

‘AT SEA, AT NIGHT’ AND ‘MITYA’S LOVE’ AS CASE STUDIES IN IVAN BUNIN’S POST-REVOLUTIONARY USE OF SUBTEXT

(‘At sea, at night’ and ‘Mitya’s love’ como ejemplo del uso post-revolucionario del subtexto in Ivan Bunin’s)

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RESUMEN

La indudable innovación y contribución de Bunin al desarrollo de la literatura del siglo XX es ahora vista como una consecuencia de su creación de nuevas formas artísticas, de la extensión de sus intenciones filosóficas de la prosa, estimulando la modificación de la historia corta y la novela, la creación de un programa estético original, estrechamente conectado con su concepción filosófica del mundo. Las interpretaciones reflexivas sobre el amor y la muerte, y la creación de un nuevo tipo de personaje femenino, son otras innovaciones artísticas del escritor. Una forma especial, condensada de la narrativa (en propias palabras del escritor), un estilo intrincado y peculiar, en particular de una narrativa biplana, son méritos definitivos de Bunin que influyeron en el desarrollo de la literatura. El subtexto transmite no solo el drama interno de la reflexión, sino también un trágico conflicto entre el hombre y el mundo, lo ideal y la realidad, así como la imposibilidad de comprender la complejidad del universo. Un ejemplo de este uso de subtexto que se puede ver en "V Nochnom More" (At Sea, at night) y "Mitina Liubov" (Mitya's love).

Palabras clave: subtexto, motivo, intertextualidad, antinomia, modalidad, carácter inmaduro, interpretación.

ABSTRACT

Bunin's undoubted innovation and contribution to the development of the literature of the 20th century is now regarded as a consequence of his creation of new artistic forms, extension of the philosophic intentions of prose, stimulating the modification of the short story and novel, the creation of an original aesthetic programme, tightly connected with his philosophical conception of the world. Thoughtful interpretations of love and death, and the creation of a new type of female character, are other artistic innovations of the writer. A special, condensed form of narrative (in the writer's own words), an intricate and peculiar style, in particular bi-plane narrative, are definitive Bunin's merits which influenced the further development of literature. Subtext conveys not only the internal drama of reflection, but also a tragic conflict between man and the world, ideal and reality, as well as the impossibility of comprehending the complexity of the universe. An example of such a use of subtext can be seen in "V Nochnom More" (At Sea, at Night) and "Mitina Liubov" (Mitya's Love).

Key words: subtext, motif, intertextuality, antinomy, modality, immature character, interpretation

The artistic legacy of Ivan Bunin should be studied from the perspective of that vital problem facing contemporary literature studies: the creation of a history of the 20th century Russian literature based on aesthetic rather than ideological grounds. Russian literature of that period ‘still seems terra incognita, [...] a lot of texts were consigned to oblivion, major figures in literature were ignored’ (Marchenko 2008:5).

The growing interest in Bunin’s poetics may be explained by the evident necessity of re-interpreting his works by aesthetic criteria such as their generic aspect (the short story and the autobiographic novel), their intertextual links and their style (M.Shtern, L.Vasylieva, G.Karpenko and others), as well as by their typological connections with different and even contrasting literary phenomena, and with the languages of culture, philosophy and religion (T.Marullo, V.Silantieva, M.Bilyk and others).

However, not all aspects of Bunin’s artistic legacy have received due attention in academic research. In particular, this relates to the subtext and its role in Bunin’s prose. Scholars have repeatedly underlined the bi-plane nature of Bunin’s narration and the presence of a ‘hidden layer’ (V.Geideko, N.Krutikova, A.Volkov and others). The use of subtext is an organic part of the artistic portrait of the world in the master’s works. The most important aim is formulated by a narrator, resembling the author, in the short story ‘Sosny’ (The Pines): ‘I tried to catch that subtlety which only God knows, - the secret of the uselessness and, at the same time, the significance of all the mundane’ (Bunin 1967: 219).

Despite academic recognition of the presence of subtext and its special role in Bunin’s works (N.Kucherovskiy, O.Slivitskaya, S.Broytman), no systemic and detailed research into this issue has been undertaken.

Traditionally, in philology research subtext is understood as a covert meaning of the dictum which follows the correlation between meaning of the words and context, as aesthetic information, which is expressed not just as an aggregate meaning of signs (words). In other words the subtext is not that which is “meant” or “expressed” but rather that which makes evident at certain points of stress or conflict (Green 2012: 1429).

Subtext is a universal phenomenon able to become apparent in any act of communication, but, as scientists note, its clearest manifestation is in works of art (literary works). Manifestation of subtext has a multilevel character: from certain phrase to a fragment and, finally, to the whole artistic work (Gromiak 2007:534).

A real sense of the subtext, especially in Bunin literary texts, could be understood only in the context of the whole artistic legacy of the author and the literature period he lived in. Such a broad understanding of subtext substantially differentiates the object and methods of research of this phenomenon applied in literary criticism and linguistics. Subtext plays a systemically important (backbone) role at different levels: from modelling some tropes (allegory, irony, metaphor) to formation of genres. Y.Kovaliv says: ‘Subtext is an obligatory element of tropes, is a basis for genres of fable, parable, tale, riddle, proverb etc., is used like Aesopian language and is characteristic for psychological short story, psychological drama, comedy and lyrics’ (Kovaliv 2007:215).

Bunin actively worked in the genre of psychological short story. The nature of subtext and its tradition are represented in literary texts of different historic periods. In specific forms it was present in old Iceland sagas (Admoni 1997:11-12). Scientists note out actualization of the subtext in certain periods of Arts development, especially during

transitional period in many European literatures at the end of XIX – beginning of the XX centuries. In Russian *ars poetica* the most detailed analysis of this phenomenon was carried out on A.Chekhov's heritage, as well as on the development of the principles of "new drama", artistic innovation of symbolist poets and prose writers, M.Gorkiy drama, pursuit of L.Andreiev. A consistent scientific reception of this phenomenon is attributed to this period.

In this regard O.Chuikova says that a conception of subtext was formed on the verge of the XIX – XX centuries (Chuikova 2001:755). Y.Kovaliv gives a more precise time reference – the essay by M.Maeterlinck "Le Tragique Quotidien" (1896) ("The Tragic in Daily Life") where subtext is seen as "another dialogue". A dialogue nature of this phenomenon is underlined in many of the contemporary research.

Interpretation of subtext and format of its analysis constantly broadens and includes research in literary criticism, linguistics and psychology. The subtext functions as a text's unconscious (Green 2012:1429). A common feature in research by literary critics and linguists is an understanding of relation of subtext with the process of decoding of the text within *decoding stylistics* (I.Arnold, R.Bart, N.Kupina, V.Kuharenko, M.Riffater). A qualification of subtext as a regulator of relations between the author and reader, recognition of the fact that subtext has its own precise organization and is reigned by the general system of the text became a point of intersection of literary criticism and linguistics (Kaida 2000: 55). Complexity of the phenomenon urges us to use results of different disciplines, particularly of literary criticism and linguistics, throughout our research.

Methods used during investigation: methodological method based on a synthesis of literary historical, comparative literary, comparative historical, structural semiotic and typology approaches.

The first attempt to analyse the phenomenon of subtext in Bunin's prose scientifically was a thesis by I.Aliohina: 'A. P. Chekhov and I. O. Bunin. Functions of subtext' (M., 1989). In this research, we find an analysis of the peculiarities of the use of subtext in the pre-revolutionary prose of the two writers. However, despite the thoroughness and profundity of this thesis, Bunin's works from his post-revolutionary period were not considered. The concept of subtext is interpreted by the scholar too loosely, as a consequence, subtext is sometimes substituted by other categories of poetics.

It is worth noting that this direction of research into Bunin's artistic legacy has progressed, and has broadened as a number of aspects have crystallized in it, including Bunin's modelling of the world through subtext (works by T.Yarkaya, A.Zlochevskaya, T.Marullo). However, the mechanics of the formation of subtext, such as intercontextualité (works by A.Ranchyn) and the symbolism of colour (I.Zhemchyzhnyi) have been lacking academic attention.

Ivan Bunin's works were highly renowned by the artist's contemporaries. His artistic legacy was regarded as classic, and a model of high standard against which to evaluate the qualitative development of literature. G.Adamovych once said: 'For us and our literature, Bunin is the last indisputable and undoubted representative of the age that we, not without reason, call classical [...]' (Adamovich 2002:79).

The drive to recognise the fundamental contribution of the classics to Russian literature became even more vigorous at the end of the 20th century; it was followed

by a 'rediscovery' of Bunin, a fundamental overhaul of ideologically and aesthetically obsolete patterns of interpretation and a search for new approaches to studying the writer's legacy. In Russian and Ukrainian literary criticism, a new era in research was only possible from the late 1980s – 1990s. This era coincided, as a number of scholars note, with a growing interest in Bunin, a reopening of the classical canon and an increase in new research into his works. It's worth pointing out that the interest of the public and of academic circles was not only focused on formerly banned 'Okayannye Dni' (Cursed Days) (15 editions of the text had been published by the early 2000s), but on the writer's work as a whole which, of course, considerably deepened academic and critical perceptions of Bunin's heritage.

Bunin's undoubted innovation and contribution to the development of the literature of the 20th century is now regarded as a consequence of his creation of new artistic forms, and extension of the philosophic intentions of prose, stimulating the modification of the short story and novel.

From the perspective of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the philosophic trend of narration – reflecting eternal problems along with the catastrophism of the transitional period – is considered to be Bunin's innovation. Bunin is especially appreciated for highlighting the dialogue between cultures, in particular for the development of Buddhist discourse in Russian literature. In this respect, Thomas Gaiton Marullo underlines: 'Among all the systems of belief that Bunin adopted and adapted throughout his literary career, it was his abiding interest in Buddhistic concepts of self, craving, enlightenment, regression, and rebirth that figured prominently in Bunin's work. These ideas enabled him to make sense of his world and served as the catalyst for an *ars poetica* that tempered his philosophical and aesthetic restiveness and contributed a sense of timelessness to works from both his prerevolutionary and émigré periods' (Marullo 1998:10).

Despite worldwide recognition of Bunin's talent, investigations into his legacy are still lacking. Contemporary research by S. Broytman and D. Magomedova justly note substantial shortcomings and gaps in academic reception, and especially the fact that the majority of monographs written on Bunin's legacy from the 1960s -1970s are ideologically flawed by modern standards, and lack deep analysis of the aesthetic parameters of the writer's works (the most criticized academic monographs are V. Afanasiev's 'I. A. Bunin', Moscow 1966; A. A. Volkov's 'Bunin's Prose', Moscow, 1969; A. Ninov 'M. Gorky and Bunin: History of Relations. Problems of Creation', Moscow, 1973).

According to J. Woodward 'Western criticism ... has thus far proved no more successful than Soviet criticism in resolving the fundamental problems posed by Bunin's art – above all, the problem of whether or not his fiction expresses a coherent view of life and the human condition. Until this problem has been convincingly resolved, significant progress in the study of Bunin's fiction is difficult to envisage.' (Woodward 1980:IX).

There is a connection between the 'diverse' and subtle nature of Bunin's heritage and the intense multi-vector searches of the 'Silver Age' with their dialectics of the synthesis and differentiation of various artistic systems. According to S. Broytman and D. Magomedova, Bunin passed through all the major trends of philosophic and aesthetic thought of that time, except, perhaps, for Marxism and Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power. Modern academics tend to explain such a paradoxical combination of elements from different systems – of principles of realism and impressionism, experience

with symbolism, traditions and innovation – not only as a result of the individual originality of Bunin's 'Silver Age' intentions, but also by the general norms of the transitional period, typologically close to other turning points of *ars poetica*, and in particular close to end of the XVII and beginning of the XVIII centuries, as well as to the turn of this millennium.

Each period of Bunin's creative work is distinguished by its own grounds for the elaboration of subtext. A new thematic turn in the writer's pursuits in the middle of 1910s contributed to the actualisation of the subtext. Bunin addressed the problems inspired by a Buddhist perception of the world which, at the same time, are implicit in his own internal intentions and world-view. In a philosophic manner, Bunin develops topics of world history and its cycles, of the fall of civilizations, cultural memory and the tragedy of human life. Buddhist concepts greatly influenced the actualization of the second plane of the narration – its subtext, given the difficulty of transmitting complex ideas and the concept of enlightenment through the logic of cause and effect.

The artistic discoveries of this period greatly influenced the further creative work of the writer, especially in the cycle 'Temnye Allei' (Dark Avenues). The majority of scholars regard 'Gospodin iz San Frantsisko' (The Gentleman from San Francisco) as a highlight of Bunin's second period of writing. Academics stress not only the concept of the short story and its connections to Tolstoyan tradition, but also development of subtext in short story and the methods of its creation, such as allegory, symbolization, detail etc.

Another form of Bunin's innovation can be seen in the creation of an original aesthetic programme, tightly connected with a philosophical conception and his vision of the world. The category of Beauty that is elevated over, but not opposed to, Ethics becomes a key concept in Bunin's writing. Thoughtful interpretations of love and death, and the creation of a new type of female character, are other artistic innovations of the writer.

Finally, a special, condensed form of narrative (in the writer's own words), the elaboration of a special form, an intricate and peculiar style, in particular bi-plane narrative, are definitive merits of Bunin's which influenced the further development of literature. In view of these special features, the study of Bunin's use of subtext gains greater importance.

Subtext in Bunin's artistic system plays a characterologic function, being closely connected to certain types of his heroes. Many of them have a common feature: they represent general human qualities. This distinguishes Bunin's approach from that of traditional realists, with their concentration on social types, as social features in Bunin's work are secondary. Subtext conveys not only the internal drama of reflection, but also a tragic conflict between man and the world, ideal and reality, and the impossibility of comprehending the complexity of the universe.

An example of such a use of subtext can be seen in 'V Nochnom More' (At Sea, at Night, 1923) and 'Mitina Liubov' (Mitya's Love). They share a similar theme and main character: an introspective personal drama and its tragic culmination, caused by a fatal mistake in understanding oneself and the universe. It is worth noting that both works contain facts from Bunin's biography, meaning that the author offers two ways of reading what he experienced. Addressing situations and impressions from the past was

relevant to the writer's creative works from his emigrant period. Actualization of the topics of love, death and the philosophy of personal life bears witness to an overhaul of Bunin's conception of the world during this period, settling old scores with himself from the past and searching for new guides. At a later stage, Bunin will return to the interpretation of these topics in his autobiographical novel 'Zhisn Arsenieva' (*The Life of Arseniev*), proposing a completely different, radically new conception of the main character.

Both of the aforementioned works represent, in an artistic manner, the difficult relations of the young Bunin with his first love Varvara Paschenko, with their plots of struggle between two egos, of betrayal by the beloved (in real life as in the story, she left Bunin for his friend who was also a writer), of the dreadful moral sufferings of the abandoned man which lead him to the brink of suicide, of the death of Varvara from illness, and of the long years of introspection on the reasons for life's tragedy and the philosophic and existential lessons it gives. This portrayal is reflected in Bunin's letters. He characterized his relations with Varvara Paschenko as an "egoistic love" which prevented the young lovers from being happy. The relations between Bunin and Paschenko were deeply researched in A. Baboreko's studies (Baboreko 1956:15).

'V Nochnom More' (At Sea, at Night) portrays the sudden meeting of two former rivals. Subtextually, the event carries a symbolic meaning of conclusion and transition. The location of the meeting is a steamer on which the two men meet; the one having many years ago seduced the cherished wife, now dead, of the other. One of them knows that he is terminally ill. The story makes allusions to the myth of taking human souls to the realm of shadows. This association is supported by infernal motifs present in the narration ('around the steamer, a real hell reigned') and the general portrayal of the hustle among the passengers, which is perceived by the reader as worldly vanity. 'Well, there you see. We philosophize away, but maybe life is very simple. As simple as that clamour just now beside the ladder. Those fools, crushing each other; where were they all in such a hurry to get to?' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:101).

The time of the meeting has a symbolic nature – it is night. Stars and the sky form a high, eternal prospect on the event, giving associations of reconciliation and harmony ('the night effused a soft, transparent darkness'). Great importance is attached to the type of main characters selected: both of them are old men, summarizing their lives. The accidental meeting gives birth to a long awaited conversation about what is the most important in life. Being interested in the conversation, neither of the characters evades it. They are not named, which generalizes their artistic image.

Likewise, the profession of the characters is important: one is a doctor, the other a writer. Both of them are initiated into life's mysteries, they are used to encountering people in different situations, including death and transition. The author emphasizes the fact that both of them achieved success in their professional lives and are renowned. But recognition and material prosperity now, at a time of existential reflection, do not evoke enjoyment and satisfaction. Such a calm reaction to the glory of oneself and the other models one of the story's subtexts, the meaning of which is the search for real values and treasures, the sense of life and all its bright moments which form destiny.

The characters are very similar and make the impression of reflecting each other. Despite their past rivalry, their positions are very close in the present as they meditate

over the end of their lives and eternal human values. 'You and I, after all, are bonded in a terribly intimate way' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:102).

All the traditional touchstones are questioned. Life: 'Next summer you'll be sailing somewhere again over the ocean blue [...] while my noble bones will repose. [...] In thinking of this I feel next to nothing. [...] It's just an idiotic insensibility' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:102).

Death and Heaven: 'Another thing is that I can't imagine your believing in those beatific realms where there's neither sorrow nor lamentation but only the little apples of paradise' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:102).

However, the subtext of the work drastically contradicts the outrageous nihilism of the two interlocutors. Subtext is created through the constant sounding of the motif of fear ('Are we really so terrified that it's over?', 'Are you afraid for me?', 'Horrible, horrendous'), the contrast between their declared indifference and lack of sensibility ('idiotic insensibility', '[...] In thinking of this I feel next to nothing') and the high emotionality of their memories. These memories and sufferings are condensed into a leitmotif of love. Love as an existential, life-creating value is interrogated, along with the theme of death and compassion. Discussions about death and fear are a short conversation about love; its power is ample and contains its own dynamics, provoking the interest of the two interlocutors which belies their pretended indifference. The power of love over a man and its fatal ability to change a person's life is underlined. Rhetorical questions in the words of the man who was left by his beloved affirm that the problem is still unresolved: 'How can you bear another's possessing her? [...] And for what did I nearly drink myself blind, for what did I wreck my health and aspirations? For what did I waste the time when my powers and talent were flourishing most brilliantly?' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:104).

Especially relevant to the formation of the subtext is the contrast between declared atheist views and the sacredness of love. The sacralisation of love is made through spontaneous confessions ('You encroached upon the most sacred thing in all my existence!') and use of Buddhist legends. The latter gives the narration a sacred key to the secret of love: souls in a new cycle of reincarnation 'recognize' their beloved in previous lives.

Subtext is formed by transferring the sacred story to the writer's own experience. The motif 'she lingers in the memory of my soul!' is constantly sounding. The meaning of the motif consecrates his love and gives her eternal status beyond the frame of time and space. In this regard, separation is interpreted as fatal, a karmic mistake which breaks universal harmony. In this respect, the death of the heroine and the unfortunate life of the main character seem natural ('My former self, nonetheless, no longer existed and could not exist') (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:104).

Symbolic details reinforce this meaning: the shuddering of the ship, the cryptic chime 'dzen', reminiscent of a broken chord and a broken life: '[...] You simply broke me in pieces' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:104). All the aforementioned subtextual meanings confirm that the characters' indifference is false.

We should note that the idea of love and its sacralisation is tested many times during deliberations between the characters. Analysis of their discussions leads to the following conclusions. First, there is inconsistency between the object of real feeling and the ideal (this aspect was most remarkably developed in 'Mitya's Love'). Second,

doom and the mortality of humans makes people in love lonely and unhappy. Third, there is a cynical assumption that love is not focused on another person, but is a manifestation of the dialogue of a person with him/herself; in other words, it is pure narcissism and self-adoration. The first two arguments are refuted as the poetic story of the man who has survived those feelings of love progresses. 'I knew her at the peak of her charm and innocence, when she had that almost adolescent trustfulness and timidity that touches a man's heart in untold ways – perhaps because all femininity must have this trusting helplessness, something childlike, a sign that a girl or a woman always harbours a future child within her' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:105). To create a backdrop, a legendary intertextuality is used.

The third argument at this stage remains unanswered (that is, the possibility that love is essentially a narcissistic dialogue with the self is offered to the reader). However, from the perspective of subtext formation, it is important to note that the point in the discussion when the two characters are lost and ready to deny the sacred status of love is the point at which the world around them starts to become desperate. This is conveyed through the motif of darkness and dumbness (they have nothing to say to each other). A contrast is apparent between the blackness of earthly life and the brightness of the cupola of heaven. The symbolism of the steamer is used as a sign of crossing the border and of transition to other levels of existence. The symbol of the sea bears a special meaning, which combines the semantics of death and birth. The sea here is significantly dark. The fatal meaning of this is reinforced by the symbolism of the 'milkfish-pale' wake, stretching not in front of the vessel but behind it, indicating that the life of the characters is over. The symbol of the black circle of the sea within which the thoughts, feelings and, maybe, even the lives of the characters move, is not random. 'And lost in that circular darkening plain, the little steamship numbly and steadfastly held its course. Stretching infinitely behind it was the sleepily seething, milkfish-pale wake – to the distant point where the night sky merged with the sea [...]' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:106-107).

The author punishes his characters for their desecralisation of love. Through the formation in the subtext of a certain kind of significative background, Bunin permits love to regain its status as a positive existential value, and interprets love as the highest event in a human's life. This position is formed via subtext using a complex of means and reflects the author's conception of love, which will be further developed in the cycle 'Temnye Allei' (Dark Avenues).

SUBTEXT AND THE CHARACTER OF IMMATURE PERSONALITY

A model for reflecting the main character's connection to the subtext is brilliantly portrayed in the short novel 'Mitina Liubov' (Mitya's Love). The character's portrayal includes a very important element of immaturity, which highlights universal issues of the individual's relationship with the rest of the world, the formation of a personal inner world, and the resolution of existential problems. As the literary character is incapable of comprehending the essence of the initiation he undergoes, everything which happens is filtered through the prism of his consciousness through unreliable narration. This, in turn,

makes subtext play a significant role in the interpretation of the writer's own position.

The author focuses the reader's attention, not on the collisions of the external plot but on the revelation of Mitya's own character as the primary plot. The development of his character and its culmination are foreseeable from the very beginning of the novella. It becomes clear that the narration will be about the main character's first love (as it is his nickname given in the title), and that this love will be unhappy. The first paragraph starts: 'The ninth of March was Mitya's last happy day in Moscow' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:181) It hints at the unfavourable further development of events. The author underlines ('at least, it seemed to him' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:181) that the assessment of a fatally tragic first love is purely subjective and corresponds to young Mitya's perception. In other words, from the point of view of an elder and mature person the same situation would not be fatal but, on the contrary, would be perceived as an extremely bright and happy life event (which is characteristic of the 'Dark Avenues' cycle).

The plot of disappointment and its fatal conclusion can be seen from the first page of the novella, which is a form of subtext in itself. Dramatic differences between the main characters, and growing tension between them, reveal their lack of perspective on their relationship. Mitya has a presentiment in his jealous fantasy visions of the future disruption of his relationship with Katya. This same disruption is foreshadowed by Katya through her accusations against Mitya and her justifications for her devotion to art.

Using natural, cultural and sacred codes, the author prepares the reader to perceive the novella as philosophical, oriented towards existential problems. The writer makes it clear that the story will not be about an ordinary life situation, but about the singularity of the relationship between man and the universe, and the inconceivable mysteries of life.

From the outset, the author proposes three variants of the unhappy finale of the young man's love. The first one, modelled on Shakespearean tragedy, is pronounced by Katya: 'You'll become an absolute Othello! I wouldn't want to fall in love and marry you!' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:185). This model is supported by Mitya. He suffers painful jealousy, sees scenes of adultery in his fantasies, which, let us note, are to happen in the future. The plot of Othello appears in Mitya's imagination from time to time; he wants to strangle the impure Katya, to separate her from a split ideal image of his beloved. Associations with 'Othello' are strengthened by theatrical discourse in the novella, such as the scene of Katya's performance in public, with doubts about her purity and an alternation in the roles assigned to her. In this case, the pathos of high tragedy in the classic drama is distorted by travesty.

The second possible finale of the love story predicted by the main characters is separation, followed by an unhappy life 'broken into pieces' (to use a figurative reading of 'At Sea, at Night'). This variant is presaged by Katya's mother when she tenderly and sorrowfully bids farewell to Mitya, as if he were a person doomed for profound sufferings.

'With maternal tenderness she kissed Mitya on the temple several times, then made the sign of the cross above him.

"Oh darling, live and laugh," she said, quoting Griboyedov with a timid smile. "Well, Christ be with you.... Go now, go on...." (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:192).

To understand the meaning of this farewell 'command', it is important to remember that this woman has been left by her husband; she has survived tragedy and become whole or 'accreted' after being broken, just as the main character has in 'At Sea, at Night'; however, she still feels deeply unhappy. She has not come back to life. This impression is reinforced by a range of details: her hair coloured with a lack of taste, her loneliness, the soft, slack flesh of her hand, her timid voice and her lack of control over the life of her daughter.

The third possible variant of the finale to the unhappy love story is proffered by Mitya's friend Protasov. The latter could be regarded as Mitya's antithesis because of his pretended insensitivity and cynicism, but such a view contradicts the subtle understanding of Mitya's character demonstrated by Protasov, his compassion and his attempts to prevent his friend suffering. The author notes that Protasov was Mitya's closest friend and his confidant. The cynical manner in which Protasov expresses his thoughts is connected with his theatrical spirit, which is common to all of the characters of the novella, and which causes him to play the role of an experienced and disillusioned person. The author makes it clear that Protasov's point of view is authoritative and attractive. In fact, in an ironically-worried, compassionate manner he accurately describes Mitya's future tragedy.

'The world is not held together by a single tread, and it doesn't ride only on Katya's shoulders.... But I can see from your efforts to strangle that baggage that you don't entirely agree – and those shoulders are all too dear to you. Well, forgive me for dispensing advice that you never asked to hear. May St. Nicholas and all his cohorts keep you safe!' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:190-191)

Like Katya's mother, Protasov makes the sign of the cross over Mitya, underlining the seriousness of his unrest. As part of the religious discourse of this section ('it's sacred', 'this sacred course', 'St. Nicholas and all his cohorts', 'keep you safe!') this action acquires more importance and denotes the sacrifice of religion or of an idea, or acquires the connotation of a transition (death) between worlds. As with the other variants of the love story's predicted outcome, Protasov's speech contains a literary code that references 'Othello', 'Woe from wit', 'The Sorrows of Young Werther', Friedrich Nietzsche's works and a parody of Kozma Prutkov. We presume that such a broad use of literary code not only reflects the cultural values of society at that time, but also conveys a subtextual meaning: it demonstrates the artificiality of the protagonist's behaviour and its theatrical nature, subject to the authority of other literary patterns rather than arising from the unique personality of the main character.

The triple forecast at the beginning of the story of the possible outcome of the unhappy love plot could attest, at a subtextual level, the author's signalling to the reader: this story will not be about a typical incident of disappointed love but about something else. This 'something else' will be an artistic analysis of a character type and his perception of life. The character chosen by the author reveals the complexity and vastness of the topic of love, of relations with the world and of intentions to decipher the significance of existence, death and the ideal.

We suppose, a romantic character has become the object of Bunin's attention and thus acquires a specific interpretation, first of all displaying immaturity, a fixation on

his own ideas and a number of illusions and mistakes. Mitya's features as a romantic character are enhanced by his juvenile maximalism and subjectivity. The author gives the reader a clue toward such an interpretation in Protasov's words, when he names Mitya a Werther from Tambov (thus reducing the romantic model and making it more provincial), and teases him using comparisons with Junker Schmidt, a parody of a romantic hero. It is important to note that Mitya agrees to be a romantic hero. He rejects only the proposed literary models, and finds himself a more attractive image for self-identification. That image is the hero from the ballad of Rubinstein's 'The Asra'. Mitya heard this ballad accidentally, but it was not accidental that it sank deeply into his soul, so that he began to try to embody its leitmotif in himself. The author subtextually derides this idea by the general tone of the ballad's performance by a stranger. It does not sound from a big stage and is not performed by a master, rather it sounds from the neighbour's window opposite Mitya, where a student of singing practices a music exercise, tests his voice and performs some roles.

'The words and music of the student's song played so insistently inside his head that he walked without seeing the streets or passers-by, feeling even more intoxicated than he had in the previous weeks. As a matter of fact, it did seem that the world rode only on those shoulders. And Junker Schmidt was quite prepared to shoot himself! Well, what can you do? If it rides on those shoulders, it rides on those shoulders, he thought to himself, and went back to the song again: how the sultan's daughter who is "radiant with beauty" wanders in the garden and meets a dark-skinned slave who stands "as pale as death" beside a fountain; how she asks him who he is and where he's from, and when he answers her, his voice is menacing but restrained, filled with sad simplicity: "My name is Mohammed"; how his voice then builds toward a kind of howl, an exultant, tragic wail: I am descended from the wretched race of Asra: If we love, we die'"(Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:191).

For Mitya this artistic image becomes an example, which, perhaps, determines his life. For the author, on the contrary, the image is an object of irony: the student of singing tests his voice, plays with different intonations. The culmination is a comic and grotesque 'howl'. In the given extract Mohammed, in an exaggeratedly dramatic interpretation of the student, becomes not an antithesis, but a continuation of the parodic Junker Schmidt. Thus, the romantic image of Mitya undergoes an ironic transformation and a reduction in its importance, which alludes to the lack of perspective inherent in such an attitude.

The presence of romantic features in Mitya's character, such as a heightened sensitivity to all real phenomena and to the irrational, born from fantasies and imagination, leads him to create his own image of Katya and conduct his own dialogue with his ideal image of her, cherishing his romantic feeling and making it both his merit and his vice, in a manner typical of Romanticism (Rymar 1990:220). In Mitya's character, following the model of Romanticism by which unconscious suggestions from dreams are actualized: 'Everything sent him into raptures that night—the vast, bright hall that opened like a brilliant chasm below them, already crowded and warm and richly scented with perfume; the gold and red-velvet tiers of the box seats that could barely hold their

scores of stylish occupants; the soft, nacreous glow of the gigantic chandelier that hung above it all; and then, from far below them, as the conductor waved his arms, the overture rising, streaming up into the air—at times roaring and demonic, at others sad and tender beyond words: “*There was a King of Thule. . .*” (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:229).

Mitya’s pained reactions are growing to the fact that his created ideal does not come true. Katya becomes a fixation to him. Her image splits into a bright and a dark side, rational boundaries shift and the motif of madness, so characteristic of Romanticism, is present. Mitya’s focus on the ideal manifests itself as love for Katya. However, he insists on the same harmony in everything around him: nature, art, people. ‘It seemed then that the spring itself was his first real love [...]. But how distant those days seemed to him now! What a boy he was then [...]. That aimless and incorporeal love now seemed to be a dream [...]. Now there was Katya. Now there was a soul that embraced the world—reigned over it, and everyone’ (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:198).

The significance of this picture, portrayed in idyllic tones, is reconfirmed through its repetition. It first appears in Mitya’s imagination when he comes across a wonderful estate with dark alleys and a mysterious landlord’s house. In Mitya’s imagination, Shakhovskoe estate becomes the centre of his world of love; he settles his imaginary and ideal Katya there and even sees her silhouette on the balcony, as if a young wife were waiting for him. This picture, made in an idyllic and romantic register becomes, for Mitya, a subjective insight into heaven, the highest embodiment of the harmony of existence and of a ‘right’ world (in contrast to the actual Katya and the real, more complicated and contradictory world). This scene appears a second time in Mitya’s imagination on the eve of his suicide, when he is broken by Katya’s adultery and understands that his dream is impossible. In other words, there is a tragic romantic discourse, connected to a sense of life’s irreconcilable contradictions, of the conflict between the ideal (the theme of ‘lost paradise’) and reality.

“Ah, it’s all the same, Katya,” he whispered bitterly, tenderly—wanting to say that he’d forgive her for everything she’d done, if she would only once more rush toward him so that they could save themselves, save their love in this beautiful spring world, which had so recently resembled paradise. But [...] he understood that no, it wasn’t all the same: there was no salvation, no going back to that marvellous vision that was once granted to him in Shakhovskoe, on a balcony overgrown with jasmine’ (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:237).

Such a contrast between worlds, real and ideal, is emphasised at the story’s end by contrasting visions. It is worth paying attention to some of the mythological features employed in the description of nature, which build associations with paradise, such as the artistic images of careless birds, sun rays and the garden with its symbolism of Eden.

The Romantic meeting of the imaginary couple is opposed to a scene of physical seduction. In this fantasy, disembodied characters act in a demoniacal way, especially the man. This delirium, created by Mitya’s jealousy, has theatrical overtones and is associated with Katya and her choice – the director of her school, condensing his childhood impressions and remorse about his liaison with the peasant woman Alenka. If the first vision symbolized subjective paradise, the second vision refers to hell. The

collision of the high and low worlds produces insoluble conflict in Mitya's soul, leading him to death.

Subtext plays a crucial role in the creation and depiction of such a character. It helps the reader to understand the internal state of Mitya's metamorphosis because the main character himself can't comprehend the complexity of the world and love. His reading of symbols and destiny is prejudiced and extremely subjective. On the other hand, the author proposes his own conception of love as a mysterious, fatal phenomenon, which becomes a trial for a person and can reveal both bright and dark sides. This conception includes the idea of a multifaceted love. From the first pages, the antinomy of 'Katya's love' and 'Mitya's love' is emphasized. If her feelings were an experiment with a new, interesting role and quickly moved on to other objects, Mitya's love transformed into his destiny.

The author's conception includes a demonstration of the power of this feeling, of its possibilities to mould the world, become its centre and attract all other existential problems. Subtext illustrates the descent from dream to madness, reflecting the mental mistakes that bring a romantic and infantile character to catastrophe.

The description of Mitya's feelings as complex and inexplicable, which he can't shape into a conceptual picture of the world, holds a clue to his tragedy – it is not only of a mundane nature (with jealousy, the outrage of the abandoned and the physiological temptations of young men), but also of a philosophic nature, as it conveys the antagonism of the ideal and the real, of subjective imagination and real existence. In Mitya's imagination a harmonic picture of the world, close to a romantic ideal, is formed.

Mitya's image of the universe progresses from the beauty of nature and the idyllic charm of 'nests of the nobility' to picturing Katya at the top of it. Without her, from the perspective of a certain moment in his life, his whole idealised image of the cosmos loses its legitimacy, power and 'authenticity'.

The following fragment could be seen as an example of such a transformation in Mitya's feelings and vision of the world. With delight and horror, Mitya observes the transition of nature from early spring to summer blossom. The ideal image of Katya is embodied by all these beautiful phenomena; it shades them and makes Mitya's perception extremely subjective.

'Once more the world had been recast; again it was filled with some new and unfamiliar element. But it was not a horror. Just the opposite: inexplicably, delightfully, it seemed to coalesce with all the youth and joy of spring. And this new element was Katya—or, more accurately, it was something Mitya sought from her—that sweetness, that loveliness to which nothing in the world compares. Now the intensity of his demands grew proportionally with each spring day that passed, and in her absence Katya was replaced by an image—an image of a woman who did not exist but who was earnestly desired—and thus she didn't stain the purity, didn't break the charming spell of what Mitya sought from her, and with every passing day he felt her presence more acutely in everything he saw' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:200-201).

This extract creates an anxious mood and a feeling of looming catastrophe. This is achieved by the use of a double sense of alienation, uselessness (the phrase 'new

element' is used twice) and a breach of naturalness (it is expected of Katya that she will not break Mitya's dream, however, the extension of her image into the real world breaches the world's self-sufficiency, while the creation of an image is artificial in itself, imposed onto nature's harmony, transformation of the image into a fixation breaches not only harmony but the norm). The extract shows an important transformation in the dynamics of Mitya's perception of the world. The real person is no longer the object of his love. Instead, the image moulded by the personal understanding of the main character becomes that object. Later, the real person will behave not in accordance with the laws of harmony, but with their own personal will, which will destroy Mitya's world. In other words, he creates his own double dependence on both Katya as ideal and on the real Katya. And this 'demand' will cause Mitya to veer off course and make a mental mistake.

The author underlines that Katya colours the rest of the world, becomes an embodiment of all the beauty of the world and its harmony for Mitya. For example, in Mitya's romantic perception Katya represents a beautiful night, the moon and colours the eternal phenomena of nature. 'Mitya slept without any curtains on his windows; the garden and the moon peered constantly into his room, and the moment he opened his eyes on that white disk, Mitya uttered in his thoughts the word "Katya," like a man possessed—uttered it with a degree of ecstasy and agony that he himself found frightening: why should the moon bring her to mind? What possible connection could there be? But it was something visible' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:215). Reading the subtext in this extract, special importance is given to the antinomy between joyful admiration and anxiety ('agony', 'frightening', 'possessed') which hints at the unnatural and abnormal substitution of all the world with the image of the beloved girl, as well as warning about the danger of such a state of mind. The words 'possible' and 'something' underline the complexity of the phenomenon and the impossibility of Mitya's fully conceiving it.

Description of moments when Katia colours the rest of the world and when natural phenomenon are named with her name, as well as of spiritual states and the development of feelings, repeatedly create subtext. 'Uneven roads' are named with Katya's name, as everything beautiful in this world bears her name, where Mitya's 'youth laid bare' refers to his openness and innocence in this uneasy world and his strained waiting for something (see page 201). His contrasting moods form a discourse of sickness and alarm. Katya becomes 'like a phantom'. This word is used in different places to describe Mitya's physiological state, underlining his growing indifference towards everything in the world apart from Katya. The overtones of anxiety and pain, in phrases like 'he could enjoy them only as a source of torment: the lovelier they were, the more suffering they caused him' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:211) acquire new, double meanings which warn about the dangers incurred in substituting the world with only one person. The natural plane of existence changes along with the idyllic.

In other words, the most important and powerful pillars of existence and renewal are rejected. For example, when Mitya is looking at his room in his father's home, he immerses into a state of happy nostalgia and meditation about his childhood and has a deep feeling of rootedness (the word 'cheerful' is used thrice), but then he mentally transfers the beauty of the estate and of the orchard onto Katya and frightens himself by her presence in everything. '[...] even the yellow wallpaper in his room—that

wallpaper that had been fading since his childhood—even it was cheerful and close to his heart. But momentarily another thought cut into his soul with ecstasy and horror: Katya! (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:215).

Once more, in contrast to the motif of cheerfulness, the motif of sickness arises. Looking at Katya's photo, Mitya 'fell into a stupor, staring at her with greed and wonder' (Bunin 1967, Vol. 5:215).

The subtext explains love as a mystic force able to colour the world, and to combine opposing fundamentals: admiration and terror, cheerfulness and anxious expectation of catastrophe, transformation and sickness. Love embodies a mystery which makes Mitya freeze, as if it were a sphinx in front of him.

The mystery of love in this work is also connected with the mystery of death. A number of associations repeatedly portray the connection: the comparison of Mitya with Junker Schmidt via Kozma Prutkov, Mohammed and Othello. The Faustian motifs, symbols of an abyss, and the image of the cuckoo who betrays her family and love, become stronger throughout this discourse. The appearance of Katya's image in Mitya's imagination is also remarkable at the moment when he thinks about the death and funeral of his father, at his suicide (her image appearing thrice), when contemplating the autumnal death of nature, and, of course, at the finale of the story. It is worth noting that, at the final stage of the plot's development Katya represents both mysteries (love and death) and both worlds (ideal and impure). The two mysteries oppose and reinforce each other. The demonization of her image, the infernal accents in the description which intensify the motif of darkness ('something sinister', 'devilish shrieking', 'devil's invisible presence in the darkness') in the scene with the owl, and mystic discourse, form a special sense of doom in the subtext of Mitya's destiny. He perceives these natural phenomena as special signs. The signification is constructed by the use of contrasts: Mitya is dreaming about supernatural happiness but hears a 'cuckoo, cuckoo'. The voice of the cuckoo stirs a melancholy understanding in him that no more letters will come from Moscow; something has happened there and he is lost. Natural phenomena, which are read as signs, also reflect a state of the main character's mood, of his internal world.

The internal dynamics of the character is covert, concealed under kaleidoscopically changing impressions (all parts of the story from VII to XXIX are constructed according to this model). Mitya is unable to understand the logic of the transformations occurring within himself. He loses his Paradise when he immerses himself in his painful illusions.

Mitya's infantilism is constantly underlined: Katya jokes about his 'boyish awkwardness', Protasov calls the lovers 'children', Katya's mother makes the sign of the cross above him as he were her son, and finally, of course, the name of the short novel itself is 'Mitya's love' using the diminutive nickname 'Mitya' rather than the character's full name 'Dmitry'. Mitya aspires to be a young Werther or Mohammed; however, peasants and the steward see him as a virgin infant who dreams about a relationship with a woman but is afraid of it. They try to help him in this natural endeavour, but their help lowers the pathos of his romantic love to the level of a natural gratification. Finally, his decision to commit suicide could be regarded as infantile too, as if he wanted revenge on the world for its inability to give him love in the way he had been waiting for. It is worth noting that the idea to put a bullet in his head first arose after Mitya's conversation with the steward, in whose voice the boy sensed crude derision.

The motif of play, of performance and theatricality, is extensive. Mitya formed an image of the romantic hero for himself, which became dominant. However, a number of masks are used: that of the lord of someone's destiny (in the case of Katya), of a conjurer (Mitya enters a mystic dialogue with the outer world, trying to decipher its signs and make Katya come back) and of a gallant knight who rescues Katya from the hands of her seducer. Mitya is also oriented towards the model of the modernist creation of one's life, combining the angelic and the demonic infernal.

Katya also performs many roles, among them: the romantic girl in love, the bride, the attentive future wife, the woman of the arts and the femme fatale. All of these roles are diminished by the author's compassionate irony. For example, the ideal of romantic love is ruined by Mitya's humiliating liaison with Alenka, who resembles Katya. Katya's privileged role at school is challenged by her hackneyed role as the lover of the school's director.

The subtext suggests a negative attitude towards performance in life and theatricality, towards the formation of one's own way of life according to someone else's model. This subtext understanding is confirmed by the narrative's critical and ironic interpretation of the topic of performance, masks and theatre. This interpretation acquires special meaning within the subtext of Mitya's own destiny. Performance of another's role prevents Mitya from finding his own identity and becomes fatal for his infantile soul.

Other scholars also interpret Mitya through the prism of his having walked into a fatal spiral of mistakes and illusions, variously accenting different aspects of this spiral. T. Marullo sees 'Mitya's Love' as Buddhist, as a result of Bunin's comprehensive analysis of this religious and philosophical doctrine. According to him, the objective of this masterpiece is to explore the correlation between different sides of the personality, and the formation of the story's conception through symbols of samsara. T. Marullo distinguishes a number of these symbols, but the symbol of natural cycle is the predominant one.

This type of reflective hero represents, in a condensed form, a high sensitivity and imagination. He is depicted in transitional periods of his life, when he is in conflict with himself. This conflict, conveyed through subtext, is deeply philosophically problematic. The use of this kind of main character means that the author scrutinizes his own views. Such a conclusion is evident in the fact that the author uses autobiographical material. In other words, he analyses his past self, and tries to interpret himself when young, from the perspective of a higher register of the general issues of mankind. A stable template is formed for novels with this type of protagonists. The works are constructed via a combination of the internal conflict of the reflective hero and an external dialogue with a representative of folk character, or with a reflective opponent who is his mirror image.

Irrespective of the pretext of the conversation, its essence touches subtextually upon universal issues: sturdiness in the face of fate, the mysteries of the world and reconciliation with them. The dialogue helps the character to grow, strengthening the author's philosophy on perception of the world and reconciliation. The contrast between natural and literary worlds is removed to enable the understanding of harmony, uniqueness and mystery. The fundamentals of a creative identity are formed. A vision of art's mission is crystallized, at times one of upheaval and commotion. Pathos is undercut by the author's irony and the intellectual intrigue of his use of play and performance.

In conclusion, we can say that in Bunin's works between 1917-1930, attention is focused on general types of human character rather than social types. In his narratives, the following characters become predominant: the reflective character, the folk philosopher and the immature character. Subtext is formed through the use of symbols of an existential nature, carrying a meaning of harmony, creativity and transition (roads, trips, cemeteries, flowers, birds); place and time are also symbolic (trips, the sea, boats), and intellectual intrigue is associated with the testing of the main characters along with the exploration of eternal values.

The author's attitude towards main characters is reflected in the system of motifs (serving harmony without any sense of doubt, as peasant philosophers, birds or flowers do; walking in a circle; countdowns; broken strings). The author's conception of the character's type is formed by the subtext. This method uses a complex of motifs, with theatricality and infantilism becoming predominant. Literary and theatrical codes are used when depicting changes of masks by main characters. It indicates existential immaturity in the main characters, the substitution of a personal sense of self with the adoption of another person's model. The basis for the existentially immature character's personality is a matrix of the romantic hero, which is constantly reviewed and portrayed with irony and compassion.

The romantic conflict of ideal and reality is reflected, at the level of subtext, through the use of contrasting situations and artistic images. Subtext develops an understanding of the internal conditionality of the immature character's metamorphosis, underlining the main character's subjectivity, the distortion of his vision of the world, and his wandering in a circle of mistakes. Appreciation of subtext allows for an interpretation of the kaleidoscopic impressions of the main character, his subjectivity and the faultiness of his deciphering of 'signals' in the world; importantly, with its system of symbols and motifs, subtext proposes its own code for reading the antinomy of the world, the mysteries of love, the vectors of spiritual growth (a symbolic exit from a vicious circle upwards towards light) and its own guiding principles (the harmony of nature, culture, faith, family traditions), a complex modality of depicting life (combining sacral and infernal motifs).

The understanding of symbols in Bunin's narratives is crucial for comprehension of subtext meanings. Symbols of eternity, deaths, love and reincarnation are widely used jointly with a complex network of tropes. However, symbols do not coincide in the meaning with any trope used. While a metaphor plays a characterization function, do not have semantic limits and is concentrated in an image form, symbol exists in an internally defined role, tending towards an universal idea trying to broaden its meaning without giving a definition to it (Gromiak 2007:622). Metaphor in Bunin's prose, like, actually, in any other literary text, is determined by artistic factors, while symbol is based on extra-artistic, primarily philosophic pursuits of esoteric nature.

Polysemy of symbols and motifs allows for a vast spectrum of interpretations of the intention, found in the subtext, of the personality's existential growth.

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