

## Artículo de investigación

**Bunin I. A. and folklore: Ontological in poetics<sup>43</sup>**

Бунин И.А. и фольклор: онтологическое в поэтике

Bunin I. A. y el folklore: Ontológico en poética

Recibido: 30 de mayo del 2019

Aceptado: 23 de julio del 2019

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**Abstract**

The article pays attention to the interaction of literature and folklore. The object of research is the work of Bunin I. A. The subject of the article is the forms and principles of folklorism in the poetics of the writer. Features of the functioning of the folk tradition can be seen in the novel "The Life of Arsenyev", it's the first book of the composition. Much attention is paid to spatial images associated with the mortal theme in the novel. The significance of the system of references to the works of A.S. Pushkin, M.Yu. Lermontov.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics of creativity, poetics, Bunin, folklore, Pushkin, tradition.

**Аннотация**

В статье рассматривается вопрос взаимодействия литературы и фольклора. Объектом исследования выступает творчество И.А. Бунина. Предметом статьи являются формы и принципы фольклоризма в поэтике писателя. Особенности функционирования фольклорной традиции прослеживаются на примере романа «Жизнь Арсеньева», первой книги произведения. Большое внимание уделяется пространственным образам, связанным с мортальной темой в романе. Также оценивается значимость системы отсылок к произведениям А.С. Пушкина, М.Ю. Лермонтова.

**Ключевые слова:** Метафизика творчества, поэтика, Бунин, фольклор, Пушкин, традиция

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<sup>43</sup> \*Project: The publication was prepared with the support of the "RUDN University Program 5-100".

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## Resumen

El artículo presta atención a la interacción de la literatura y el folklore. El objeto de investigación es el trabajo de Bunin I. A. El tema del artículo son las formas y principios del folklorismo en la poética del escritor. Las características del funcionamiento de la tradición popular se pueden ver en la novela "La vida de Arsenyev", es el primer libro de la composición. Se presta mucha atención a las imágenes espaciales asociadas con el tema mortal en la novela. La importancia del sistema de referencias a las obras de A.S. Pushkin, M.Yu. Lermontov.

**Palabras clave:** Metafísica de la creatividad, poética, Bunin, folklore, Pushkin, tradición.

## Introduction

The interaction of literature and folklore is one of the most difficult problems in modern humanitarian science. It requires the researcher, on the one hand, to be attentive to the cultural heritage, folklore, on the other hand, the literary historian should not lead the writer to the "oath of allegiance" to the folk tradition. The concept of "folklore" is perceived quite widely, it includes not only texts, but also the forms of rite, ritual. The latter is especially important for a researcher who studies the manifestation of a folk tradition in a literary author's text. In a theoretical aspect, the external forms of the manifestation of the folk tradition in literature are distinguished, that is, stylization and borrowing, and internal forms, latent.

Contemporary researchers contemplate on the latent nature of Bunin's folklorism, integrating proverbs, sayings, song formulas into their texts, ethnic constants in poetry (Dalgat, 2004). However, the attitude to the early works of the writer and folklorism forms in them is problematic, and, what is most important, the axiological perception of folklore in poetry is one-sided. For example, V.V. Lyukevich in some of his articles criticized the words of M.K. Azadovsky about the dark folklore baseline in Bunin's prose, but himself saw exclusively tragic and dark in the perception of the folk by the poet (Lyukevich, 2014). However, what should be implied by the dark, irrational, subconscious? When considering the nature of folklore from non-materialistic viewpoint, from the positions of archaic understanding (of life and death, the other world, the initiative path), which are present in fairy tales, charms, epics, the irrational and dark comes out with reverse correlative.

The folklore provides the artist with an opportunity to go beyond the boundaries of the ordinary, philistine understanding of the life — this appeal to folklore and myths will become particularly relevant for the aesthetics and

poetics of modernism, in which Bunin was involved. Like L.N. Tolstoy, he cautiously and even critically treated the emerging modernist trends, but himself his ideology was closer to the new literature. According to a fair observation of I.B. Nichiporov, it is the sense of the crisis of rationalism in the knowledge of the world, history and the human soul, as well as the formation of new ideas about art that brought Bunin closer to modernism (Nichiporov, 2003). Thus, the crisis of rationalism pushed writers and poets back to the archaic, mythological, and folklore codes. Such treatment requires the writer to have some kind of reincarnation, to grow into what he describes. Bunin himself reflected on this creative act in Tolstoy's *Liberation*: "Some kind of people have the ability to feel strongly not only their own time, but also others', past one, not only their own country, their tribe, but also others', foreign, not only themselves but also their neighbors, that is, as commonly said: "the ability to reincarnate," and particularly vibrant and particularly imaginative memory. In order to be among such people, one must be an individual who has passed, in the chain of his ancestors, the long way of numerous existences\* and suddenly manifested in himself a particularly complete image of his wild primeval man with the entire freshness of his sensations, with all his imagery..." (Bunin, 2006).

The poet-symbolist A. Belyy called this the person's attachment to other cultures. For example, in the article "The Emblems of the Meaning" (1909), we can find: "That truly new that captivates us in symbolism is an attempt to illuminate the deepest contradictions of the modern culture with the colored rays of diverse cultures. We are now experiencing the whole past it was: India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, as well as the Middle Ages come to life, sweep past us, as the epochs that are closer to us are rushing past us" (Belyy, 2010). If we transfer Belyy's thought to the scientific space, we will see that the humanitarian science is also trying to solve the

problem of interpreting works of art, especially artistic texts, from different angles. *The concept of entelechy of culture* was put forward by G.S. Knabe who defined this phenomenon as “the absorption by a certain time of the content, nature, spirit, and style of the past cultural epoch on the grounds that they were consonant with another later epoch and capable of satisfying its internal needs and requests” (Knabe, 2000). Is this how Andrei Belyy considers the art of symbolism and the *art of the future*? How complex and often changeable are the views of the poet on the symbol, its features, on how dialectical his conclusions about romanticism and realism are, but the reflection on the *need to remember* the words of *other epochs by the artist* always remains unchanged, and this problem is closely related to another, the problem of “cosmic”, not philistine, not positivist view of art. So, the impending epoch itself was an *entelechy* by its nature and it was expressed in the circulation of the word in folklore and myths, and even the need of the artists in it. Bunin the realist is consonant with this epoch in the aspect of our subject, as well.

### Materials and methods

Russian literature of the beginning of XX century absorbed the knowledge of folklore, the archaic ideas about the Cosmos, and gave an idea of a man who was attached to the supramundane, the metaphysical. Of course, the subjects of *Eros* and *Thanatos* so strongly relevant to the national axiology organically entered the artistic world of Russian writers along with this. Neither did I.A. Bunin pass over these subjects. There are numerous works devoted to the concepts of “love” and “death” in Bunin’s poetics in literary criticism, in particular, the thanatological motives of “The Dark Alleys” (Konovalov, 1995; Bogdanova, 1999; Li San Chul, 2016). The purpose of this article is to consider the genesis of the mortal border images in Bunin’s poetry, in the first book of the famous novel “Arseniev’s Life.” The methodology of our research assumes the use of historically functional, historically genetic, and systematically typological methods of analysis and application of the experience of folkloric commenting of texts.

Where did the writer bring this tragic, often dark, and elemental from? Azadovsky, who studied Bunin’s folklorism, pointed out that Bunin saw the tragic in folklore, in the people element; all the people’s sorrow passed from the verbal-poetic into the artistic: “... in the very folklore tradition, in its rites and everyday manifestations, the writer found wild, gloomy images”

(Azadovskiy, 2010). This makes us think about the genesis of *mortal images* and the nature of thanatological motifs in Bunin’s poetics. Here, it is necessary to say about the special type of his works’ folklorism. On the one hand, researchers who were the first to develop this problem pointed to the bookish nature of Bunin’s folklorism and, mainly, sought to find all sorts of sources that the author could rely on to create a certain image (Pomerantseva, 1973). On the other hand, a number of new works have appeared that state the syncretic latent nature of folklorism. Particularly distinguished are the articles by V.A. Smirnov who drew attention to the opposition “Eros – Thanatos” coming from archaic folklore foundations (Smirnov, 2001). In addition, the theory of literature has singled out various types of folklore long time ago: recording, stylizing and borrowing, internal. From these positions, Bunin’s work is especially interesting, who, firstly, knew various genres of folklore, studied it, and even collected it, and secondly, creatively reworked it. The writer himself strove specifically for artistic comprehension of folklore, rejecting, for example, Remizov’s stylizations and alterations (Smirnov, 2016). In the context of such theoretical and Bunin’s message, let us turn to the novel of his emigration period, “Arseniev’s Life.”

### Results and discussion

Attempts to consider the “Arseniev’s Life” novel in the light of the folkloric traditions have already been undertaken and, what is worth noting, very successfully done by folklorist V.A. Smirnov. The scientist pays much attention to the landscape sketches, coupled, in his opinion, with the “lunar myth.” In the turning point for the life of the main character, the Moon appears, which manifests the cosmogonic nature of the situation: The star model of the world, the Moon’s motif “in the novel are certain counterpoints that determine its entire tonality” (Smirnov, 2016). These observations are accurate and fair; they also refer to the formula of *the heavenly fencing*, to the charming poetics. However, it seems to us that from the viewpoint of the folklore tradition functioning, special attention should also be paid to the types of spatial models in the novel that are related to the field, plain, unknown *invisible land*. Researchers have long introduced the concept of a geographical and metaphysical living space in relation to the artistic world of Bunin (Prashcheruk, 1999, 2011). Also, the “exit points” into this metaphysical and symbolic space of the novel were revealed, for example, from the viewpoint of special lexical organics

(the concepts “soul,” “surrounding world,” and others were analyzed. (Smolentsov, 2012)). The metaphysical, transitional space (between “that” and “this” light) is also expressed at the level of the topography, which is set by the model of the field, plain.

The concept of “field,” also rather frequent from the standpoint of the work’s language, was already appealed to in “Arseniev’s Life.” Scientists point out that it is in the field where Arseniev draws closer to the Cosmos; a kind of mysterious “power of the space” is exercised over the soul (Gallyamova, Ertner, 2012), which makes the main character yearn and feel lonely. But was the motif of loneliness and anguish expressed only in this type of space? It is worth paying attention to Arseniev’s attraction to everything *miraculous and inexplicable*, starting, paradoxically, with death: “Are not we born with a sense of death? And if not, if I had not suspected, would I have loved life as much as I love and loved?” (Bunin, 2006). These thanatological reflections that open the novel, set not so much on the gloomy conversation about death, as on the conversation about the *vague, invisible, wonderful* in life that the main character tries to catch since his young age. Often in Arseniev’s reflections, there are lexemes “incomprehensible,” “unknown”: “The depth of the sky, the distance of the fields told me about something else, as if existing apart from them, caused a dream and yearning for something I lacked, touched with *incomprehensible love* and tenderness to someone and something I don’t know...” (Bunin, 2006). These concepts of the invisible suggest the eidology of the ideal and other-worldly, which Bunin could borrow from the Russian fairy tales. A confirmation of this is the direct mentioning by the main character himself of the fairy tales heard in his childhood: “Recollecting the fairy tales read and heard in my childhood, I still feel that the most captivating were the words about the *unknown and the unusual*” (Bunin, 2006). Perhaps, this “childish” discovery of the main character also expresses the basis for understanding Bunin’s folklorism, whose essence reduces itself to the archaic ideas of humans about the Cosmos, the invisible unknown life, and the desire to learn it. This opens up the special type of Bunin’s character: the *man of the threshold*. Is it accidental that through the mind of a little boy, the reader is reminded of stable fairy-tale formulas, rising actions: “In a certain kingdom, in a certain state, beyond the far end of the earth... Beyond the mountains, beyond the dales, beyond the blue seas... Tsar-Maiden, Vasilisa the Wise...” (Bunin, 2006). Here are listed the possible models of the

*edge of the world*, the limit beyond, which cannot be comprehended by the common way. Actually, Arseniev with his strange teacher seeks such places in his adolescent’s daily life. The attic, which is often explored by the characters, embodies in a ritual sense the other world: “And so many times I climbed with Baskakov in the attic, where, according to a legend, some grandfather or great-grandfather’s saber was lying about? We climbed there on a very steep staircase, in the semi-darkness, bending over. <...> In the world, there was the sky, the sun, the space, and here only the twilight and something *crushed, drowsy*” (Bunin, 2006). But the horror and mustiness of the attic attracted the child, but not repelled. The search for a fairy-tale saber filled his meager, in his opinion, life with superfluity.

The craving for the ideal affects not only indirectly in the strange searches and hobbies of Arseniev, which he shared with Baskakov, but also in his reading preferences. First, the reference to Pushkin’s “Ruslan and Lyudmila” is extremely momentous, where the idea of the threshold, the aesthetics of the outer-worldly reality is clearly represented already from the first lines, to which the Bunin’s character refers: “It would seem that such a nonsense, some never and nowhere existing seashore, some “booky” cat, who for no reason found itself there, and for some reason is chained to the oak, some wood spirit, mermaids and “On unknown paths there are traces of extraordinary beasts” (Bunin, 2006).

And *poetic guessing*, insight does not fail the smart boy here. He is attracted by the unexplicability from the viewpoint of the everyday reality: “But obviously, that is the matter. that nonsense, something ridiculous, unprecedented, and not something reasonable, genuine” (Bunin, 2006). Obviously, the fact that a scientist seeks and reveals works in poetics through careful analysis, is perceived by the poet at another, deeper, unconscious level. And this is the manifestation of the entelechy of culture and thinking. In one case, the researcher needs to draw typologies, identify ethno-poetic constants. In another case, the artist of the word needs to live into another environment, epoch — this was what Bunin wrote in “Tolstoy’s Liberation.” However, Arseniev appeals not only to Pushkin, but also to world literature, knightly novels, feeling himself a participant in the distant past. This *travesty* expresses the sacred memory, the *mimetic action*. This allows the character to perceive the surrounding reality imaginatively,

for him the ordinary gets the status of the Absolute.

Arseniev sees the sensation of the otherworldly, non-domestic current of life in his illness, which he treats as a transition to the other world: "In the last year of our life in Kamenka, I suffered the first serious illness, for the first time I learned the amazing thing that they used to call simply a serious illness and that there is actually a sort of *wandering to some other-worldly limits*" (Bunin, 2006). It is interesting to see the *room topography* itself, the position of the main character in space during the illness: "Ah, I remember very well those moments when I began to come to myself at times and saw either my mother in the form of some huge ghost, or instead of the bedroom, a dark and gloomy barn, where the candle placed on the floor behind the head of the bed generated thousands of disgusting figures, faces, animals, plants fluttering and trembling in the fiery waves!" (Bunin, 2006). The design of *the other world* has its own laws, and the main feature is the "inverted nature", ugliness of common things (compare the dream imagery of Pushkin's Tatiana). In addition, the candle in our context refers to the funerary *mortal candle* set for the soul of the deceased, who does not see and can find the way to the *other world with the help of the light* (Tolstoy, 1995). Arseniev delicately feels the state of the threshold. Not accidentally, Bunin describes the terrible images of the character's drowsiness and puts a candle in his bedhead.

The feeling of death chases the boy especially after Nadya's death, who appears either as a sackcloth puppet, or someone with black terrible lips: "I suddenly realized that I am mortal, that every minute that wild, terrible thing that happened to Nadia could happen to me, and that in general everything earthly, all living, material, corporeal is inevitably subject to death, decay, that purple blackness, which covered Nadya's lips by the time she was taken out of the house" (Bunin, 2006). In the mind and soul of the main character, death is dialectical: he is either afraid of it, or seems to wish to die, while remaining in the *threshold conditions*: "... my half-mad, enthusiastically bitter dreams of the torments of the first Christians, of the maidens torn to pieces by wild beasts on some courses, of the royal daughters, pure and beautiful like god's lilies, beheaded by their own cruel parents, of the burning desert of the Jordan, where, covering up her nakedness only with her own hair grown to the ground, Mary of Egypt dwelt, entreated her fornication in the world..." (Bunin, 2006); "I lived only by the inner contemplation of these

pictures and images" (Bunin, 2006). And again, at the turning point of life for Arseniev, he does not have a domestic view of things, but an imaginative one: through the inner image all the surrounding reality is highlighted. Again, there is a feeling of a fabulous, other-worldly life, which the main character consciously seeks: "<...> escaped into his fabulously holy world, reveling with his mournful joys, the thirst for suffering, self-indulgence, self-torture" (Bunin, 2006).

## Conclusions

The first book of the novel reveals to us the secret life of Arseniev the child and the boy. He feels himself on the verge of real and surreal, as indicated by the symbols of the field, attic, book with fairy tales, his visions. In the most ordinary (for an adult), Arseniev foresees the inexplicable, mysterious and strives to this with all his heart. The identification in the text of archetypal constructions, the folklore commentary, which is connected in this part more with the models of spaces, leads the reader to the *ontological* plan of the narrative.

Bunin's novel contains many references to the works of Pushkin and Lermontov, which allows the researcher not only to raise the question of intertextuality, but also to reveal the reaction of the novel's hero, Arsenyev, to the works of the classics. Arseniev reads the poem "Ruslan and Lyudmila", sensing the metaphysical nature of Pushkin's work and paying attention to the image of unknown animals and tracks. This also reveals the hidden folklorism of Bunin's work.

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