a successive chain of abstract-rational arguments and terms, resorts to a lyrical-metaphorical way of conveying his thought. The preference for this narrative manner is a feature of many of Bunin's so-called 'philosophical tales' (for example, *Ioann the Weeper and Brothers*, *Chang's Dreams*, *Night and Many Waters*), where Bunin tends to support all abstract ideas with pronouncements, quotations and extracts from the sacred books of various religions (especially Eastern ones), mythology and philosophy which largely inspired both Tolstoi's theological and philosophical quest and his personal views,<sup>18</sup> in particular on the question of the meaning of life and death. The extent to which Bunin was actually influenced<sup>19</sup> by these ideas will always be questionable. To judge by *The Emancipation of Tolstoi*, Bunin was strongly drawn by Tolstoi's ever-increasing interest in the East, with its culture, religions and philosophies. He

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<sup>18</sup> The late 1870s and early 1880s mark the beginning of a turning point in Tolstoi's philosophy. At this time Tolstoi turns to the East. He attaches great significance to its religions and philosophical doctrines and tries to find ideas in keeping with his own thoughts about the essence of Being, the purpose of human life and the future development of the whole of mankind. He is of the opinion that the great merit of Buddhism, the Stoics, European Prophets and Chinese Sages is that they all similarly recognize man's essence, its spiritual potentiality, and stand for the idea of the common weal. At the same time as studying philosophical treatises, Tolstoi becomes interested in oriental folklore traditions and works of oral literature, many of which he translates into Russian. He considers Buddha and Confucius to be among the many writers and thinkers of the East and West who had a significant influence upon his own philosophical strivings (see Tolstoi's response to a Question from the Petersburg publisher M. M. Laderle in October 1891 in L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v devianosta tomakh*, vol. 66 (Moscow – Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1928-58), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> For a broader analysis of Bunin's literary thinking in relation to Tolstoi's ideas, see V. Ia. Linkov, *Mir i chelovek v tvorchestve L. Tolstogo i I. Bunina* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1989), pp. 97-111. See also N. M. Kucherovskii, 'O kontseptsii zhizni v liricheskoi proze I. A. Bunina (vtoraia polovina 90-kh – nachalo 900-kh godov)', in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: Dooktiabr'skii*

also links Tolstoi's study of the East with his own ideas, developed during the course of his journey in the East, and which resulted in the collection of travel poems *The Shadow of the Bird* and the stories *Night* and *Many Waters*. David Richards' observation represents the most complete treatment of this issue to date:

How far Bunin was influenced by these ancient beliefs and how far he found them in accord with views he had already developed, it is impossible to say. What is clear, however, is that he found the sentiments expressed – and perhaps more particularly the poetic language and imagery of these works – congenial and apposite.<sup>20</sup>

*The Emancipation of Tolstoi* opens with the following passage:

'The perfect one, o monks, does not live in contentment. The perfect one, o monks, is His Holy Highness Buddha. Open your ears: the emancipation from death has been found.

And here is Tolstoi speaking of 'the emancipation':

- It is not enough that space, time and reason are forms of thinking and that life's essence is outside these forms, but all our life is an ever greater and greater submission of oneself to these forms and then again the emancipation from them... .

[“Совершенный, монахи, не живет в довольстве. Совершенный, о монахи, есть святой Высочайший Будда. Отверзьте уши ваши: освобождение от смерти найдено”.

И вот и Толстой говорит об “освобождении”:

- Мало того, что пространство и время и причина суть формы мышления и что сущность жизни вне этих форм, но вся жизнь наша есть всё большее и большее подчинение себя этим формам и потом опять освобождение от них... .] (Bunin 9: 7)

The understanding of 'the whole of Tolstoi' (ibid.), according to Bunin, is rooted in these little known words. For him, the analysis of Tolstoi is, as

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*period*, ed. Kucherovskii (Kaluga: Tul'skii Gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut, 1963), pp. 80-106.

<sup>20</sup> Richards, 'Bunin's Conception of the Meaning of Life', 159.



Mamardashvili puts it, 'an untwisting of a single endless, but single ribbon' [raskruchivanie kakoi-to odnoi beskonechnoi, no odnoi lenty],<sup>21</sup> for the whole of Tolstoi's life, his spiritual and artistic strivings, represent an attempt to find the answer to one single question: what does one *need* in order to overcome the fear of death? The course of an entire human life, as Tolstoi saw it (that is, the process of subjection, which is eventually replaced by the process of emancipation), depends on this. What makes individuals differ from one another is *the degree* of subjection and emancipation.

Tolstoi's position certainly anticipates Bunin's interest in the problem of the *interrelation* between man and time: what helps to establish and maintain it and how does man, in this respect, search for and find his place in the chain of existence, namely, history. There is a certain logic to the fact that Bunin worked on *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* in parallel with the novel *The Life of Arsen'ev*. In the essay Bunin's personal views on death and man's attitude to it read almost like a paraphrase of Arsen'ev's reflections on this subject, with which the novel opens as well as concludes. Bunin is convinced that a sense of death is an integral part of human existence in general. It is something that we experience from our first breath and that grows and develops in us in proportion to our sense of life. Bunin speaks of himself as one of those people who, 'seeing a cradle, cannot but remember the grave' [vidia kolybel', ne mogut ne vspomnit' o mogile]. Furthermore:

Every minute I think: what a strange and terrifying thing our existence is – every second you are hanging by a thread! Here I am, alive and healthy, but who knows what will happen in a second to my heart, which is, like any human heart, something that has no equal in all creation in its mystery and delicacy?

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<sup>21</sup> Merab Mamardashvili, *Kantianskie variatsii* (Moscow: Agraf, 1997), p. 14.

[Поминутно думаю: что за странная и страшная вещь наше существование – каждую секунду висншь на волоске! Вот я жив, здоров, а кто знает, что будет через секунду с моим сердцем, которое, как и всякое человеческое сердце, есть нечто такое, чему нет равного во всем творении по таинственности и тонкости?]<sup>22</sup>

Bunin claims that Tolstoi's place is also among these people, for Tolstoi's acute sense of life, his faith in it and recognition of its meaning, were largely determined and explained by his extreme sensitivity to death. It is important to note that in his account of the development of the theme of death in Tolstoi, Bunin assigns a large role to Tolstoi's first substantial work *Detstvo* [Childhood], in which this theme, for the first time, enters Tolstoi's artistic world with the portrayal of the death of Nikolen'ka Irten'ev's mother. Resurrecting innumerable episodes of the deaths of Tolstoi's characters, both major and minor, Bunin emphasizes that, beginning with *Childhood*, the theme of death, in one form or another, appears in virtually every one of Tolstoi's substantial works, and that from then onwards every aspect of human life and experience is considered by him *in relation to death*, 'the highest re-evaluator of all values' [velichaishaia pereotsenshchitsa vsekh tsennostei] (Bunin 9: 133). So it turned out for the gravely injured Andrei Bolkonskii, or for the terminally ill Ivan Il'ich, or for Anna Karenina on the day she committed suicide. Moreover, Bunin seeks to demonstrate how, within (and despite) a certain narrowness which occurs in a philosophical interpretation of the issue of man in the face of death, Tolstoi undoubtedly succeeded in his broad treatment of this subject, achieving, above all, a remarkably varied representation of death in his works.

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<sup>22</sup> Grin, *Ustami Buninykh*, I, 98-99.

Herein also lies, in Bunin's view, the whole paradox of Tolstoi's situation. Reconstructing, at times with astonishing, almost documentary accuracy, certain fragments of Tolstoi's life, especially the last days, Bunin emphasizes that it was precisely the idea of death, along with the striking persistence (combined with 'an obsessive monotony' (oderzhimost' odnoobraziia) (p. 33)) with which Tolstoi spoke of it, that first brought him close to suicide and then turned him into both a thinker and a madman at the same time, a great martyr and 'God's fool', an artist and eternal 'wanderer'. He died on 'the great road' (bol'shaia doroga) (p. 12), profoundly devoted to his attempt to solve the riddle of death, fighting for emancipation and searching for what is called in Buddhism 'coming out from Being into the Eternal' (iskhod iz 'Byvaniia v Vechnoe') and in the Gospels is known as 'the Path into Life' (Put' v Zhizn') (ibid.). During the last few years of his life Tolstoi kept a handbook entitled *The Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day* [Mysli mudrykh liudei na kazhdyi den'] and which consisted of his own thoughts and of 'the thoughts of sages of different countries, peoples and times' [mysli mudretsov razlichnykh stran, narodov i vremen] (ibid.) which he considered to be in accord with his personal views. Bunin draws our attention to one surprising coincidence. On the page dated 7 November – the day of Tolstoi's death – there is the following passage from the Gospel according to Matthew:

13 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *The Gospel According to Matthew*, in *The Bible: A Literary Survey*, ed. Charles W. Harwell and Daniel McDonald (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, INC., 1975), pp. 243-47 (pp. 245-46).

[Входите тесными вратами: ибо широки врата и пространен путь, ведущие в погнбель: и многие идут ими: ибо тесны врата и узок путь, ведущие в жизнь, и немногие находят их.] (Bunin 9: 12)

For Bunin 'the Path into Life' begins, first and foremost, with man's natural desire to establish his personal identity, to understand his place in the world. As noted earlier, the whole lyrical-philosophical core of *The Life of Arsen'ev* is nothing other than Arsen'ev's reflections on this subject. Exactly the same questions preoccupied Tolstoi's thoughts too:

'Who are you – what are you?'. Not without reason was he enthused by this – by the fact that it was this question, and no other, that his old nanny heard in the rhythmical ticking of the clock measuring off the ebbing time of her poor earthly life. For she could have heard the usual 'Tick-tock', tick-tock...'. But she heard it her way, differently: 'Who are you – what are you?'. He heard this question in himself all his life, from childhood right up to the very last minute of his life.

[“Кто ты – что ты?”. Недаром так восхищался он этим, – тем, что именно этот вопрос, а не что-либо другое слышала его старая нянька в мерном стуке часов, отмеривавших утекающее время её бедной земной жизни. Ведь можно было слышать обычно: “Тик-так, тик-так...”. Но вот она слышала свое, другое: “Кто ты – что ты?”. Сам он слышал в себе этот вопрос всю жизнь – с детства и до самой последней минуты своей.]

(p. 119)

Bunin emphasizes the importance of recognising that for Tolstoi, the question of one's vocation – 'what am I here for' (p. 137) – and such linked issues as the meaning of life in general are not for the human mind to deal with: *reason* appears to be mute in this situation. It is the human *heart* that speaks and is thus capable of anticipating this question:

Only some feeling in the depth of our consciousness answers it. Ever since people have existed, they have answered it not with words, that is, the tool of reason, a partial manifestation of life, but with the whole of life.

[Отвечает на это только какое-то чувство в глубине сознания. С тех пор, как существуют люди, они отвечают на это не словами, то есть орудием разума, частью проявления жизни, а всей жизнью.] (p. 34)

Bunin remarks that, notwithstanding such a passionate claim for the priority of feeling (or intuition), Tolstoi subjected everything to thorough intellectual examination only to return to that with which his artistic-philosophical quest had originally begun: 'People find salvation not with their intellect but by feeling. [...] Everything is in feeling' [Liudi nakhodiat spasenie ne umom, a chuvstvom. [...] A ved' vse v chuvstve.] (p. 165). But without this tense, indefatigable study in-between there would be no Tolstoi with his acute sense of 'the Unity of Life' (Edinstva Zhizni), according to ancient Indian wisdom, and which Bunin describes as 'a heightened sensitivity for All-Being' (obostrennoe oshchushchenie Vsebytiia) (p. 47):

I resolved to explore in my heart and test with my reason everything that happens under the sun: God gave his human sons this difficult task in order that they might torment themselves...

The whole of Tolstoi is in these words from *Ecclesiastes*. 'This difficult occupation' was the major preoccupation of his whole life. He explored and tested, thought through and felt deeply, with unrivalled scepticism and exactitude, everything, everything 'that happens under the sun'.

[Решился я в сердце своем исследовать и испытать разумом всё, что делается под солнцем: это тяжёлое занятие дал бог сынам человеческим, чтобы они мучили себя...]

В этих словах Екклесиаста весь Толстой. "Это тяжелое занятие" было главным занятием всей его жизни. Всё, всё, "что делается под солнцем", исследовал и испытал он, продумал и прочувствовал с беспримерной недоверчивостью и требовательностью.] (p. 137)

Furthermore, man's knowledge and realisation of his place in the world is an integral part of 'the sense of All-Being' by which, in Bunin's interpretation, Tolstoi was 'completely possessed' (p. 124) just as was, perhaps, Buddha himself. Bunin writes:

Certain kinds of people have the ability to feel particularly strongly not only their own time but other people's, the past; not only their own country and tribe but different, alien ones; not only themselves but their neighbour too. That is, they have what is customarily described as 'the ability to reincarnate themselves' and have a particular vivid and figurative (sensual) 'memory'. But in order to be one of these people, one has to be an individual who has passed through the path of many, many existences, in the chain of his forbears, and suddenly displayed a particularly complete image of his savage ancestor with all the freshness of his sensations, with all the imagery of his thinking and with all his vast subconscious. And yet to be an individual who has become immensely enriched during his long journey and already with enormous consciousness.

Is such a person a great martyr or one with good fortune? He is both. The curse and the happiness of this man is his particularly acute I, a craving for a greater assertion of this I and at the same time a greater (by virtue of the vast experience gained during the time spent in the enormous chain of existences) sense of the futility of this craving....

**[Некоторый род людей обладает способностью особенно сильно чувствовать не только свое время, но и чужое, прошлое, не только свою страну, свое племя, но и другие, чужие, не только самого себя, но и ближнего своего, то есть, как принято говорить, "способностью перевоплощаться", и особенно живой и особенно образной (чувственной) "памятью". Для того же, чтобы быть в числе таких людей, надо быть особью, прошедшей в цепи своих предков долгий путь многих, многих существований и вдруг явившей в себе особенно полный образ своего дикого пращура со всей свежестью его ощущений, со всей образностью его мышления и с его огромной подсознательностью, а вместе с тем особью,**

безмерно обогащенной за свой долгий путь и уже с огромной сознательностью.

Великий мученик или великий счастливец такой человек? И то и другое. Проклятие и счастье такого человека есть его особенно сильное Я, жажда вящего утверждения этого Я и вместе с тем вящее (в силу огромного опыта за время пребывания в огромной цепи существований) чувство тщеты этой жажды... ] (p. 47)

Finally, the answer to this question of one's vocation is vital because with it begins another important 'path' in human life – 'the Path of Return' ('Put' vozvrata') (p. 18), which symbolizes, once again according to ancient Indian wisdom, our journey of coming to our true self. On this path the boundary between our personal *I* and social *I* ceases to exist, and so does 'the craving to take' (zhazhda brat') (p. 19). Instead the opposite feeling grows and increases in strength: 'the craving to give back' ('zhazhda ot davat') (ibid.) what was once taken from other people, nature and the world in general. Our *I* thus discovers the hitherto unknown, *spiritual* side of our existence, so that from now on we begin to feel the development and movement within our soul. For Bunin it is indeed here, on the Path of Return, that Tolstoi found for himself another dimension whereby he was able to confront his terror of death, finally establishing his attitude to it, and to recognize the inevitability of the process of life's gradual 'spiritualisation' (odukhotvorenie) which is, at the same time, its gradual emancipation:

The kingdom of this world and the kingdom of death are one.

Emancipation is in the disrobing of the spirit from its material garb.

Emancipation is in self-renunciation.

Emancipation is in the submerging of the spirit in the one true Being.

[Царство мира сего и царство смерти одно.

Освобождение – в разоблачении духа от его материального одеяния.

**Освобождение - в самоотречении.**

**Освобождение - в углублении духа в единое истинное бытие.] (p. 50)**

Bunin makes an interesting observation in relation to Tolstoi's definition of *life*. He notes that Tolstoi, in his designation of life as compared with that of death, which has undergone at least some changes in accordance with the nature of his study, has remained a constant adherent of Heraclitus' definition: life is death. Subsequently, this formulation was repeatedly employed and extended by philosophers and artists, most notably by Plato (for whom any thought process, that is, life, was nothing more than a preparation for dying and death) and Euripides (who has remained undecided about what is what: death life, or vice versa). According to Bunin, Tolstoi favoured and referred to both Plato and Euripides throughout his life:

Euripides nevertheless hesitates: 'Who knows... maybe...' Tolstoi, more than once and ever more firmly, said directly: 'Life is death. [...] It is time to wake up, that is, to die'.

**[Эврипида всё-таки колеблется: "Кто знает... может быть...". Толстой не раз и всё твёрже говорил прямо: "Жизнь есть смерть. [...] Пора проснуться, то есть умереть".] (pp. 133; 15)**

Hence, Tolstoi endows death with the same qualities that life originally possesses. In his understanding death acquires a universal significance, turning out to be the solution to all contradictions, the beginning of man's new awareness of himself when, finally overstepping the temporal and spatial limits of his *I*, he begins to think of himself as an organic 'link' (*zveno*) of a single 'Chain of existences' (*Tsep' sushchestvovanii*) (p. 48).

In the concluding part of *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* Bunin turns to Mark Aldanov's book *The Enigma of Tolstoi* (1923), recalling the passage on Andrei Bolkonskii's death with his unanswered question about what 'awaits'



one after death. Aldanov claims that on one occasion Tolstoi replied to it confidently: 'a Return to Love' (*Vozvrashchenie k Liubvi*)<sup>24</sup>. Perhaps, argues Bunin, the discovery and cognition of God in Spirit and Love brought an end to the search for emancipation for Tolstoi's hero, but by no means for Tolstoi. In reality it was something else that finally liberated him:

In order to believe in immortality, one must live an immortal life *here*.

Death is the transference of self from the secular (that is, temporal) life to the eternal life *here and now* which I (already) experience.

What does 'death' mean in this phrase? Is it what is usually called death and what he too once understood by it? It is now something quite different. It is the lively and joyful return from the earthly, temporal and spatial to the unearthly, eternal and boundless, to the bosom of the Master and Father whose existence is absolutely beyond doubt.

**[– Чтобы верить в бессмертие, надо жить бессмертной жизнью *здесь*.**

**– Смерть есть перенесение себя из жизни мирской (то есть временной) в жизнь вечную *здесь, теперь*, которое я (уже) испытываю.**

Что значит "смерть" в этой фразе? Есть ли это то, что обычно называется смертью и что он и сам разумел когда-то под этим словом? Уже совсем не то. Это живой и радостный возврат из земного, временного, пространственного в неземное, вечное, беспредельное, в лоно Хозяина и Отца, бытие которого совершенно несомненно.] (p. 160)

Tolstoi's striking contradiction is both a refusal to believe in infinity along with eternity and immortality and at the same time a refusal to believe that death can end or halt anything. This explains why he was drawn so strongly to the idea of reincarnation and the Buddhist notion of pre-existence that had, according to Bunin, a philosophical appeal for him:

On the one hand, what eternity can there really be! *We truly existed before this life, although we have lost all recollection of this.*

<sup>24</sup> M. A. Aldanov, *Zagadka Tolstogo* (Berlin: Izdatel'stvo I. P. Ladyzhnikova, 1923), p. 126.

[Да и в самом деле, какая может быть вечность с одной стороны! Мы верно, существовали прежде этой жизни, хотя и потеряли о том воспоминание.] (p. 119)

Tolstoi believed in the reality of *timelessness* (or *extra-temporality*), and death, in its turn, is nothing but awakening to the timeless life, an event of return to God, a feeling of closeness and unity with him: ‘We celebrate the mortification of death ... an eternal beginning of a different life ...’ [Smerti prazdnuem umershchvlenie ... inago zhitia vechnaga nachala ... ] (p. 165), says the church psalm. ‘Death does not exist’, says Tolstoi with reference to the premature death of his seven-year-old son Vania, ‘if we love him, we live by him!’ [Smerti net, raz my liubim ego, zhivem im!] (p. 61). These words of Tolstoi are paraphrased in Chang's reflections on the Captain's death: if he loves the Captain, the Captain will always be with him. For Bunin, this is the concluding stage of Tolstoi's personal search for emancipation. He however was liberated, ‘not by the Saviour's death’ (ne Spasovoi smert'iu) (p. 165), but rather by *a sense of life's extra-temporality* that lies at the basis of the process of time's interaction. By setting time free, this very sense releases man from temporal-spatial captivity, helping him to become fully free. This, above all, emerged for Tolstoi as a moment of the greatest approximation to God, pure and absolute cognition of him not, however, in the way that it is accomplished in church rituals, but in all the simplicity and fullness of his original *Truth*.

*The Emancipation of Tolstoi* concludes with the following passage:

‘He [Tolstoi] had no strong belief in the life to come’, says Aldanov. And he quotes Tolstoi's own words: ‘Once I asked myself: do I believe? And involuntarily I answered that I do not believe in a definite form...’. But he said that only in those moments when he ‘asked himself’. It was not these moments that saved him, but those ones when he did not ask.

My old friend Dr. I. N. Al'tshuller writes to me:

'When I read your articles about Tolstoi, I remembered the night in the Crimea, in Gaspra, when I sat alone with the seriously ill Lev Nikolaevich. We doctors had at that time almost lost hope, and he too, in my view, was convinced of the inevitability of the end. He lay, seemingly semi-conscious, with a very high temperature, breathing very shallowly, and suddenly he uttered in a weak but clear voice: "From you I came, to you I shall return, take me, Lord", - he said like any simple believer.'

[“В будущую жизнь он верил плохо”, - говорит Алданов. И приводит его собственные слова: “Как-то спросил себя: верю ли я? И невольно ответил, что не верю в определенной форме...”. Но ведь так говорил он только в минуты, когда “спрашивал себя”. Не эти минуты спасали его: спасали те, те когда он не спрашивал.

Мой старый друг доктор И. Н. Альтшуллер пишет мне:

“Когда читал Ваши статьи о Толстом, вспомнил ночь в Крыму, на Гаспре, когда я один сидел около тяжело больного Льва Николаевича. Мы, врачи, тогда почти потеряли надежду, и сам он, по-моему, убежден был в неизбежности конца. Он лежал, и, казалось, был в полубытьи с очень высокой температурой, дышал очень поверхностно, и вдруг слабым голосом, но отчетливо произнес: ‘От тебя пришёл, к тебе вернусь, прими меня, господи’, - произнес так, как всякий просто верующий человек.”]

(Ibid.)

In *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* Bunin attaches great significance to the analysis of Tolstoi's photographic portraits. For him, they illustrate, with astonishing clarity, all the intensity of Tolstoi's lifelong spiritual quest. It is interesting that these portraits convey the impression of a personality who lived through only two spiritual periods which, in their turn, correspond to two existential phases, abruptly disproportional in their temporal duration: the search for emancipation (that is, the striving to solve the problem of the meaning of life) and finding it. Beginning with childhood, the first phase

lasted right up to the first years of Tolstoi's old age. This is exactly the time when, according to ancient Indian wisdom, one follows (first, willingly and then with resistance) 'the Path of Egression' (Put' Vystupleniia) (p. 18) on which:

[...] man, firstly, feels that he is only his 'form', his temporal bodily existence, his I distinct from all else, is within his personal boundaries in which is contained part of the Single Life, and he lives by a purely personal cupidity. Then his cupidity expands and he lives not only in himself, but also by the life of his family, tribe and people, and his conscience, that is, shame at a solely personal cupidity, grows, although he still lives by the craving 'to seize' and 'to take' (for himself, his family, tribe and people).

[[...] человек чувствует себя сперва только своей "формой", своим временным телесным бытием, своим особенным ото всего Я, находится в тех своих личных границах, куда заключена часть Единой Жизни, и живет корыстью чисто личной; затем корысть его расширяется, он живет не только собой, но и жизнью своей семьи, своего племени, своего народа, и растёт его совесть, то есть стыд корысти только личной, хотя всё ещё живёт он жадной "захвата", жадной "брать" (для себя, для своей семьи, для своего племени, для своего народа).] (Ibid.)

In this sense, it is hardly surprising that all Tolstoi's portraits from this phase have one predominant feature which Bunin, resorting to an expression which he remembers Tolstoi using on one occasion, describes as 'the perspicacity of malice' (pronitsatel'nost' zloby) (p. 86) and which is best observed in Tolstoi's glance, conveying a striking spectrum of different qualities among which Bunin particularly stresses the following:

Power, seriousness, severity, distrust, cold or impudent contemptuousness, malevolence, dissatisfaction and sorrow... Such gloomy, intense-inquisitive eyes and tightly clenched teeth!

[Сила, серьёзность, строгость, недоверчивость, холодная или вызывающая презрительность, недоброжелательность, недовольство, печаль... Какие сумрачные, пристально-пытливые глаза, твёрдо сжатые зубы!] (Ibid.)

And only in the last portraits of Tolstoi does one notice that this painful fixedness of his eyes significantly softens, and the expressions of ‘gentleness, obedience, kindness, at times even a smile and soft gaiety’ [krotost’, pokornost’, blagovolenie, poroi dazhe ulybka, laskovoe vesel’e] (ibid.) begin to appear on the general look of his face that alone allows us to believe that Tolstoi had reached his second existential phase, stepping onto the Path of Return where all personal discontent and anguish are finally resolved. Conflict no longer exists, and there remains a man who has found the answers to the questions of his personal identity, vocation and the meaning of life and ‘how it should be lived by any reasonable man’ [kak dolzhen prozivat’ ee vsiakii razumnyi chelovek] (p. 25); a man, liberated from the terror of death and the torment of time, who has realized that life’s true meaning is ‘outside temporal and spatial forms’ [vne vremennykh i prostranstvennykh form] (p. 31) and begun to assert the possibility of living an extra-temporal life in this, allotted, terrestrial life; a man inspired, above all, by his belief in the truth of a Creator, a belief which liberates, unites and links everything in this world.

It seems logical to conclude this chapter here, although there is one more aspect of *The Emancipation of Tolstoi* that deserves our attention. As mentioned at the beginning, notwithstanding its brevity, the work is striking in its complex, multi-layered, explicit and implicit, thematic structure, open to various interpretations and assumptions. However, if we choose to focus on any given theme, we soon realize that on all levels the meaning contains an open, well-argued challenge to both readers and critics. Bunin’s challenge is

based on the idea that despite the numerous reassessments that Tolstoi's image has undergone (is undergoing and, most likely, will continue to undergo), it is still far from clear that we can conclude that this image 'is already established, precisely, impartially and fully, that not only all its major features, but also its very essence are defined and divined' [**установлен уже точно, беспристрастно и полно, что не только все главные его черты, но и самая сущность определены, угаданы**] (p. 100). There is still a great deal of the contradictory, incomprehensible, irrational-mystical and therefore not easily explainable in Tolstoi's image (of which the whole conception of emancipation is a good example), which rules out the possibility of a reductive formulation. Moreover, Bunin persistently reminds us that in order to establish Tolstoi's true place in the history of culture, one should always take into account the fact of his 'great' and at the same time, 'conflicting bifurcation' (p. 49) which singles out Tolstoi's personality, ranking him alongside Buddha, Solomon, saints and sages. This bifurcation is closely linked to two diametrically opposed but nevertheless interrelated tendencies in relation to the existential (or evolutionary) 'Chain' - the sense of a strong attachment to this Chain and a desire to withdraw from it:

There are two types of people. The first, huge one consists of people of their own definite moment, life-building, doing, people seemingly with almost no past or ancestors, true links in the Chain, about whom Indian wisdom says: what does it matter to them that the beginning and the end of the Chain disappear so frightfully into boundlessness? But the second, small one consists of not only non-doers and non-builders but downright destroyers who have already come to know the futility of action and building. They are people of dreams, contemplation and wonder at themselves and at the world, people of that 'philosophising' about which Ecclesiastes speaks. People who have already secretly responded to the ancient call: 'Leave the

Chain!', and who already crave to dissolve and disappear into the All-One and at the same time suffer ferociously, longing for all their past appearances and embodiments and, in particular, for every instant of their present. These are people endowed with the great wealth of perceptions received from their innumerable predecessors, who feel the infinitely remote links in the Chain; beings who wondrously (and possibly for the last time?) have resurrected in their person the strength and freshness of their heavenly forefather, of his corporeality. Hence their great bifurcation: the agony and terror of the withdrawal from the Chain, of parting from it, the consciousness of its futility and a particular fascination with it.

[ - Есть два рода людей. В одном, огромном, - люди своего, определённого момента, житейского строительства, делания, люди как бы почти без прошлого, без предков, верные звенья той Цепи, о которой говорит мудрость Индии: что им до того, что так страшно ускользают в безграничность и начало и конец этой Цепи? А в другом, малом, не только не делатели, не строители, а сущие разорители, уже познавшие тщету делания и строения, люди мечты, созерцания, удивления себе и миру, люди того "умствования", о котором говорит Екклезиаст, - люди, уже втайне откликнувшиеся на древний зов: "Выйди из Цепи!" - уже жаждущие раствориться, исчезнуть во Всеедином и вместе с тем ещё люто страждущие, тоскующие о всех тех ликах, воплощениях, в коих пребывали они, особенно же о каждом миге своего настоящего, это люди, одаренные великим богатством восприятий, полученных ими от своих бесчисленных предшественников, чувствующие бесконечно далёкие звенья Цепи, существа, дивно (и не в последний ли раз?) воскресившие в своем лице силу и свежесть своего райского праотца, его телесности. Отсюда и великое их раздвоение: мука и ужас ухода из Цепи, разлука с нею, сознание тщеты её - и сугубого очарования ею.] (Ibid.)

It is essential to recognize that withdrawal from the Chain (and herein lies the secret of its attraction and seductive power<sup>25</sup> for Bunin) excludes or, more exactly, does not guarantee salvation during one's life-time, offering, instead, a life outside time, the possibility that having been born once, one can be born

again. Once again, the paradox of Tolstoi's situation (although this might sound rather confused and naïve as many of Bunin's conclusions do when this work is taken at face value) resides in the following: the more we feel that the solution to Tolstoi's riddles is found, the more we discover new ones emerging from his literary and religious-philosophical experiences.

Lastly, what still remains unclear and what the next chapter has to deal with, is the question of the meaning of emancipation with reference to Bunin's work: what endows an individual with a sense of freedom (if there is a place for such a category at all in Bunin)?

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<sup>25</sup> For an engaging discussion of this theme in Bunin see Woodward, 'Eros and Nirvana', pp. 577-79.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### 'A Return to Love': *The First Day of Lent.*

Всё ритм и бег. Бесцельное стремленье!  
Но страшен миг, когда стремленья нет.

Иван Бунин, *Ритм* (1912)

Зачем героини и герои? Зачем роман, повесть, с завязкой и развязкой?

Иван Бунин, *Книга* (1924)

#### 1. The short story: a new old genre

Critics were far from unanimous in their appraisal of Bunin's last collection of short stories *Dark Avenues* [Темные аллеи]. It was received with a certain coolness in some émigré circles,<sup>1</sup> and hostility in others, for whom *Dark Avenues* displayed nothing but Bunin's 'senile obsession with sex'<sup>2</sup> and eroticism, that almost bordered on 'pornography'.<sup>3</sup> Soviet scholarship dwells, rather predictably, on two aspects: Bunin's ever growing 'nostalgia'<sup>4</sup> for pre-Revolutionary Russia and his idea of 'the destructive power' of passion.<sup>5</sup> Finally, there are works which point to something in the collection that clearly does not fit into the traditional scheme of description of Bunin's narrative art, that goes far beyond his usual stories about unhappy love or, more exactly,

<sup>1</sup>See G. A. Adamovich, *Odinochestvo i svoboda* [1955] (St. Petersburg: Logos, 1993), p. 64-66.

<sup>2</sup>R. Poggioli, 'The Art of Ivan Bunin', *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 1 (1953), 249-77 (p. 251).

<sup>3</sup>Gleb Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii* (New York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1956), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup>O. N. Mikhailov, *Ivan Alekseevich Bunin: Ocherk tvorchestva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1967), pp. 77-78.

<sup>5</sup>V. A. Afanas'ev, *I. A. Bunin: Ocherk tvorchestva* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1966), p. 234.

about love which does not end happily.<sup>6</sup> And this is precisely the perspective from which Bunin's last work is approached in the present chapter.

In *The Grasse Diary* [Grasskii dnevnik] Galina Kuznetsova recollects that in May 1929 Bunin remarked to his wife that:

Since I realized that life is like an ascent of the Alps, I have understood everything. I have understood that everything is trivial. There are certain invariable, organic things about which nothing can be done: death, illness and love, but the rest is trivial.

[С тех пор, как я понял, что жизнь – восхождение на Альпы, я все понял. Я понял, что все – пустышки. Есть несколько вещей, неизменных, органических, с которыми ничего поделать нельзя: смерть, болезнь, любовь, а остальное пустышки.]<sup>7</sup>

These words serve as a starting point in formulating the major themes of the whole collection: every short story in *Dark Avenues* is, in its own way, a story of love - one of those three 'things' about which one can really do nothing. In *Dark Avenues* Bunin again resorts to his favourite, although 'insidious',<sup>8</sup> genre of the short story. The perfidy of this genre has attracted the attention of many writers, linguists and literary theorists such as Goethe, Poe, Chekhov, Garshin, Jakobson, Kafka, Tynianov, Babel', Virginia Woolf, Vinogradov and Vygotskii. Viktor Shklovskii explains this feature in terms of the *changeable* nature of the genre itself.<sup>9</sup> He asserts that the short story is 'a stylistic notion which is created by us, and depends on a number of phenomena which form it and as it were supplant it' [понятие стилистическое, нами созданное,

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, M. Iof'ev, 'Posledniaia novella Bunina', in *Profili iskusstva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), pp. 277-319 (pp. 278-79); James B. Woodward, 'Eros and Nirvana in the Art of Ivan Bunin', *Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970), 576-86 (pp. 579-81); and C. Wood, 'The Modernity of Ivan Bunin' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bradford, 1996), pp. 349-51.

<sup>7</sup> G. Kuznetsova, *Grasskii dnevnik* (Washington, D. C.: Victor Kamkin, 1967), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> V. Shklovskii, 'O novelle', in *Khudozhestvennaia proza: Razmyshleniia i razbory* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), pp. 149-55 (p. 149).

<sup>9</sup> Although Shklovskii uses the term 'novella' he is referring to what other scholars term *korotkii rasskaz* ('short story').

зависящее от целого ряда явлений, которые ее создают и как бы подменяют] (p. 150).

Although mentioning 'a number of phenomena', Shklovskii focuses on one in particular, namely, the factor of the '*extraordinariness*' (*neobychainost*) of the short story, the '*unfamiliarity*' (*neznakomost*), that is, the '*chance character*' (*sluchainost*) of its content which is interesting, of value and significant in its own right (p. 151). The exceptional character of the short story is closely linked to the problem of finding a universal formulation for this genre: the history of the development of the genre of the short story proves to contain more exceptions than rules, for it is only in accordance with the latter that a precise definition can be made. Hence, one author's or scholar's conception of the short story very often turns out to be entirely alien and unacceptable for the artistic thinking of another. Shklovskii considers Chekhov to be a vivid illustration of this, since the whole of Chekhov's creative work is directly associated with the breaking of the generic canon. For instance, what was understood by nineteenth-century literary scholarship to be a specific characteristic of the short story (that is, a narrative which is based on the idea of plot intensity and deals only with a single event) would not, as Shklovskii puts it, 'suit' Chekhov, who 'did not strive' for an intensity of plot. Furthermore:

Nor does Chekhov always narrate about a single event in the short story. The exposition is absent in his short story but it does often include a prehistory: it is a narrative about several events.

[Чехов также не всегда в новелле повествует об одном событии. В его новелле отсутствует вводная часть, но часто в нее включена предыстория: это повествование о нескольких событиях.] (p. 152)

Shklovskii argues that in defining the genre of the short story it is crucial to take into account the concept of 'novelty' (*novizna*), manifested in the aspiration to discover the new in the familiar, and 'not sharpen old, traditional conflicts on new material' [ne obostriat' starye, traditsionnye konflikty na novom materiale] (p. 153). Thus, in his own definition of the genre (and this is important for an understanding of Bunin's narrative art in particular), Shklovskii proceeds from the idea that the short story or, to be more precise, its finale, is always open to more than a single interpretation. He concludes:

The structure of the short story is founded on the contradictions which exist in life and which (with the help of events of a different series or comparison of series of events which offer a different treatment of the same phenomenon) are revealed in the narrative.

[Строение новеллы основано на существующих в жизни противоречиях, которые при помощи событий иного ряда или сопоставлений событийных рядов, дающих разное отношение к одному и тому же явлению, обнаруживаются в повествовании.] (p. 155)

Thus, from here it follows that *duality* can never be obvious or predictable; on the contrary, it is always combined with the element of *unexpectedness* that offers the very possibility of a new reading, interpretation and sense of the familiar experience. The genre of the short story develops in a reader, author or narrator the ability to see anew the habitual, finding an unusual 'freshness', significance and uniqueness in every phenomenon, however familiar.

## 2. The author's narrative

What is remarkable about Bunin's prose is that among other features of the genre of the short story such as 'strict' composition, the presence of a detailed exposition and so forth, it is, above all, guided by the factor of novelty which, in its turn, is closely associated with the principle of narrative *conciseness* or briefness. In the history of the genre, Chekhov was the first to speak of the necessity for both the short story and the short-story writer to be 'as brief as possible',<sup>10</sup> translating this principle into a narrative device. Konstantin Paustovskii describes this peculiarity of the genre in the following way:

The most effective, most magnificent prose is concise prose. Everything that is superfluous, everything that it is possible not to say is excluded from it, only that which it is absolutely essential to say remains. [...] Conciseness comes with exhaustive knowledge.

[Самая действенная, самая потрясающая проза – это проза сжатая; из нее исключено все лишнее, все, что можно не сказать, и оставлено лишь то, что сказать совершенно необходимо. [...] Сжатость дается исчерпывающим знанием.]<sup>11</sup>

Conciseness is created by the language structure of the short story which, like no other literary genre, makes way for such a narrative form as the author's narrative, that is, the narrative on behalf of the hero wherein the narrator's plane merges with that of the protagonist.

The preference for first-person perspective in story-telling is a distinguishing feature of Bunin's work in general, and *Dark Avenues* is no exception. This is chiefly explained by the fact that the first-person narrative has a strongly developed *subjective principle* which allows the hero-narrator

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<sup>10</sup> See Ivan Bunin, 'Chekhov', in *Memories and Portraits*, tr. Vera Trail and Robin Chancellor (London: John Lehmann, 1951), pp. 28-57 (p. 28).

not only to express his own or her own attitude to the world, an understanding and evaluation of the events which are portrayed or recollected, but also to reproduce the subtle movements of the human soul, to describe and relate those things which are not easily susceptible to direct observation. Moreover, first-person narration directs the reader's attention towards the authentic, at times photographic representation of the material, guided by the narrator's desire to make one believe in what he tries to recollect. Bunin's last collection is, in terms of composition, organized as (badly kept) diary notes with detailed descriptions of various brief moments or even instances of human life, the memory of which proves to be so significant to the person that everything that took place before, between or after those moments, is simply not interesting, does not make sense and therefore does not deserve attention. The element of subjectivity introduced by first person narrative changes the short story, its inner rhythm and intonation, endowing it, in Bunin's case, with elegiac features. This also indicates that we are dealing with a personal, vivid memory, with the hero's addressivity towards the past, his aspiration to enliven this past aesthetically (being, moreover, well aware of its singularity, uniqueness and irreversibility) and to find himself in the reliving of that experience.

The idea of reliving the experience during its recollection is a crucial one for Bunin's artistic thinking in general and for *Dark Avenues* in particular, for the author's feeling, expressed through the hero-narrator, hereby gains, in Bakhtin's words, 'a certain extension, a certain content that is contemplated

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<sup>11</sup> K. Paustovskii, 'Poeziia prozy', in *Naedine s osen'iu: Portrety, vospominaniia, ocherki* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1967), pp. 5-16 (p. 8).

almost palpably', 'determination' and 'rhythm'.<sup>12</sup> The significance of the latter for an understanding of Bunin's works was observed by Paustovskii in his article 'Ivan Bunin', in which he asserts that rhythm is the very 'inalienable' category which creates the unique lyricism of Bunin's prose. Paustovskii implies that Bunin's rhythm is formed by a certain feeling which lies at the basis of Bunin's artistic ability to see, hear and sense the surrounding world and time:

In Pusheshnikov's notes there is an astonishing passage which reveals the 'secret' of Bunin's mastery. Bunin said that when he was beginning to write about anything, he had first and foremost to 'find the sound' (for Proust this is 'the rhythm of prose', for Ostrovskii - 'tone', for Maiakovskii - 'rumble' and for Mandel'shtam - 'breathing of the verbal structure'). 'Once I have found it, the rest comes of its own accord'. What does this mean: 'to find the sound?' 'To find the sound' means to find the rhythm of prose and its major resonance. For prose has the same inner melody as poetry and music.

[В записках Пушешникова есть место удивительное, раскрывающее "тайну" бунинского мастерства. Бунин говорил, что, начиная писать о чем бы то ни было, прежде всего он должен "найти звук" (у Пруста - это "ритм прозы", у Островского "тон", у Маяковского "гул", у Мандельштама - "дыхание словесного строя"). "Как скоро я его нашел, все остальное дается само собой". Что это значит - "найти звук"? "Найти звук" - это значит найти ритм прозы и найти основное ее звучание. Ибо проза обладает такой же внутренней мелодией, как стихи и музыка.]<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the sense of the rhythm of the prose, which is synonymous with the musicality of its sound, is the expression of the inner texture of a literary work

<sup>12</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, tr. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 4-257 (p. 117).

<sup>13</sup> K. Paustovskii, 'Ivan Bunin', in *Naedine sosen'iu*, pp. 64-78 (p. 71).

which is rooted, according to Paustovskii, 'in an excellent knowledge of and subtle feeling for language' [v prekrasnom znanii i tonkom chuvstve iazyka] (ibid.). In his *Psychology of Art* [Psikhologiya iskusstva] Lev Vygotskii, examining the peculiarities of the genre of the short story, expresses the idea that in the body of the short story everything, from the conjunction of actual events, the structure of sentences, phrases and rejoinders to the literary images, the heroes' attitudes and acts, is all subjected to the same laws of artistic accumulations to which the transition of sounds into melody or the rhyming of words into verses are subjected. In short, in the short story, rhythm (sound, melody, tone or intonation) represents a concrete emotional and aesthetic reality which defines the artistic structure of the whole work, its stylistic, linguistic, figurative and compositional systems.<sup>14</sup>

In Bunin's works, rhythm is created not only by the intonational-linguistic structure of the narrative (reiteration of images, situations, combinations of words, plot and speech schemes and so forth), but also, as was noted earlier, by the narrator's direct orientation towards reminiscence which is, in fact, strengthened by an ever-growing and overwhelming aspiration to revive the memory of the past, not so much because of a longing for this past, as for the purpose of experiencing it anew, in all its detailed reality, temporality and eventness. The narrator and the hero form, moreover, one joint space, one movement and sensation of the time-flow. In 'The First Day of Lent' [Chisty ponedel'nik] - the short story of the collection selected here for closer examination - the past is 'resurrected' in the hero's consciousness in such a way that he begins to speak of the bygone as though it takes place in the

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<sup>14</sup> L. S. Vygotskii, *Psikhologiya iskusstva* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1969), pp.129-31.



immediate present. The very necessity of detailed descriptions and elucidation becomes, therefore, significantly reduced, which leads to a simplification of the exposition in Bunin's short stories in general: the short stories in *Dark Avenues* either do not have an exposition as such or it turns out to be very 'compressed' (szhataia).<sup>15</sup> 'The First Day of Lent' begins with a passage which ends by depicting the picture of a soon-to-arrive winter evening, briefly enumerating all that almost every evening begins with, that recurs every day in the hero's life. The subjective plane of the protagonist is as though already introduced and we at once find ourselves plunged into his world and consciousness:

The grey winter Moscow day was growing dark, the gas in the street lamps lit up coldly, the shop windows were warmly illuminated - and, releasing one from the daily routine, Moscow's evening life began to kindle; the cabman's sleighs sped along more often and cheerfully, the overcrowded, swooping tramcars rattled more heavily, so that in the twilight you could already see the green hissing sparks falling from the electric wires - the dull-black figures of passers-by hurried with greater animation along the snow-covered pavements. ... Every evening at this time my coachman whisked me along with a high-stepping trotter - from the Red Gates to the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour opposite which she lived.

[Темнел московский серый зимний день, холодно зажигался газ в фонарях, тепло освещались витрины магазинов - и разгоралась вечерняя, освобождающая от дневных дел московская жизнь: гуще и бодрей неслись извозчичьи санки, тяжелей гремели переполненные, ныряющие трамваи, - в сумраке уже видно было, как с шипением сыпались с проводов зеленые звезды - оживленнее спешили по снежным тротуарам мутно чернеющие прохожие... Каждый вечер мчал меня в этот час на вытягивающемся рысаке мой кучер - от Красных ворот к храму Христа Спасителя: она жила против него [...]. (Bunin 7:238)

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<sup>15</sup> L. A. Foster, 'O kompozitsii *Temnykh allei* Bunina', *Russkaia literatura*, 9 (1975), 55-65 (p. 55).

The exposition is 'saturated' with verbs of motion or displacement, used in the past tense and imperfective aspect which indicates the 'past-present' condition: after all, the semantic organisation of the remembrance is always, in essence, based upon verbs used in the present tense. From the very beginning this also releases the narrative from the interruptedness of the events, creating a smooth, 'solid'<sup>16</sup> and at the same time swift development of the action of the short story.

It is useful here (since we touched upon the question of temporal relations in Bunin's short story) to mention one more peculiar feature of the narrative rhythm which was described by Bakhtin in *Author and Hero...* as 'experience and *temporal past*'.<sup>17</sup> For Bakhtin, the important (if not the major) condition of true aesthetic experience is manifested in the necessity 'to go beyond the bounds of the whole given experience', to be outside 'the experiencing soul' (*ibid.*), considering it from the position of '*the past of meaning*, along with the entire context of meaning into which it was inseparably woven and in which it received its meaning' (p. 117). In this sense, presupposing 'a certain *predeterminedness*' and 'hopelessness' of human strivings, actions and feelings, the rhythm helps to overcome the temporal bounds between the past, present and future 'in favour of the past':

The future as the future of meaning is dissolved, as it were, in the past and the present - is actually predetermined by them (for the author-contemplator always encompasses the whole temporary, that is, he is always *later*, and not just temporarily later, but he is later in *meaning*). But the very moment of transition, of movement from the past and the present into the future constitutes a moment in me that has the

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<sup>16</sup> F. A. Figurovskii, 'O sintaksise prozy Bunina: Sintaksicheskaia dominanta *Temnykh allei*', *Russkaia rech*, 4 (1970), 43-66 (p. 66).

<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero', 116.

character purely of an event, where I, from within myself, participate in the unitary and unique event of being. (pp. 117-18)

Thus, the author remains, in Shklovskii's expression, 'the master of time' (khoziain vremeni),<sup>18</sup> whereas the rhythm, in its turn, assures the aesthetic action of the plot in the past and assists in an understanding of the chronotope of the world within which all events of the hero's life take place. Moreover, rhythm is important for an understanding of the contextual mood and the character of the narrative undercurrent, helping to define the direction in which the author's quest and the work of the artistic imagination move.

### 3. 'This is not religiosity': Oriental wisdom and the irrational past

In *Dark Avenues* Bunin seeks to find the answer to the following questions: What is love? What is its place in human life? What is the meaning of love? Is it to give one the sensation of perfect bliss and freedom or, on the contrary, to burn, to empty one's soul, leaving it in a state of complete despair and misery, or perhaps all of these things? It is significant that, notwithstanding the narrowness of the themes and problems of the whole collection, 'The First Day of Lent' is noted for its unusual character, for, as Lev Dolgoplov maintains, beyond the acts and appearances of the protagonists we feel something deeper which Bunin subtly but at the same time persistently interweaves into the seemingly everyday love-plot.<sup>19</sup> Bunin himself singled out this short story, considering it to be one of 'the best and

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<sup>18</sup> V. Shklovskii, 'Konventsia vremeni', *Voprosy literatury*, 3 (1969), 115-28 (p. 119).

most original things' he had ever written: 'I thank God', writes Bunin, 'for giving me the opportunity to write "The First Day of Lent"' [Blagodariu Boga, chto on dal mne vozmozhnost' napisat' 'Chisty i ponedel'nik'].<sup>20</sup>

As in many other short stories of the collection, such as 'The Caucasus' [Kavkaz], 'Visiting Cards' [Vizitnye kartochki], 'In Paris' [V Parizhe], 'The Beauty' [Krasavitsa], 'Steamship "Saratov"' [Parokhod 'Saratov'] and 'A Cold Autumn' [Kholodnaia osen'], the protagonists in 'The First Day of Lent' are unnamed. They are a *he* and a *she* who meet in the Arts Club at a lecture delivered by Andrei Belyi and fall in love. The feeling seems to be mutual but the heroes have not yet become truly intimate with each other: the moment of complete intimacy is insistently and deliberately suppressed by the female protagonist. After spending only one night together, they part. After this night, undoubtedly fateful for the hero and crucial in the development of the plot, Bunin's heroine decides to do penance by taking the veil in a convent. Whilst providing all secondary characters with names which, moreover, are not fictitious (apart from the name of the coachman, Fedor), Bunin refuses to name his protagonists, creating the situation where two major intentionally unnamed heroes live and act in a real and topographically precise environment. 'The First Day of Lent', like no other of Bunin's short stories, is 'overpopulated'<sup>21</sup> with names of real persons, among whom are Russian writers of the previous century - Griboedov and Tolstoi - and the turn of the century - Chekhov, Ertel', Andreev, Belyi and Briusov. Bunin's heroine receives, along with flowers and boxes of chocolates, the

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<sup>19</sup> L. K. Dolgoplov, "'Chisty i ponedel'nik"' v sisteme tvorchestva I. Bunina emigrantskogo perioda', in *Na rubeze vekov: O russkoi literature kontsa XIX-nachala XX v.* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1977), pp. 319-44 (p. 320).

<sup>20</sup> *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 84, pt. 1 (*Ivan Alekseevich Bunin*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), p. 634.

books of Hoffmansthal, Schitzler, Tetmayer and Pshibyshevskii - writers and literary critics who were popular in early twentieth-century Russia. The names of artists and actors mentioned here (such as Stanislavskii, Kachalov, Moskvina, Sulzerzhitskii and opera singer Shaliapin) belong to real figures of the Moscow Arts Theatre. Egorov is the real name of the owner of the well-known inn in Hunter's Row. Characters from Old Russian literature and history (Peresvet and Oslabia, Paul and Fevroniia of Murom, Iurii Dolgorukii and Sviatoslav Severskii) as well as personages from *War and Peace* - Platon Karataev and Pierre Bezukhov - are acknowledged. The very fact of the insignificance of the names of the protagonists is one of the peculiar features of Bunin's artistic thinking in general. The element of historical or geographical reality and concreteness is introduced by the names of real people or places. Besides, against the background of such a quantity of non-imaginary and easily recognisable names, invented protagonists could not possibly be named, for any name in this situation, as Bakhtin formulates it, 'acquires the tinge of something typical, distinctive and original, it is no longer a name but the *appellation* of a personage' [priobretaiet ottenok chego-to tipicheskogo, kharakternogo, svoeobraznogo, eto uzhe ne imia, no *nazvanie* personazha].<sup>22</sup> The hero's name is profoundly individual, it generates, distinguishes and structures individuality, associating it with a tradition. The absence of a name, in its turn, brings into the narrative Chekhov's 'mutual sense of life', that is, the feature of community and universality. The male protagonist in 'The First Day of Lent' describes the female protagonist in the following way: 'She was enigmatic, incomprehensible to me' [Ona byla

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<sup>21</sup> Dolgoplov, "'Chistyĭ ponedel'nik" v sisteme tvorchestva', 321.

zagadochna, neponiatna dlia menia] (Bunin 7: 238). The name would, therefore, only make her concrete and defined, destroying the aura of strangeness, insoluble tension and intriguing expectation that surrounds Bunin's heroine. By virtue of her own mysteriousness, a kind of decadent unbalancedness, the female protagonist in 'The First Day of Lent' could easily exist under any possible name. Finally, becoming a nun, she seems to dissolve in a different world wherein a secular name is no longer significant, emerging as, to use Bakhtin's words about the image of Platon Karataev, 'the wisdom of the depersonalising whole' [mudrost' obezlichivaiushchego tselogo].<sup>23</sup>

In 'The First Day of Lent' the protagonists introduce into the narrative the West-East opposition which has been a crucial theme for Bunin from the collection of travel notes *The Shadow of the Bird* onwards. In the beauty of Bunin's heroine there was something 'Indian' or 'Persian' which, in spite of her quintessentially Russian origin (her father comes from a well-known Tver merchant family), made her look, as one of the characters says, like the fairytale 'Virgin Empress, Queen of Shamakhan' or, in the male protagonist's words, 'an oriental beauty from a cheap popular print' [vostochnaia krasavitsa s lubochnoi kartinki] (Bunin 7: 248):

A face of dark-amber, magnificent hair, rather sinister in its luxuriant blackness, softly shining brows, like black sable fur, eyes black, like velvety coal, her alluring mouth with its velvety-crimson lips was shaded by dark down; when she went out, she usually wore a rich red velvet dress with shoes of the same colour with gold buckles.

**[Смугло-янтарное лицо, великолепные и несколько зловещие в своей густой черноте волосы, мягко блестящие, как черный собольный мех,**

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<sup>22</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, 'Dopolneniia i izmeneniia k "Rable"', in *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh* (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1996), V, pp. 80-129 (p. 102).

брови, черные, как бархатный уголь, глаза: пленительный бархатисто-пунцовыми губами рот оттенен был темным пушком; выезжая, она чаще всего надевала гранатовое бархатное платье и такие же туфли с золотыми застежками.] (p. 240)

The combination of three major colours (black, red and golden-yellow with their rare tints) which prevails in the description of the female protagonist's outward appearance is used in various oriental legends, myths and ceremonies to symbolize beauty, wealth, wisdom and peace. It needs to be said that for Bunin a criterion of human beauty in general, and female beauty in particular, is the presence of 'oriental features' (in *Dark Avenues* all memorable beautiful female characters such as Rusia ('Rusia'), Natali ('Natali') or the unnamed niece of sheikh Aid ('Spring in Judea' [Vesnoi, v Iudee]) have either an element of 'eastern blood' in their family or a direct ancestral link with the East) which lies at the basis of their peculiar and unique beauty and which is always accompanied by great, although secret, passion.

In 'The First Day of Lent' the female protagonist carries in herself that oriental sensuality which the European, 'Sicilian' temperament of the male protagonist is so attracted to and longs for: Bunin's hero, coming from Penza province, was also handsome, even 'indecently handsome' (*neprilichno krasiv*) (p. 240) with a warm southern beauty. Bunin's heroine lives a lazy, easy life, doing some university courses which she visits only occasionally. When she is asked why she goes at all, she replies interrogatively: 'Why does anything happen in the world? Do we really understand anything about our acts?' [*A zachem vse delaetsia na svete? Razve my ponimaem chto-nibud' v nashish postupkakh?*] (p. 239). Thus, her outlook is presented as an utterly eastern one, whereas a western outlook wants to understand, evaluate and consider

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<sup>23</sup> Bakhtin, 'Dopolneniia i izmeneniia k "Rable"', 82.

everything, cognising the world and actions through logic and reason. It is no accident that Bunin prepares such a sudden finale, the renunciation of secular vanity and entering a convent, since the oriental sensuality, gradually coming into contact with western sensuality, impulsive in its very nature, gradually rejects it, returning, in the end, to its own roots, but this time on an ascetic basis. On the piano Bunin's heroine constantly plays 'the slow, somnabulistically beautiful opening of "The Moonlight Sonata" - but only the beginning' [medlennoe, somnabulicheski prekrasnoe nachalo "Lunnoi sonaty", - tol'ko nachalo] (ibid.). Bunin emphasizes that she practises 'only the beginning', that is, that part where the turbulent, spirited personality of Beethoven does not manifest itself, but there is certainly something which speaks for the heroine's still sleepy, aimlessly moving soul. In fact, this opposition is present throughout the whole of the narrative: in words and actions, deeds and feelings these two principles - eastern and western - adjoin, synthesize and disintegrate in order to begin a new search for each other. The closer their contiguity and intimacy, the longer and more painful their parting. Herein, for Bunin, lies the essence and meaning of how the East and West (these two eternal elements, two sides of the human state and existence) become acquainted with one another. The protagonists in 'The First Day of Lent' emerge, therefore, as two eternal symbols which, in Bunin's interpretation, represent two different cultures: they cannot entirely merge to become a unitary whole, but neither can they dispute, for there is always a possibility, a place for a certain uniting space where the two sides can interrelate and enter a dialogue with each other. This theme was a vitally important one for Bunin from *The Shadow of the Bird* onwards, where the East



was seen by him as the manifestation of a natural, powerful Being in which one feels a free breathing culture which is possessed of healthy qualities.

The male protagonist describes the female protagonist's love for Moscow as 'strange', since it is based on a harmony of things which, he believes, are impossible or at least difficult to combine:

"A strange city! - I was saying to myself, thinking about Hunter's Row, Iverskaia and St. Basil's Cathedral. St. Basil's and Saviour on Bor, Italian cathedrals and something Kirghiz about the spikes of the towers on the Kremlin walls..."

["Странный город! - говорил я себе, думая об Охотном ряду, об Иверской, о Василии Блаженном. - Василий Блаженный - и Спас-на-Бору, итальянские соборы - и что-то киргизское в остриях башен на кремлевских стенах..."] (p. 241)

At first, Bunin's heroine does not reveal herself in any kind of discourse, and just as the hero is inclined to talkativeness, as though bursting into the narrative, so she remains 'thoughtfully incommunicative'. Clearly, the East is most often silent whereas the West always speaks openly, verbally expressing both thought and feeling. At this point the following detail is of particular importance: the male protagonist is dressed in a coat with 'beaver collar'. A beaver collar, moreover, is mentioned twice in the text of the story, evoking the lines from *Evgenii Onegin*: 'His beaver collar silvers with a frosty dust' [Moroznoi pyl'iu serebritsia ego bobrovyi vorotnik] (I, XVI). Here we can observe a certain parallel between the major characters in Pushkin's novel and Bunin's short story: she is Tat'iana and he is Evgenii Onegin. Furthermore, Pushkin's Tat'iana Larina, a protoheroine of Russian nobility, before emerging as an unnamed oriental beauty in Bunin, appears in Turgenev, a person and writer with western convictions, in particular in his novel *A Nest of the Gentry* [Dvorianskoe gnezdo] in the image of Liza Kalitina. All these

female characters bear in themselves the Russian national principle, but Bunin's heroine, above all, is a merchant daughter: the merchant class in Russia was certainly closer to the 'soil', to popular roots, to Russia before Peter the Great with its schismatics and deacons so beloved by her:

As I said: you should have seen the deacons! Like Peresvet and Oслиabia! And two choirs in both aisles, all of them, too, like Peresvets, tall, mighty men in long black caftans, singing, echoing: first one choir, then the other. And they all sing in unison and without music but from 'kryuks'. And the grave was lined with bright fir-tree branches, and outside it was frosty and sunny, the snow dazzling...

[Так вот: диаконы – да какие! Пересвет и Ослияб! И на двух клиросах два хора, тоже все Пересветы: высокие, могучие, в длинных черных кафтанах, поют, перекликаясь, – то один хор, то другой, – и все в унисон и не по нотам, а по “хрюкам”. А могила была внутри выложена блестящими словыми ветвями, а на дворе мороз, солнце, слепит снег... ] (p. 244)

It is significant that Liza Kalitina wanted to enter one of the most solitary northern convents. Bunin's heroine has similar intentions: 'Oh, I shall go into a convent somewhere, some truly remote one, somewhere in Vologda or Viatka!' [Okh, uidy ia kuda-nibud' v monastyr', v kakoi-nibud' samyi glukhoi, vologotskii, viatskii!] (p.246). Her letter - the finale of 'The First Day of Lent' - simply paraphrases Liza's last letter to Lavretskii in *A Nest of the Gentry*, in which a declaration of love is followed by a brief note about her decision to do penance. Both Turgenev's heroine and Bunin's oriental beauty consider renunciation and the convent to be a way out. In this sense the dialogue between Bunin's protagonists about Platon Karataev and 'oriental wisdom' is of particular importance:

'Anyway, this is not love, not love...'

She calmly answered from the darkness, 'Maybe. Who knows what love is, after all?'

'I know!' I exclaimed, ' And I shall wait until you learn what love is, and happiness is!'

'Happiness, happiness... Our happiness, my friend, is like the water in a drag-net: if you give it a tug, it swells but if you pull it out - there is nothing left.'

'What's all that about?'

'This is what Platon Karataev said to Pierre.'

I waved my hand, 'Oh, the hell with it, this oriental wisdom!'

[ - Да, все-таки это не любовь, не любовь...

Она ровно отозвалась из темноты:

- Может быть. Кто же знает, что такое любовь?

- Я, я знаю! - воскликнул я. - И буду ждать, когда и вы узнаете, что такое любовь, счастье!

- Счастье, счастье... "Счастье наше, дружок, как вода в бредне: тянешь - надулось, а вытащишь - ничего нету".

- Это что?

- Это так Платон Каратаев говорил Пьеру.

Я махнул рукой:

- Ах, бог с ней, с этой восточной мудростью!] (p. 242)

This passage recalls the conversation between Liza and Lavretskii in which they express their different understandings of the meaning of happiness in human life. In *A Nest of the Gentry* Turgenev's major problem, happiness and duty, was solved by his heroine in favour of duty. Liza Kalitina argues that there is no place for happiness in this world and particularly in her situation: to be in love with a married man was seen as a terrible sin. In 'The First Day of Lent' the expression 'oriental wisdom' bears traces of the polemics between eastern and western perceptions of the world and general principles of life style.

By referring to Platon Karataev's words, Bunin's heroine tries to offer an explanation for her own strivings and actions which led her to her final

decision. Herein also lies the root of Tolstoi's choice (as well as that of some of his characters) of renunciation. Pierre Bezukhov in his conversations with Platon Karataev, Andrei Bolkonskii in his observations of wounded soldiers, and Levin in his simple talks with mowers discover for themselves a new, spiritual power in which they try to participate, for it eliminates all that is false, vain and egoistic. The following dialogue between Bunin's protagonists is revealing at this point:

'Have you finished reading *The Flaming Angel*?'

'I've finished looking through it. It is so high-flown that one is ashamed to read it.'

'Why did you suddenly leave Shaliapin's concert yesterday?'

'He was excessively bold. Besides, I don't really like flaxen-haired Rus!'

'You don't like anything, do you?'

'Yes, there are many things...'

**[- Вы дочитали *Огненного ангела*?**

**- Досмотрела. До того высокопарно, что совестно читать.**

**- А отчего вы вчера вдруг ушли с концерта Шаляпина?**

**- Не в меру разудал был. И потом желтоволосую Русь я вообще не люблю.**

**- Все-то вам не нравится!**

**- Да, многое...] (p. 241)**

Here and in some of the other utterances of the heroine on literature, theatre and history it is difficult not to notice Bunin's bias, his attitudes, passions and affections.<sup>24</sup> It is well-known that Bunin was sceptical about decadent art, and as much as he admired Chekhov's prose, he was critical of both Chekhov's plays and the experimental staging of the Arts Theatre. It is, therefore, no wonder that for Bunin's heroine Chekhov's memorial tomb manifests nothing other than 'a nasty mixture of sugary Russian style and the Arts Theatre'

[protivnaia smes' susal'nogo russkogo stilia i Khudozhestvennogo teatra] (p. 244). The works of Briusov are considered by her to be 'too stilted', Shaliapin's performances are 'excessively bold' and Andrei Belyi's lecture was impossible to hear because he did not deliver it properly but rather 'sang' it instead, 'running and dancing around the stage' [pel ee, begaia i tantsuia na estrade] (p. 240). She calls all this 'flaxen-haired', tawdry Rus', seeing in it only the embodiment of everything unnatural, insincere and pseudo-Russian which is primordially alien to her nature. For her it is Tolstoi who is radical and truly Russian.

Bunin's heroine is fascinated by Old Russian chronicles, hagiography and folklore tales, some of which she knows by heart. She tells her favourite story *The Tale of Peter and Fevroniia of Murom* [Povest' o Petre i Fevronii Muromskikh], a work of seventeenth-century hagiographic literature.<sup>25</sup> This tale is based on the combination of two well-known folklore plots: the story of the tempter snake and the legend of a wise maiden who could stand up to the lechery test: the devil sent her a flying snake which was capable of taking on the appearance of a young handsome man. In 'The First Day of Lent' the use of the old legend implies that the female protagonist is also tempted by 'a snake in very beautiful human form' [zmei v estestve chelovecheskom, zelo prekrasnom] (p. 246). This is, in fact, an allegoric prophecy of her destiny, for Bunin's heroine faces an earnest spiritual ordeal which she, like Fevroniia, passes steadfastly and confidently, leading herself out of temptation's way.

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<sup>24</sup> This aspect is well observed by Lev Dolgoplov in "'Chisty i ponedel'nik" v sisteme tvorchestva ...', 339-40.

<sup>25</sup> The protagonists of this tale are historical figures who reigned in Murom and died in 1228. However it is only the names that are real: a large number of legends ultimately formed the basis of the actual story. The text of the *Life* was compiled in the sixteenth century, and has reached us by way of 150

'The First Day of Lent' is, in terms of composition, organized as a temptation of the heroine which she welcomes, for after its overcoming, she will never return to her previous life, aimless, meaningless and vain. The wisdom of Fevroniia, as well as of Bunin's heroine, is not so much in their intellect as in their feeling and will. Conquering the temptation, she frees herself from the inner contradictions between feeling, mind and will. From here comes the extraordinary 'stillness' of her appearance at the end of the story. The narrative tone and tempo change in the epilogue they become slower, indicating that we are dealing with memory:

In 1914, on New Year's eve, the evening was quiet and sunny like that unforgettable one. I left home, took a cab and drove to the Kremlin.

**[В четырнадцатом году, под Новый год, был такой же тихий, солнечный вечер, как тот, незабвенный. Я вышел из дому, взял извозчика и поехал в Кремль.]** (p. 250)

The protagonists meet at the Martha and Mary Convent:

And then one of those walking in the middle suddenly raised her head which was covered with a white shawl, and shielding the candle with her hand, she fastened her dark gaze on the darkness, as though directly upon me... What could she see in the darkness, how could she feel my presence? I turned round and quietly went out of the gates.

**[И вот одна из идущих посередине вдруг подняла голову, крытую белым платом, загородив свечку рукой, устремила взгляд темных глаз в темноту, будто как раз на меня... Что она могла видеть в темноте, как могла она почувствовать мое присутствие? Я повернулся и тихо вышел из ворот.]** (p. 251)

All the short stories in *Dark Avenues* (despite the fact that in most cases everything is predictable from the very beginning and the narrative itself is

only there to clear up the issue) end abruptly, creating the impression that the narrator has nothing more to add and that there is nothing to believe and hope for. How might such finales be explained? Is it right to maintain that Bunin does not have mercy even on hopes, just seeing in them the desperation and endlessness of human existence? Is it, in fact, the case that the greater the love, the more it is fated to stop suddenly? And finally, what is the meaning of the renunciation undertaken by Bunin's heroine?

The finale of 'The First Day of Lent' certainly reminds one of the finale of *A Nest of the Gentry*. In both stories the female protagonists decide to enter a convent because through this choice they fulfil the commandment before loved ones and God. Furthermore, both characters find their salvation: Turgenev's heroine by making her choice in favour of God, Bunin's heroine, above all (and this is how Bunin solves the religious problem of the finite in the endless in his last collection), by wanting to accomplish something in this world through love. Though deciding to remain within holy orders, Liza Kalitina and Bunin's heroine, feeling the presence of their one and only love, do not simply pass him by but answer with a slight inclination of the head, with a glance. Thus, in both cases entering a convent does not mean a complete rejection of and break with the world; on the contrary, at this very point they begin to experience addressivity and entry into the world, its transfiguration. This also means the beginning of the spirituality of life, its *emancipation*. The cognition of God through love endows an individual with a sense of *freedom*<sup>26</sup> and is, in essence, freedom itself.

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<sup>26</sup> James Woodward in *Ivan Bunin: A Study of His Fiction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980) provides a different interpretation of the problem of freedom in Bunin's creative thinking, arguing that the idea of human freedom 'has no place in Bunin's view of life' and furthermore: 'There can be no genuine freedom in a world governed by the impersonal forces of

In *Dark Avenues* the question of the meaning of love is closely linked to the aesthetic problem of the infinite in the finite. Bunin seeks to demonstrate that the place of love in human life, or broadly speaking, in Existence, is unique, so unique is the singularity of this feeling. In this collection Bunin returns to the themes raised in his novel *The Life of Arsen'ev* about the significance of the lived experience in human life and in the process of human becoming. Arsen'ev refuses to believe in a life wherein everything is allocated, guaranteed and turned into a habit. For him the readiness to love and search for this feeling, discovering it in himself and others, an aspiration to experience anew the feeling, seemingly familiar to everyone, making it part of the whole, is, indeed, all. It is thanks to love that Arsen'ev ceases to perceive the world as something that one should merely take for granted. He also finds acuteness of sensation, clarity of sight and keenness of hearing which enable him to see differently the same everyday life and become, in the end, an artist. Herein lies the explanation of what is to become of man. This is an illustration of the inexhaustible character of his spiritual strength. Herein also is rooted a pledge of the future.

Thus, in finding her vocation in leaving behind mundane cares, the female protagonist in 'The First Day in Lent' does not simply appeal to spiritual-religious values: in self-abnegation she fully finds herself, her place in Being and a possibility of creating life in the present in order to live in this present. Turgenev's Liza chooses to be a novice mainly because of moral duty, whereas Bunin's heroine does so because of her ever-growing attraction towards *the irrational past*. As though through her sensuality, she is drawn

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nature' (p. 23). An individual, therefore, turns out to be a combination of 'irrational drives and instincts' (p. 22) and heroes, 'existing in body alone', have 'entirely instinctive and sensual responses



towards this irrational, mystical past: 'I did not know that you were so religious', says the male protagonist to her. She replies to this with the following explanation: 'This is not religiosity. I don't know what it is...' ['Ne znal, chto vy tak religiozny.' - 'Eto ne religioznost'. Ia ne znaiu chto...'] (p. 244). Hence, it is more probable that in renunciation of the world and turning to Christianity the heroine finally finds an understanding of the meaning of life (manifested in the aspiration to communicate and be joined with the eternal stream of life) which she could not find in the excessively vain life she used to live, which once was filled with sense but has now become meaningless and remote from the embodiment of a vivid and valued life. Furthermore, in mysticism the personal and universal, finite and endless merge with each other, for the irrational experience introduces something entirely new to the development of the human soul, to a person's attitude to himself and the world, and to the content of life in general. It is only within Christianity that the East and West, meeting, find their unity and understanding.

In this sense, the question of the meaning of the title of Bunin's story is of great importance. In Christian (Orthodox) ritual-festive symbolism, Clear Monday, following Forgiveness Sunday, is the first day of Lent when, in fact, the time of the soul begins and one should read the prayer: 'Lord, master of my life...' [Gospodi, vladyko zhivota moego...]. By tradition, Shrove-tide is a very lively feast, for the parting with winter and coming of spring symbolizes a great event of change, a hope for the renewal of life, and participation in it and a belief in its continuation. One must therefore celebrate, have a good time and be happy. The joy of Shrove-tide should be really vivid, before the

approaching sadness that is associated with Lent, when the soul is cleansed of all sins and made ready to enter communal life. Shrove-tide, like all ritual gatherings, is a communal feast by its very nature. Nobody, therefore, celebrates it alone but rather together, with others, since the essence of every holiday is to return to man the sense of the time-flow, integrity and unity of both the social and existential spheres of human life, and orientation towards the future. This is, above all, a peculiar religious manifestation of a shared belief and hope for a completion in the end of the world. On Forgiveness Sunday all crises should be solved, and one must forgive everyone who has caused one offence, pain or injustice, for Clear Monday, signifying the period of the completion of the Fast (but not so much a corporeal as spiritual one), prepares one for confession and the Eucharist. The Shrove-tide festive mood and joy now give way to strict living and inner contemplation. In the development of the human soul there is also a qualitative change that takes place: it is reborn as a spiritual Being.

On Forgiveness Sunday Bunin's heroine was dressed 'all in black', expressing the wish to spend the night of Clear Monday, that is, the first night in Lent by going to the artists' party at the Arts Theatre, admitting, moreover, that she knows nothing 'more vulgar' than such actors' gatherings. After this the protagonists experience their first and last moment of complete intimacy. On the one hand, acting in such a way, Bunin's heroine tries to make her 'sin' even worse, for, as was noted earlier, according to traditional religious ethics, one should enter the first day of Lent free or 'clean' bodily and spiritually. On the other hand, the intimacy with the loved one gives her the strength to leave this life, to end it with the happiest and at the same time most painful moment.

Bunin attaches great significance to the meaning of 'an instant' or short period of time in human life, when all that one had lived through focuses, as it were, on only one moment. In Bunin's artistic thinking the category of the instant represents the degree of experiencing reality. The instant is absolute and at the same time real and historical, combining within it happiness and sorrow, the finite and infinite, because, for a short period of time, one can really feel both the unity and eventness of this life and its sudden, infinite emptiness. The historicity of these instants lies in their uniqueness and singularity whose significance is realized, above all, by man himself. Furthermore, such instants enable man to understand 'the essence of things' which, for Bunin, is rooted in and emanates from the act of life; and love in *Dark Avenues* is a communion with this act.

The short story *Sunstroke* [Solnechnyi udar] (1935), which was written slightly earlier than *Dark Avenues*, serves as a vivid example of this. For the hero of *Sunstroke* the whole of his life emerges as one day spent with the woman he loved. Here, love turns out to be immense happiness, great joy and at the same time a 'terrifying sunstroke'. One day and the whole of life: this is the way the hero measures the time of his own life in the end of the story: 'The lieutenant sat under an awning on the deck, feeling that he had aged ten years' [Poruchik sidel pod navesom na palube, chuvstvuia sebia postarevshim na desiat' let] (Bunin 5: 245). Sunstroke, when the sun's great energy reaches one for a brief instant, entirely switches one out of reality and emerges as a moment of transformation and insight of Being which, in the case of Bunin's hero, is experienced *physically*. Thus, it is no longer a dream, illusion or hallucination, the hero feels his memory of one afternoon and one

morning as though it had taken place ten years ago. After sunstroke, recovery and a return to the usual course of life is a very slow process that remains forever in the human memory.

In *Dark Avenues* there is another story, 'A Cold Autumn' [Kholodnaia osen'], in which the heroine, trying to recollect everything that has ever been in her life, comes to the conclusion that there has been only one cold autumn evening, when she saw off her fiancé to the front where he was killed a month later:

And since then a whole thirty years have passed. And I've experienced so much through those years which seem so long when you consider them carefully and go over in your memory all that magical, incomprehensible thing called the past which neither the mind nor the heart can grasp.<sup>27</sup>

**[И вот прошло с тех пор целых тридцать лет. И многое, многое, пережито было за эти годы, кажущиеся такими долгими, когда внимательно думаешь о них, перебираешь в памяти все то волшебное, непонятное, непостижимое ни умом, ни сердцем, что называется прошлым.]** (Bunin 7: 209)

Asking herself whether this evening existed at all in her life, she becomes firmly convinced that it did; and furthermore:

And that is all there's been in my life. All the rest has been a useless dream. But I believe, I do ardently believe that somewhere over there he is waiting for me - with the same love and the same youthfulness as on that evening. 'You live, be happy for a while in the world, and then come to me...' I have lived, I have been happy for a while, and now, quite soon, I'll come. (p. 207)

**[Все-таки был. И это все, что было в моей жизни - остальное ненужный сон. И я верю, горячо верю: где-то там он ждет меня, с той же любовью и молодостью, как в тот вечер. "Ты поживи, порадуйся на свете, потом**

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<sup>27</sup> Ivan Bunin, 'A Cold Autumn', in *Long Ago*, tr. David Richards (London: Angel Books, 1984), pp. 203-7 (p. 206).

приходи ко мне..." Я пожила, порадовалась, теперь уже скоро приду.]

(Bunin 7: 210)

Thus, for the heroine, the memory of just one evening, which happened thirty years ago, has become the source of spiritual strength which has helped her to create and continue life in the present. Slipping away, the past, despite the uniqueness of feeling, finally ceases to torment, emerging as a part of lived experience; and if we come to realize this, the tragedy is forgotten or, to be more precise, we begin to understand it differently, endowing it with new, existential meaning.

This also explains why neither 'Sunstroke', 'A Cold Autumn' nor 'The First Day of Lent' make us feel pity: compassion is considered by Bunin to be an integral part of love. Hence, the feeling of pity for the past simply because it is the past does nothing but destroy personality. Moreover, Bunin, in his ability to see and evaluate instants, to feel in them and through them the reality of life and time, takes a step on the way to the restoration of the ontological unity between man and the world, that very unity which Chekhov strove for but could not find in his *Steppe* [Step'], which is close in its emotional-philosophical mood to Bunin's last collection of short stories. In *Steppe* Chekhov attempts to look into the very depths of human consciousness in order to understand what lies at the basis of the human attitude towards the world and time and how different people (Egorushka, father Christopher, Dymov and Kuz'michev) come to realize their place in this world. It is, therefore, of particular importance for Chekhov here to show all the significance of such a seemingly trivial event as the journey of a boy to town on a cart. Chekhov's heroes here grasp the world 'in breadth', as it were, for the steppe bears in it a huge expanse of space along with an unlimited number

of possibilities of movement hidden in its immobility. But what do the expanses of the steppe betoken? And who, in fact, needs so much spaciousness? It at first perplexes Chekhov's heroes and then stimulates a prescient feeling of the tragic future (if there is a place, in Chekhov, for such a category at all). The space proves to be disturbing for the travellers: they cannot deal with it, but neither can they overcome it. For Chekhov and his heroes, space belongs to those phenomena by which man, in trying to apprehend them, is seized with panic, reminding us yet again of Goethe's *Faust* who, too, was scared and shaken on hearing about matter around which space and time do not exist, just a void and a groundless expanse (II, I 6212-16; 6246-48). Thus, Chekhov does not see the possibility of a way out from the immobility of life; nor does he see its craving for movement in order to join in the life of the whole of mankind.

In 'Days and Years' [Dni i gody] Bunin writes the following: 'Nothing defines us like the nature of our remembering' [Nichto ne opredeliaet nas tak, kak rod nashikh vospominanii].<sup>28</sup> It appears that any one of Bunin's, at times ordinary, love stories shows the world which surrounds and absorbs the whole of man in all its complexity. Man for Bunin is not a reserved 'segment' of time and space but a living particle of the one and indivisible chain of life. The meaning of Bunin's chronotope is the movement of the human soul in an organic unity of both the extraordinary fullness of life and the world and their indescribable emptiness, in organic manifestation of eternal themes in the earthly and temporal, in their simple but at the same time endlessly complex essence.

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<sup>28</sup> *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vol. 84, pt. 1 (*Ivan Alekseevich Bunin*) (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), p. 386.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, by interpreting the temporal and the eternal, the personal and the supra-personal in terms of each other and making these categories appear and function at the same time in the space of human life, Bunin becomes one of the first artists in twentieth-century Russian literature to stand at the source and greatly advance the process of time's desubstantiation. The majority of artistic-philosophical discoveries that emerge from Bunin's literary experiments, especially with genres and novelistic discourse, convey the idea with which Russian humanities was preoccupied during the first three decades of this century: an attempt to free thinking from the supra-personal and the extra-historical. The whole of Bunin's work demonstrates that the understanding of the interrelation between times as well as between man and time is accomplished through history. And the nature of this understanding in Bunin, moreover, is profoundly creative: it is directed towards one's inner experience, self-studying and self knowledge, expressed first and foremost in one's natural aspiration to realize oneself and one's place in one's own time and culture. This becomes, above all, an absolutely essential condition for Bunin's hero-wanderers in their perception, appreciation and portrayal of another time, existence and culture. Nevertheless, the whole paradox of Bunin is that in his thinking history was never something he deliberately strove for. Rather it was understood as an inner unifying element of human existence that lies at the basis of both the cultural and the events of everyday life. The latter is particularly important since for Bunin history without its human context, that is, without its passage through private life and the lived experience of an

individual, is futile. This is also true of the eternal, with all its manifestations, if it is not considered in relation to the reality of human life and experience that finally form and contribute to the realm of the historical.

In closing, it is important to emphasise the concern expressed at the beginning of the present study, that by looking at Bunin's works from this perspective it is possible that one might well gain, in the end, more questions than answers. But it is my hope that this does not indicate that this approach is necessarily unproductive. However, if I succeeded even partially in exploring the issue of the reality of time, history and life in Bunin, it should give me some confidence to conclude that this problem was worth pursuing.



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