

Kata JURACSEK

## IMAGES OF THE EAST IN THE SHORT FICTION OF IVAN BUNIN\*

### Образ Востока в короткой прозе Ивана Бунина

#### Аннотация

Статья посвящена образу Востока в короткой прозе Ивана Бунина. С помощью нарративной модели Яна ван дер Энга, состоящей из трех основных тематических уровней (действия, характеристики, географического и социального окружения), мы анализируем и упорядочиваем произведения Бунина через призму постколониальной критики. С одной стороны, мы рассматриваем точки зрения традиционных постколониальных исследований; с другой стороны, мы также принимаем во внимание постколониальную теорию по поводу «второго мира» (Россия, Восточная и Центральная Европа). При анализе мы начинаем с текстов, в которых образ Востока представлен только на одном тематическом уровне, постепенно направляя наше внимание на короткие рассказы, в которых этот образ определяет всю смысловую структуру.

**Ключевые слова:** Иван Бунин, короткая проза, Восток, «второй мир», постколониализм

Ivan Bunin, the first Russian to win a Nobel Prize in Literature, is known as an author of prose and poetry. In his oeuvre the portrayal of pre-1917 Russia as well as of certain territories outside of Russia (Europe, Far and Middle East) plays a significant role. His work is equally important for researchers examining 20<sup>th</sup> century forms of traditional Realism<sup>1</sup> and for those interested in Russian émigré literature. In this paper we read and arrange the short fiction of Bunin through the prism of postcolonial criticism. On the one hand, we will consider the arguments of traditional postcolonial studies; on the other hand, we will also take into account the postcolonial theory regarding the “second world” (Russia, Eastern and Central Europe).

Portraying the East and the periphery of the Russian Empire is, of course, not a phenomenon that started with Bunin: in this respect, his writings can be examined within the context of a rich Russian literary tradition. While the Caucasus was a popular subject in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, playing an important role in the works of such

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<sup>1</sup> The latest monography on the subject was written by Natalia Prascheruk [ПРАЩЕРУК 2012]. However, the works of Bunin can also be examined within the context of early 20<sup>th</sup> century literary movements. According to Yuri Malcev, he can be linked to Symbolism, based on the common aspects of “the motif of Russian backwardness (Blok, Bely), the poetization of the old Rus, the cult of the past, lost heaven, the disapproval felt towards contemporary culture” [МАЛЫЦЕВ 1994: 146].



authors as Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy,<sup>2</sup> the Middle East was another important poetic element. Among other contemporaries of Bunin, Middle Eastern imagery is prominent in the oeuvre of Nikolay Gumilyov.<sup>3</sup>

This topic has been widely examined by certain researchers of Bunin. The relationship of Bunin with the East was analysed in a biographical context by Julian Connolly, who states that the author's worldview had been fundamentally shaped by his travels between 1903 and 1909 [КОННОЛЛИ 2001]. Thomas Gaiton Marullo, the most renowned American Bunin expert, interprets six of his prosaic texts based on Buddhist teachings [MARULLO 1998]. Léna Szilárd examines the works of Bunin within the context of the Tolstoian tradition of thought. According to her, Bunin's journey to Ceylon and the Middle East in 1910–11 “gave external material and a basic *syuzhet* to the introduction of those Eastern religious ideas that attracted the author even beforehand” [СИЛАРД 1978]. Ildikó Mária Rác, who focuses in her doctoral dissertation on the philosophical principles of the oeuvre of Bunin, examines, among other factors, the way in which Oriental teachings became determining structural factors of Bunin's literary texts [RÁCZ 2018]. Although these approaches are indeed important, the present study will not focus on biographical facts or philosophical influences, discussing instead the immanent structure of the texts and the system of motifs that develop in the examined corpus. We will thus analyse how the cultural opposition of East and West, of Russia and the people living on the periphery of the Russian Empire develops in the literary text.

### Theoretical context

Postcolonial criticism examines the relationship between Eastern and Western cultures. One of the most influential works of the field is *Orientalism*, the 1978 book of Edward W. Said. From the point of view of our research, the conventions of representation outlined by Said, through which the East is portrayed in Western texts, are highly important. Said describes the relationship between colonizer and colonized as a relationship of power: within this framework the subordinated group is always defined from the point of view of the dominant culture. In the terms of Foucault, a subordinated group can only be the object, never the creator of discourse [FOUCAULT 1991]. As a result, representation itself becomes a form of dominance and control. In this sense, the East is a construction of the West, a means of its self-determination (this is how a culture defines itself in relation to the extra cultural space [LOTMAN ET AL. 1975: 57–61]). From the point of view of the West, the East appears to be physically and psychologically inferior; as opposed to the masculine, strong, and rational West, its characteristic features are femininity and weakness. This aspect is also featured in its representation: the East is emotionally heated, sensual, mysterious, and animalistic, existing in a state that is much closer to nature [SAID 2006].

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<sup>2</sup> This widely researched topic was summarised by Izabela Kalinowska [KALINOWSKA 2004].

<sup>3</sup> The image of the East in the works of Gumilyov was analysed, e.g., in the doctoral dissertation of Zsuzsanna Egeres [EGERES 2012].



A more recent direction of postcolonial critical thought, introduced by Ewa Thompson, focuses on the “second world” (Russia, Central and Eastern Europe). Relying on the results of traditional postcolonial criticism, Thompson argues that a particular type of colonialism can be found in these regions – one based on a similar power structure as the type described by Said, but the colonization itself is accomplished through different means. Since it is neighbouring regions that are affected by the expansion, instead of overseas territories, in the determining narrative of the colonizer this colonization is interpreted as a natural and legitimate growth, as opposed to occupation: the motherland adopts and integrates various ethnic groups. As a result, in literary texts space is structured based on the logic of centre versus periphery, and the centre is portrayed as culturally superior. Since ethnic differences are not always visibly present in external features, the representatives of the centre, when compared with people from the periphery, are primarily portrayed as intellectually superior. At the same time, the representatives of the periphery, within the discourse of the dominant culture, seem to have a more organic bond with nature and folk traditions [THOMPSON 2000].

What exactly do we mean by “East”? As Yuri Lotman states in his article about Lermontov, in which he writes about the spheres of East and West as competing cultural spaces in the self-determination of Russian identity, the Caucasus clearly represents the East in Russian literature [ЛОТМАН 1985]. However, in terms of geography, this does not coincide with the East that Said writes about. In the light of the theories of Said and Thompson, it is not the geographical east that we are examining, but the East as a construct that develops in the framework of a discourse determined by a hierarchical power structure (it may coincide with the geographical east, but does not have to). It is plausible that Bunin, as a Russian, portrays the periphery of the Russian Empire as a representative of the centre, while the territories outside of Russia are seen through the eyes of a Western traveller, in both cases representing the dominant culture. Therefore, we will examine Bunin’s short fiction touching upon the East (the Far and the Middle East, as well as the periphery of the Russian Empire) as a unified corpus, only separating the texts in the last part of the paper, when describing the chronotope of a specific territory.

### **Defining the corpus of texts**

The short fiction of Bunin is unique in Russian literature due to the fact that it portrays both overseas territories of colonial powers and the periphery of the Russian Empire<sup>4</sup>. Relying on the theories summarised above, we can define on a thematic basis the corpus of texts in which the East is represented and define the following two groups:

Short stories featuring or referencing the peripheral/neighbouring territories of the Russian Empire (in chronological order): *Помещик Воргольский* (1892), *На край света* (1894), *Святые Горы* (1895), *На даче* (1895), *По Днепру* (1895), *«Казацким ходом»* (1898), *В августе* (1901), *С высоты* (1904), *Маленький роман* (1909),

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<sup>4</sup> The oeuvre Bunin is rich in portrayals of Russian provincial life. This is evidenced by the fact that a toponymic index was published based on his prose [КРАСНОВА 2005].

*Веселый двор* (1911), *Суходол* (1911), *Лирник Родион* (1913), *Чаша жизни* (1913), *Хороших кровей* (1913), *Аглая* (1916), *Казимир Станиславович* (1916), *Митина любовь* (1924), *Ущелье* (1930), *Молодость и старость* (1936), *Кавказ* (1937), *Волки* (1940), *Памятный бал* (1944), «*В такую ночь...*» (1949).

Short stories featuring or referencing overseas territories of colonial powers and the Middle East (also in chronological order): *Три просьбы* (1901), *Тень Птицы* (1907), *Море богов* (1907), *Дельта* (1907), *Свет Зодиака* (1907), *Иудея* (1908), *Камень* (1908), *Шеол* (1909), *Пустыня дьявола* (1909), *Страна содомская* (1909), *Храм Солнца* (1909), *Геннисарет* (1911), *Крик* (1911), *Сверчок* (1911), *Копье господне* (1913), *Пыль* (1913), *Братья* (1914), *Город Царя Царей* (1914), *Сны Чанга* (1916), *Сын* (1916), *Соотечественник* (1916), *Готами* (1919), *Третий класс* (1921), *Темир-Аксак-Хан* (1921), *В ночном море* (1923), *Слепой* (1924), *Ночь* (1925), *Воды многие* (1925–26), *Полдень* (1930), *Апрель* (1938), *Руся* (1940), *Визитные карточки* (1940), *Зойкаи Валерия* (1940), *Генрих* (1940), *Чистый понедельник* (1944), *Камарг* (1944), *Сто рупий* (1944), *Весной, в Иудее* (1946).

Based on the chronological list, we can see that both subjects are present throughout the active years of Bunin as an author. We will evaluate in the summary the degree to which they are in the role of the dominant (as per the terminology of Jakobson [JAKOBSON 1987]). In order to determine to what extent the East becomes part of the artistic text and on which text levels it can be identified, we will arrange the corpus on the basis of the narrative model of Jan van der Eng. Eng specifies three thematic levels for the description of the narrative: action, characterization, and geographical and social setting [ENG 1978: 9–17]. We will examine the corpus not in chronological order, but starting with the texts in which images of the East are only featured on one thematic level, gradually directing our attention towards the short stories in which these images determine the whole semantic structure.

### Geographical and social setting

The short fiction of Bunin contains a considerable number of episodic characters who can be linked to the East in one way or another. While these figures contribute to the general picture of the social setting, they do not significantly influence the overall semantic structure of the text. In some cases, their ethnicity signals their place in society: in *Маска* the footmen are Tatars, in *С высоты* we read about a Tatar coachman, in *Памятный бал* one of the officers is Georgian, in *Сны Чанга* the first Chinese owner of the dog is a poor merchant.

The elements of the geographical and social setting can also support another thematic level. In *Кавказ*, the setting functions as the space in which the narrator and his lover can be together: the Oriental background supports thus the level of action. In *Чаша жизни* the figure of the Serbian travelling performer with the monkey highlights the strictness and intolerance of father Kir („Не терпел отец Кир и бродяг, беспаспортных, пришлых людей. [...] Но показался вдали о. Кир. И улица мгновенно опустела: все скрылись по калиткам. Он же, приблизясь к сербу, запретил ему ходить по улицам Стрелецка”), supporting the level of characterization. The figure of the Serbian is quite animalistic, a fact emphasised by the monkey

obtaining human features. In *На даче* the conversation of the Ukrainian maid with Grisha, the protagonist, supports the boy's characterisation. In *Казимир Станиславович* the Georgian waiter highlights the declining quality of the restaurant, supporting the level of action, the contrast between the past and the present in the life of the protagonist («Потом седой, кудрявый грузин принес ему [...] полусырой пахучий шашлык, [...] и, для пушей азиатской простоты, собственно ручно посыпал луком»). This scene features the simplicity of the subordinated culture, which is seen as less valuable compared to the dominant one. In *Помещик Воргольский* the title character calls the coachman "Kazakh"; however, the narrator only uses this name in quotation marks. This would suggest that he might not be an actual ethnic Kazakh, but is only called one because of his profession, due to the prejudice held by Vorgolski, whose characterization this detail supports.

### **Level of characterization**

A number of Bunin's characters contain a reference to the East in their features or attributes. This technique helps the author to nuance the physical or psychological portrayal of the character. For instance, such references may be found in *Веселый двор* («Теперь я – вольный казак, а женишься – журишь о жене»), *Сверчок* («Сила, уверенность в силе чувствовались и во всей осанке этого черноволосого человека, похожего на малайца»), and *Слепой* («Поза его напряженно неподвижная и, как у всех слепых, египетская»). In *Митина любовь* Mitya has Byzantine eyes, which are connected to his child-like nature («Как ты смешно, с какой-то милой мальчишеской неловкостью растягиваешь свой большой рот, когда смеешься. [...] Да вот еще за твои византийские глаза...»). In *Волки* the female protagonist wears her kerchief like a Little Russian («Она кругло, по-малорусски, повязана красным платочком»). Her clothes have semantic significance, thus becoming part of her portrayal as a naive young woman. In these texts a connection to the East signifies freedom, physical strength, and beauty, while, at the same time, Oriental features are associated with childlike naivety, innocence, and mental instability.

In another group of texts, the various characters not only contain references to the East, but have actual Eastern roots, which are seen as an explanation of certain psychological and physical features. Thus, in *Визитные карточки* the peculiar beauty of the protagonist is explained by his heritage – his ancestors were Oriental merchants; the narrator of *Суходол* traces his family tree back to legendary heroes, among which Tatar leaders can be found; in *Хороших кровей* Lipat emphasises his Siberian descent, also as part of his heritage («Мы, сказывают, из Сибири пришли, – говорит он. – От того у меня и рост и волос сибирный»). In *Зойка и Валерия*, speaking about the Turkish heritage of Levitski, doctor Danilevsky jokingly attributes certain psychological features to the character of the former («так что будьте осторожны, дамы и девицы, он турок и вовсе не такой скромник, как вы думаете. Да и влюбчив он, как вам известно, по-турецки. Чей теперь черед, коллега?»). In *В такую ночь...* the ethnic heritage of the female character is part of her self-awareness («Оставьте в покое мою старость. И я вовсе не хохлушка, а казачка»).

In *Крик* the drunk Turk is an Oriental figure in a foreign environment (the Russian ship). He expresses his pain with just one cry, which the narrator of the story interprets for the reader, translating the unintelligible sound to human language («Все мешается в его мозгу, он чувствует только одно – ужас и тоску»). *В августе* focuses on the subjective experience of the narrator; the Ukrainian landscape and people are interpreted in relation to his feelings. There are two female figures that capture his attention: the nameless woman carrying water, who is seen as part of the landscape and helps create the geographical and social atmosphere of the place, and the fully developed character of Olga Semionovna, who interrupts the narrator's contemplation. The motif of looks is worth examining here: the narrator observes how Olga is observing herself, projecting his own attitude towards her body on her perspective («Однако я никак не мог привыкнуть к ее одежде, к тому, что она босыми ногами ходит по навозу и колкому жнивью, даже стыдился смотреть на эти ноги. Да она и сама все поджимала их и часто искоса поглядывала на свои испорченные ногти»), thus acting as an interpreter, just as in the previous case. In *Сын* we see not the Oriental origin of the character, but the influence of the East on an European: the husband of Madame Marot gradually develops Oriental features («За четырнадцать лет Маро очень изменились по внешности: он стал черен лицом, как араб, поседел и подсох, многие принимали его за уроженца Алжирии»), while conversely, on the level of geographical setting, the West influences the East (the Arabic fortress is ruled by the French).

### **Variations of the Oriental woman**

On the level of characterization, the figure of the Oriental woman can be considered as a characteristic poetic element of the short fiction of Bunin. It is possible to determine a group of texts featuring this particular type of female character. These figures are always portrayed either through the eyes of the male narrator-protagonist or by a third person narrator adopting the psychological perspective [УСПЕНСКИЙ 1970] of the male character. They tend to be associated with the colour black and are seen as beautiful and desirable (their bodies being subjected to the male gaze), but at the same time these women appear to be dominant and dangerous. In the sketch *Ущелье* the adolescent Tatar girl may potentially become such a woman. This is apparent from her characteristic colours and the almost threatening look in her eyes («она еще в одной рубаше, черная головка ее еще раскрыта; но глаза уже дивны и жутки, как у архангела...»). In *Апрель* the teacher has an Oriental spark in her eyes and her dominant colour is also black («черной шляпке с черной сквозной вуалькой до половины лица, за которой восточно сияли ее черные глаза»). An interesting detail is the attention drawn to her wet glistening teeth («влажно блестящие зубы») and the animalistic look in her eyes, in which life and death are present at the same time («большие черные глаза за черными ресницами мели что-то гробовое и в месте с тем были налиты молодой животной теплотой»). These details liken the character to a predator.

In *Руся* the mother of the protagonist is a princess of Oriental origin, who also plays an active role in the story (she separates the young lovers). Her characteristic

feature is her melancholy (черная меланхолия – the melancholy itself is black as well), she is also referred to as insane («полоумная») and thus mentally unstable. The black colours of Rusya<sup>5</sup> are in contrast with her yellow sarafan: «черные глаза, черные брови... [...] Все это, при желтом сарафане и белых кисейных рукавах сорочки». Rusya is portrayed as more intellectually mature than the male protagonist, being the one making the decisions regarding their relationship. In *Генрих* two women, Li and Nadia, are portrayed in relation to the male protagonist. They can be interpreted as equivalent figures based on opposition: the Russian poetic Nadia represents childlike innocence and sensitivity, while the Oriental Li is dominant and threatening, which is reflected in the manner she talks to Heinrich («Молчи. Я-то не дуручка. И если правда есть это Бог знает что, я тебя серной кислотой оболую»). Just like in the case of Rusya, her clothes are given special emphasis, but instead of the lively yellow, Li's dress is black. The narrator focuses on her hands: she often hides them in a muff, they have a bluish tinge, with long and sharp nails, which makes her also predator-like. As opposed to Nadia, she is highly physical, the lust associated with her figure is coupled with aggression («целуя и кусая то в губы»).

The heroine of *Чистый понедельник* can also be interpreted as a manifestation of this figure. She is not of Eastern origin, but her beauty links her to the character type: «у нее красота была какая-то индийская, персидская: смугло-янтарное лицо, великолепные и несколько зловещие в своей густой черноте волосы, мягко блестящие, как черный соболий мех, брови, черные, как бархатный уголь, глаза». Her relationship with the male protagonist is also similar to that of Oriental female characters: she is the one determining how things progress between them. However, her sexuality is not emphasised; she does not appear to have any passion for the male character. By the end of the story she becomes an Orthodox nun, making herself completely inaccessible to him. Just like Li, she has a muff («вынув из каракулевой муфты») and the attention of the narrator is again directed at her hands.

We can see the last three manifestations of this type of character in *Камарг, Весной, в Иудее* and *Сто рупий*. In all three texts the act of active looking is highly emphasised. In *Камарг* the woman on the train is eating, which gives her animalistic features: «Тонкое, смугло-темное лицо, озаряемое блеском зубов, было древне-дикое. [...] Руки, сухие, индусские, с мумийными пальцами и более светлыми ногтями, все шелушили и шелушили фисташки с обезьяньей быстротой и ловкостью». In the other two stories the real Oriental woman in an Oriental setting appears like an unattainable, heavenly, and yet purchasable entity. In *Сто рупий* the Malay servant offers the woman to the narrator for a hundred rupees, while in *Весной, в Иудее* the male protagonist buys the woman instead of the cheese she is selling. Thus, the female body is featured as a commodity, that can be purchased just like the cheese («Я положил в ладонь несколько медных монет, потом, замирая от волнения, вынул и показал ей золотой фунт. Она поняла и опустила ресницы»).

<sup>5</sup> The locus of Rusya is the lake, which along with her name connects her to the mythological figure of the rusalka. This short story was analysed in more detail by Tatiana Marchenko [МАРЧЕНКО 2015: 167–200].



### Level of action

On the level of action, it is possible to distinguish two groups of texts that feature the East. In the first group the Russian landscape is transformed into an Eastern one in the mind of the protagonist. In the sketch *Полдень* the sight of the women in the river revive the narrator's memories of the Nile («Одна через голову сорвала с себя серую замашную рубаху и кинулась так дико, что я тот час вспомнил Нил, Нубию»). The Eastern setting is associated with increased eroticism. In *Пыль* we see a similar transformation: the Russian countryside is turned into Asia through the image of dust («мысли его опять возвратились к молодости, [...] к этому большому мертвому городу, вечно заносимому пылью, подобно оазисам среднеазиатских пустынь, подобно египетским каналам, засыпаемым песками... «ПЫЛЬ, ПЫЛЬ, ПЫЛЬ! – думал он с какой-то едкой и сладкой тоской, глядя на тончайшую сухую мглу, наполнявшую его жаркое купе. – Азия, Азия!»»).

Another group of short stories (*Азляя*, *Три просьбы*, *Готами*, *Темир-Аксак-Хан*, *В ночном море*, *Молодость и старость*) is structured alongside the logic of text within the text (*текст в тексте* [ЛЮТМАН, 2014]), and the relationship between the texts is different in each case. In *Азляя* the stories Katerina reads and tells about Russian history prepare Anna for life in the nunnery. In her tale Kiev is portrayed as the cradle of Russian Christianity, while the attack of the Tatar tribes is seen as God's punishment.<sup>6</sup> In *Три просьбы* the tale about the Turk who had three wishes is interpreted by the narrator as an illustration of his own life («К сожалению, я в эту пору сам похож был на турка из сказки»). The framing text of *Готами* is not emphasised; only one sentence shows that the story should be interpreted as a legend («Повесть, трижды прекрасная своей краткостью и скромностью, повесть Готами»). At the end of the story the narrator summarises the lessons to be learned, so the text within the text functions as a parable. A song about the title character is integrated in *Темир-Аксак-Хан*. It serves as the catalyst of subjective experience; everyone in the audience reacts to it in some way. For the narrator, the song expresses the echo of lost heroic times.

The East can also play a role in the framing text. *В ночном море* is structured along the conversation of two men who used to be part of a love triangle. One of the men is an Oriental, which becomes apparent from his cultural references: he tells a story about Buddha (Царевич Гаутама), thus showing that he has come to terms with what happened in the past. The function of the text within the text is therefore similar to what we have seen in *Три просьбы*, but here the framing text is more extensive. Although we can deduce that one of the protagonists is an Oriental, the function of the night is to render the two men equal: even if their cultural background is different, they have to face the same hardships in life. In the beginning of *Молодость и старость* not the similarities, but the differences prevail on the level of social setting. While the first-class cabin of the narrator-protagonist is clean, spacious, and empty, the deck is overcrowded with passengers, and their space is

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<sup>6</sup> As Ewa Thompson states, the Tatars at this time were already subjects of the Russian Empire, but such narratives still represented them as enemies of Russian Christianity [THOMPSON 2000].



dominated by unpleasant smells. However, in contrast with the cabin, the deck is portrayed as a more exciting, more dynamic sphere. The old Khurd who appears in this setting tells a tale about the course of human life,<sup>7</sup> proving his wisdom to the young Greek. The function of the text within the text is therefore to support the characterization of the old man, at the same time, with the tale about the essential equality of everyone, reevaluating the initial social setting.

### **Buninian chronotopes**

Now we are turning our attention towards text groups in which one particular geographical region is linked with a characteristic line of action and outlook on time. Time and space are therefore linked in these texts, and as a result we can structure these formations with the help of the Bakhtinian concept of *chronotope* [БАХТИН 1975]. In the oeuvre of Bunin it is possible to distinguish three such chronotopes, connected to the territories of the Ukraine (at the time known as Little Russia), the Middle East, and Ceylon.

### **Little Russia: the birthplace of Russia**

The chronotope of Little Russia can be identified in the following short stories: *На край света*, *Святые Горы*, *По Днепру*, *«Казацким ходом»*, *Лирник Родион*. This chronotope is connected to the past of Russia, it appears as the birthplace of Russian statehood and of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the locus of folkloric traditions and mythical heroes. *На край света* portrays the resettlement of Ukrainians to the Russian Far East. On the level of action, the characters are leaving their homeland. As a result, they are forced to abandon their past as well, since it is the geographical space through which they are connected to their ancestors («Много слез упало на этом месте и в былые дни. Стояли здесь когда-то снаряженные в далекий путь «лыщари». Они тоже прощались, как перед кончиной, и с детьми и с женами»). Leaving this space is seen as losing the past itself. The once proud and mighty army is replaced by a grey crowd, the motivational force behind the actions is now necessity and poverty instead of the thirst for adventure («Но тогда надо всем витала гордая казацкая воля. А теперь стоит серая толпа, которую навсегда выгоняет на край света не прихоть казацкая, а нищета, эти желтые пески, что сверкают за рекою»). Sentences in Ukrainian are included in the Russian text, which helps emphasise the characters' Ukrainian identity.

While in *На край света* the characters are moving away from their homeland, in the *Святые Горы*, *По Днепру*, *«Казацким ходом»*, and *Лирник Родион* the opposite movement is portrayed: on the level of action, the characters are moving towards and travel through Little Russia. All four texts have first-person narrators concentrating on their own subjective experiences. Movement in this space is closely connected to the image of the river: in *Святые Горы* the narrator follows the Donets, in the other three texts the action unfolds on the Dnieper. The river is portrayed as

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<sup>7</sup> Many variations of this tale exist in the folk traditions of the world; the old man narrates the Kurdish version [BEN-AMOS ET AL. 2004: 429].

the witness of bygone times, physically connecting the regions of the old Russian tzardom, connecting the present and the past. Therefore, the journey on/alongside the river may be understood, at the same time, as a spiritual journey.

In *Святые Горы* the narrator's pilgrimage is described; the emphasis is on the spiritual experience evoked by the holy place. A general festive spirit prevails in the short story, which is also represented on the level of social setting through people's clothing. Climbing the mountain and looking down at the river can be seen as the culmination point of the story. This is the episode when the present merges with the past: the narrator experiences what one of the soldiers of Igor, known from the chronicle *Повесть временных лет*, had once experienced («...Донца в солнечном блеске, какую горячею жизнью юга дышало все крутом! То-то, должно быть, дико-радостно билось сердце какого-нибудь воина полков Игоревых, когда, выскочив на хрипящем коне на эту высь, повисал он над обрывом, среди могучей чащи сосен, убегающих вниз!»). In *Лирник Родион* the general atmosphere is equally festive. The journey on the river is a journey from winter to spring, from death to life. The ship is called *Oleg*, which could be interpreted as a reference to the father of prince Igor from *Повесть временных лет*. The short story focuses on the blind singer Rodion, whose name bears an etymological connection to the Russian verb *родить/родиться*, and thus the Ukrainian character is also associated with life. Rodion tells the story of his own life, evoking *житие* (life of saints), one of the most important genres of old Russian literature. Even though the Ukrainian language is present in both short stories, emphasising the cultural separation of Little Russia from Great Russia, the Russian character has no difficulty in understanding it, and this separation is easily overcome.

*По Днепру* and «*Казацким ходом*» are strikingly similar in their action, but they differ in their tone: *По Днепру* is lyrical, while «*Казацким ходом*» is written in the style of a travel journal. While in the short stories that we have analysed so far the Ukrainian landscape represented the birthplace of Russian Christianity, both *Святые Горы* and *Лирник Родион* evoking genres and texts of early Russian Christianity, *По Днепру* and «*Казацким ходом*» refer to the *былина* (bylina), another significant, secular genre of old Russian literature, by making reference to the folk hero Danilo. The image of the region is split between past and present: the peaceful Little Russia of the present is opposed to the untamed and wild Ukraine, the world of bylinas and the folkloric world of Gogol's *Страшная месть*. The connection between the two time periods is once again established by the river («За Черкассами Днепр становится уже не таким мелководно широким и спокойным. [...] Кажется иногда, что это Днепр не теперешней мирной Малороссии, а Днепр времен «Страшной мести», Днепр могучего и вольного прошлого старой Украины»). The Ukrainian landscape is also connected to the figure of Taras Shevchenko, the father of modern Ukrainian literature, although his work is seen by the Russian narrator as an integral part of Russian literature («ждал увидеть вечное пристанище того, кто так горячо любил все это, кто воплотил в своих песнях всю красоту своей родины вместе с горестями своей страдальческой жизни и чье простое крестьянское имя – Тарас Шевченко – навсегда останется украшением русской

литературы»). In both short stories the fields of Little and Great Russia are compared. The former appears to be more lively, picturesque, and poetic, having a more organic connection to nature.

### **The biblical chronotope of the Middle East**

The chronotopic character of the cycle of narrative travel poems<sup>8</sup> *Тень Птицы* was analysed by Tatiana Kovaleva, who examines in detail the biblical chronotope in these texts [КОВАЛЁВА 2018]. The Middle East plays a part on the level of geographical and social setting. The eleven texts (*Тень Птицы, Моребогов, Дельта, Свет Зодиака, Иудея, Камень, Шеол, Пустыня дьявола, Страна содомская, Храм Солнца, Геннисарет*) follow the journey of the first-person narrator from Istanbul to Beirut. As Prascheruk states, in this cycle we can see the first example of the portrayal of absolute freedom, liberation from the bonds of time, a characteristic element of Bunin's later work [ПРАЩЕРУК 1999: 28–83]. The texts focus on the spiritual experience of the narrator, while the outside world, the diverse, always changing Middle Eastern landscape acts as a catalyst. As in the short stories linked to the chronotope of Little Russia, on the level of action constant movement, a kind of pilgrimage is portrayed, during which the biblical spaces emerge, evoking biblical times.

The same chronotope can be identified in *Копье господне* and *Воды многие*. These also lead us to the chronotope of Ceylon, which is going to be examined in the last part of this paper. Like in *Тень Птицы*, the narrative focus is on the subjective experience of the first-person narrator. On the level of action both texts portray a voyage, but in opposite directions: the ship in *Копье господне* is returning from the East, while in *Воды многие* the ship sails towards Ceylon. The two narrators differ in their attitude towards the East. In *Копье господне* the ship coming from the East is associated with the image of death, it sails under a yellow flag (the sign of quarantine), the vultures and the khamsin (desert wind) bring about the feeling of vulnerability and the realisation of being subjected to the forces of nature. Thus, physical illness caused by the East is coupled with psychological anxiety («тоже во время чумы [...] Но какой сон при хамсине! Тело ноет, сердце замирает. Поминутно, весь в поту, просыпаешься, куришь, снова задремываешь...»). At the same time, Arabia transforms into a place of the past, from Old Testament times («все думаешь о том древнем, мистическом, чем отравляет нас Восток [...] Аравия. Какая загадочная, доньше неведомая нам, ветхозаветная страна – эти пустыни, до шлака сожженные ветхозаветным богом!»). The weak, artificial lights of the Western ship are in contrast with the powerful light of celestial bodies, representing the East. The main attribute of the region is that its essence cannot be fully understood from the Western perspective. This enigmatic nature also leads to anxiety («Что там, в гористой, вечно мреющей миражами глубине ее? Окраины мы знаем: жара, грязь и вечная холера в портах; дальше – пески и камни; где-

<sup>8</sup> A number of researchers, such as Maja Więckowska [WIĘCKOWSKA 2017], call this cycle *travel essays* (путевые очерки). However, according to Prascheruk, „essayism, as the generic-stylistic characteristic of the text, is too incidental, it does not exhaust its full content” [ПРАЩЕРУК 2016: 61].

нибудь на голой волнистой равнине их – страшный в своей доисторической неуклюжести верблюд»).

The narrator of *Воды многие* does not see nature as something threatening, but he is amazed by its power («Жизнь моя – трепетное и радостное причастие вечному и временному, близкому и далекому, всем векам и странам, жизни всего бывшего и сущего на этой земле, столь любимой мною»). Mount Sinai is seen in this text as a space that connects humankind, and the narrator reflects on the simple but universal truths of the Ten Commandments. West in this case is not seen as a sphere separated from the East: the two appear to be connected organically. The past time of the Old Testament is interpreted in its connection to the present, as the Ten Commandments are just as true in the present as they were in biblical times. Although the East is once again portrayed as an enigma, this does not result in anxiety, but in amazement, for even behind Eastern poverty the narrator suspects the divine will of God («чувства пробуждаются совсем иные, высокого, почти жуткого порядка. Тысячелетиями идет эта полуживотная жизнь. Но над нею – нам неведомые божьи цели»). The Oriental characters are seen in their physical aspect, obtaining animalistic features, and at the same time their sight evokes positive feelings in the narrator («кучка высоких черно-шоколадных тел [...] в тонких профилях было что-то козлиное [...] я смотрел на их наготу и испытывал какое-то странное, даже как будто стыдное, райское [да, истинно райское] чувство»). The journey to Ceylon is seen as a journey to Paradise, as the return to God, represented in the text almost like a prayer («Земля, рай все ближе – всю ночь облака, всю ночь луна сияет между ними, серебром озаряя их края. [...] я был в страшной и сладкой близости твоей, и безгранична моя любовь к тебе, и крепка вера в родимое, отчее лоно твое!»).

### **Ceylon: the guardian of ancient wisdom**

The last Eastern chronotope to be examined can be identified in the short stories that take place in Ceylon (today Sri Lanka). The region, like the previously examined chronotopes, can be linked to the past and is portrayed as the birthplace of humankind, a true Paradise on Earth. *Третий класс*, *Соотечественник*, *Город Царя Царей*, and *Братья* can be linked to this chronotope. As in *Копье господне* and *Воды многие*, these texts pose an epistemological problem: is it possible for the West to fully understand the ancient wisdom of the East?

In these short stories the East is represented by a nature whose abundance stimulates the senses (strong colours, smells, voices), while its people are characterised by their diversity. By contrast, the West is represented by a built environment (offices, hotels, and train stations), and the Western people are uniform. *Третий класс*, *Соотечественник*, and *Братья* are also connected by certain signifiers of the characters: while the Westerners' clothing is emphasised, the Eastern characters are almost nude, thus being more connected to the original, natural state of men. The West is represented by the colour white; the dominant colour of the East is black.

Both *Третий класс* and *Город Царя Царей* have first-person narrators. As with the texts of the biblical chronotope, the narrative focus is on the subjective experience. In *Третий класс* the epistemological problem is represented in the situation

(however, it does not address the problem of time, so the chronotope is not fully developed here): the Western narrator is only allowed to travel in first class, thus he has no opportunity to get acquainted with the real East («Я хочу видеть все особенности страны, всю ее жизнь, всех ее обитателей, вплоть до самых «презренных» как вы любите выражаться о цветных людях»). The action of *Город Царя Царей* follows the thoughts of the narrator: he looks at the map, and Ceylon catches his attention. The history of the territory, the geographical space is thematised through the biblical story of Genesis, and in this way the history of the island is interpreted as the history of humankind. Ceylon is portrayed as the Paradise («Создатель одарил Цейлон всем, что только есть на земле ценного и прекрасного. Создатель сделал его раем, местом сотворения человека, и отдал Адаму в полное владение лишь с одним запретом: не стремиться ни мечтой, ни зрением за пределы рая»), while the original sin is equivalent to leaving Ceylon for India («преступил запрет, ушел с Евой в Индию»); the conflict of Ceylon and India is described as the story of Cain and Abel. The city of Anuradhapura is the locus of the past, a space to connect and unite the past and the present.

In *Соотечественник* the central character, Zotov, seems to represent from an outside perspective the dominant, masculine, aggressive West. However, according to his own account, upon approaching the East by ship, his worldview was completely changed («он испытал чувства необыкновенные на пути сюда, в те жаркие звездные ночи, когда впервые глядел на Южный Крест»). When seeing the East for the first time, he experienced a not completely understandable, but familiar feeling («тоска какого-то бесконечно далекого воспоминания, – что человеческим словом не выразишь»). Like in *Город Царя Царей*, the past here is organically linked to the present, just like in the collective memory concept of Jung [JUNG 1971], where the experiences of previous generations live on as memories in the man of the present («И затем горячо начинает уверять, что «вся сила в том», что он уже видел, чувствовал индийские тропики, может быть, тысячи лет тому назад, – глазами и душой своего бесконечно дальнего предка»), and the space serves as a catalyst that helps the characters access these memories.

*Братья* is a central text in the research of the oeuvre of Bunin. Prascheruk identifies it as one of the short stories in which the liberation from time (introduced in *Тень Птицы*) is represented [ПРАЩЕРУК 2016].<sup>9</sup> From the texts that can be linked to the chronotope of Ceylon, this is the only one in which the East is portrayed through a fully developed character (the rikshawman). While in the texts analysed so far the narrative focus was on the internal, spiritual change of the West, on the possibility of accessing the wisdom of the East, in *Братья* the destructive effect of the West on the East is also represented, so that the two spheres mutually influence each other. The Orientals appropriate some Western elements (professions, clothing – in postcolonial discourse this is defined as mimicry [ВНАВНА 1994: 85–92]), resulting in moral degradation («это был большой притворщик, старик лукавый, как все, у кого есть достаток, кто торгует в городе»). The Westerners get

<sup>9</sup> See the detailed analysis of the short story in the author's previous paper [JURACEK 2019].



physically ill because of the conditions in the East («У всех вид был полумертвый, все говорили, не двигая губами»), but the East can also potentially change Western thinking, unleashing the power of nature. This realization, as in *Соотечественник* and *Воды многие*, is linked to a journey on the ocean, just like in *Копье господне* the opposition of East and West is represented in the motif of artificial light versus natural light. Ceylon, the Paradise on Earth, is being destroyed by Western culture. The material resources of the West are in contrast with the natural resources of the East («зачем им, этим лесным людям, прямым наследникам земли прародителей, как и теперь еще называют Цейлон, зачем им города, центы, рупии? Разве не всё дают им лес, океан, солнце?»). Time in the short story is not only represented on a historical scale, but also in terms of the cycle of human life, on the level of characterization as one generation following the other. The rickshawman naturally takes his father's place after the death of the latter (the father is buried at sunset, which represents his reunification with nature), the past and the present are organically connected in the sphere of the East. The English traveller perceives this connection, the organic nature of history, consequently realising the wrong, self-centred outlook of the West that is only concerned with the present.

### Summary

Based on our analysis, we can state that the images of the East play a significant role in the short fiction of Bunin. If we examine these images in the context of his works, it is possible to identify certain thematic junctions: Little Russia and the chronotope connected with this region dominated his prose in the 1890s; in the 1900s this was replaced by the biblical chronotope of the Middle East, and in the 1910s – by Ceylon, seen as the cradle of humankind. The East resurfaced in the 1940s as the dominant element of the short fiction of Bunin in the character type of the Oriental woman. It is important to note that in the analysed texts the buninian narrator never completely adopts the point of view of the East. His own vision either reflects the dominant (Russian/European) culture or denotes an external view of both the East and the West. As a result, the people inhabiting the Middle and Far East in the prose of Bunin are primitive and live according to the laws of nature, while his Little Russia is populated by simple folk, still keeping with ethnic traditions. These groups, as in the theories of Said and Thompson, are seen as culturally inferior from the point of view of the dominant culture; in many cases, like that of Oriental women, their animalistic nature is emphasised. At the same time, on the positive pole of their portrayal, these characters and spaces are still organically connected to nature, to the historical past, and to the natural order of the world, motivating the West to reflect on these questions and re-evaluate its own position in the world.

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Kata JURACSEK  
PhD student  
ELTE Doctoral School of Literary Studies  
Budapest, Hungary  
juracsek.kata@gmail.com

