

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# Philosophical Aspects in "Dark Avenues" by I. Bunin and "The Sunflower in Revolt" by L. Rzhevsky: Creative Dialogue

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on analyzing the inner world of the characters in I. Bunin's "Dark Avenues" and L. Rzhevsky's "The Sunflower in Revolt". These works reveal the traditions of Russian realist writers and innovations that characterized the artistic quest of the creative community at the turn of the centuries and in the first third of the 20th century. The plot and composition of the works by I. Bunin and L. Rzhevsky, their creative dialogue allow tracing the classic Russian literary tradition and the continuity in creative contacts between the writers. A vivid perception of time gave rise to numerous associations, especially in the theme of love, philosophical conceptualization of man and time, and achieving happiness through trials.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION: THEME OF LOVE AS MAIN ONE THAT BRINGS I. BUNIN'S & L. RZHEVSKY'S WORKS TOGETHER

Emotional and value attitudes of an artist to the world and their characters are manifested in the social-class typology, at the level of images, associations and the plot. Of particular interest is the comparison of the literary works by I.A. Bunin and L.D. Rzhevsky, their typology and parallels of the plot. Love, in I. Bunin's interpretation, is an ecstatic act that a person fully experiences only once in a lifetime. Bodily connections can be numerous (the characters of In Paris, Natalie), but the ecstatic act is only one. Towards this climax, the writer guides his characters through the lines and spirals of plots. The analysis of

the plot of I. Bunin's stories allows tracing the literary tradition, which had a considerable impact not only on the Soviet literature of the second half of the 20th century (Yu. M. Nagibin, Yu. P. Kazakov), but also on the Russian emigre literature, an example of which is L. Rzhevsky's creative work.

## 2. FORTUNES OF THE RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA, FORTUNES OF EMIGRATION, THEMES OF THE MOTHERLAND, LIFE AND DEATH, LOVE AND MEMORY

One of the key themes that make the creative work of L. Rzhevsky and I. Bunin related is the theme of the

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"absorbing and resurrecting love; love that stands the test of time and even unites different generations. Most frequently, this love bears a tragic connotation (e.g. harsh times or life circumstances separate the beloved) but, like in I. Bunin's stories, which L. Rzhevsky greatly appreciated, love is ingrained in the narrator's memory (all the writer's works are first person), inevitably preventing personality destruction or even bringing back to life not only the narrator, but also secondary characters, including those recently being cynics and voluptuaries" [1].

Criticism of the Russian emigrant literature observed the tradition of Bunin in the work of L.D. Rzhevsky both at the level of form and at the content-literary level. R.B. Gul believed that it was exactly L.D. Rzhevsky to be destined to revive the true sensuality and beauty of eroticism in Russian literature: "The theme of sensual love proves a failure in Russian prose. It is not a Russian theme. Having turned 70, Bunin tried to fill this gap in Russian prose and created the erotic "Dark Avenues". However, his attempt was not entirely successful." L. Rzhevsky, in his turn, considered I. Bunin one of the genius Russian writers and believed "Dark Avenues" to be an example of "Russian literary eroticism" [2].

Let us turn to L. Rzhevsky's novel "The Sunflower in Revolt" which contains 17 chapters. It is about the Russian intelligentsia, emigration and the literature of a "home" in exile. The title originates from a poem by I. Drach, *The Ballad of a Sunflower*. The palimpsest technique, so characteristic of L. Rzhevsky, expands to the size of a large-scale philosophical allusion: "sunflower" is what one character, a debater and non-conformist Sergei Sergeevich, calls the other, the writer Dima, "for his narcissism".

The author skilfully projects individual destinies on a universal scale, while the mosaic composition of the novel only contributes to the expansion of its socio-philosophical area. The thematic paradigm of the novel is presented by traditional for L. Rzhevsky themes: homeland, life and death, love, creativity, memory, historical mission, suffering and redemption.

Space is one of the key elements that form the character's vision of the environment and one of the ways to create the author's model of the world. Another element that plays an important role is the category of time, which is closely connected with spatial layers. This synthesis is commonly referred to as "chronotope".

Chronotope, as defined by M.M. Bakhtin, is the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were,

thickens and becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope" [3].

Time is inseparable from space. However, unlike space that acquires meaning in being filled with sacred objects, time predetermines the possibility of the formation and structural organization of space.

In general, time is one of the main forms of the existence of the world, the emergence, formation, development, and destruction of any phenomena of being. The categories of time are associated with the sequence of stages in nature, human life and the development of consciousness.

Spatio-temporal representations served as a means of image generalization of life phenomena, while retaining their objective foundation (we mean the "stopping: of time, its "stretching" and "compression", the overlap of temporal layers). However, we may refer to the connection of spatio-temporal elements in the structure of a literary work as a single whole. The reproduction of spatio-temporal relations by the realist writers of the turn of the century suggests a certain typology, even despite their noticeable creative individuality. There were no extremes or subjective-mystical interpretation of time and space, but an emotional-aesthetic variety of solutions to these relations was present. Flexibility in the perception of space enhanced the dynamism of action (this also marked Chekhov's later works). The spatial concepts of "distance", "space", "road", while preserving all their reality, are also considered as symbols (Bunin's prose). Bunin's concepts of time and space, as we have already mentioned, are historic, material, and visible, but it is the author who connects times, epochs, civilizations, peoples, and generations, looking at what happened or is happening from the distance of centuries and spaces.

### 3. MEMORY IS THE HIGHEST MEASURE OF HUMANITY

Philosophically, I. Bunin makes the post-climax part of *Tanya* and *Muza* equal to the pre-climax part of *In Paris* and *Natalie*. Plot structures of stories with differently located compositional climax may be similar. Thus, short stories *Tanya* and *Natalie* have a spiral plot, while *Muza* and *In Paris* – a linear one.

These structural differences only go to emphasize that "all roads lead to Rome": people reach life outcomes in different ways, and to all of them it seems (just seems!) that the path lies through happiness.

Memory and proto-memory, a vivid sensation of peoples and centuries in the artist's soul, naturally stimulated interest in antiquity and the archaic, which required not only the artist's senses, but also mind and associative memory – this is where the rationalism and intellectualism of the writers of the Silver Age comes from.

They may seem ostentatious; however, this is not deliberate snobbery but an indispensable attribute of poesy, if to bear in mind the immanent nature of poesy as a Renaissance phenomenon. The renaissance of Russian culture at the turn of the century implied not only and not so much the revival of Russian idealism of the Slavophil type, but the revival of Russian culture through its organic fusion with the world culture. It was a new round in understanding the heritage of Antiquity and the European Renaissance – this is how Russian idealist philosophers N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov, and V. Rozanov understood it. Their ideas were also close to artists, neoromantic and neoclassic (A. Blok, V. Bryusov, D. Merezhkovsky, I. Annensky, and Vyach. Ivanov), as well as neorealist (I. Bunin and A. Kuprin).

It is evident that for I. Bunin, memory is the highest measure of humanity. We may argue with researchers who consider only Nature to be the essential criterion for I. Bunin [4] and agree with L.A. Kolobaeva, who claims that "the basis of Bunin's worldview is the phenomenon of 'memory' understood as a necessary natural protection of a person from the destructive influence of time, and inevitability of death" and that memory is a recurrent image in Bunin's works and "a universal form of narration" [5].

#### 4. BUNIN'S AND RZHEVSKY'S CHARACTERS: PEOPLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

I. Bunin's characters are always people of the 20th century, even if the writer turns to history (not as a novelist-historian, but as a philosopher-historian); they are measured by the whole Earth and Eternity. They are bright individuals possessing the features of a national worldview: the Ceylon rickshaw man (*Brothers*) or the Abruzzi mountaineers (*The Gentleman from San Francisco*) differ from Averky (*Weeds*) or Meliton (*Meliton*), but together they create what is called the moral being of man. Indeed, in all times, such qualities as kindness, unselfishness, the ability to sympathize with others, love and faith have been valued by people. It is particularly important that Bunin searched for and found primogeniture in

people, their cultural traditions, long-standing historical ties, and consanguinity of close peoples against the context of the beginning of the 20th century, when people felt isolated in times of violent social conflicts and world war. Wise, humanistic ideas of I. Bunin found in the collection *Temple of the Sun* speak for the breadth of his views, democracy, a sense of historical optimism, and love as the ultimate value.

It is exactly love (for a woman, the Motherland, the world, people, or God) that is an enduring value in the axiological paradigm of L. Rzhevsky's works. The characters of the novel *Between Two Stars* undergo the "test of love" along with the "test of war", but not all are capable of passing it.

In the axiological paradigm of the military prose by L. Rzhevsky, the idea of the Good, the concepts of Truth, Good and Beauty are inevitably connected with the image of Russia, interpretations of Russia's special historical course, and the issue of memory. In the novel *Between Two Stars*, the idea of the Good as such is presented as inseparable from patriotism. The good is understood by the characters not just as a universal human category, but above all, as the Good of Russia, as fulfilment of historic predestination, noble in its very essence [6].

"Heavenly Russia" is strong in faith and love, which revive, heal, and transform. This idea defines the moral pathos of the works of many realist writers.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The original artistic worlds of I. Bunin and L. Rzhevsky are not isolated from each other and from the literary process as a whole. According to M. Gorky, "Every writer in Russia was truly individual, but they all were united by one persistent desire – to understand, feel, and guess the future of the country, the fate of its people, and its role on Earth" [7].

They were brought together by the time itself, which put forward an urgent demand to create an image of a truth-seeker, with thousands of threads connected with their own century and the fate of the country. The artists were obsessed with inventing a hero of the time, hungry for truth, constantly looking for a way out of the difficult Russian situation at the beginning of the century, both for themselves and for others. Thinking about the same, I. Bunin and L. Rzhevsky, like other writers – their contemporaries, solved their creative tasks in differently. Each of them created their unique artistic world and their character.

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