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**THE IMAGE OF A RUSSIAN FIELD
IN THE NOVEL «THE LIFE OF ARSENYEV» BY I.A. BUNIN**

SUMMARY. In this article the image of the Russian field as one of the fundamental patterns characterizing the spatial organization of the novel "The Life of Arseniev" is described. It facilitates better understanding of Bunin's worldview. The space of the Russian land lies in the focus of attention.

KEY WORDS. An image of the field, space of the Russian land, expanse.

Ivan Bunin opened a new page of the Russian prose conceptualizing the «eternal» truths. The possibility of a detailed (global) reflection of the present day as well as of these «eternal» truths was set for a reader in his writings. Bunin's works rendered the pride in the ancestry, noble culture and specific way of life of the whole social layer, irrevocably washed off by the time.

Being abroad, Bunin continued writing about Russia, but the subject acquired a different character. Comprising the motif of memories, Bunin narrated about his Motherland, lost forever. «The Life of Arseniev» is the most significant work of Bunin's emigration period, it was and it is still of particular interest to the researchers. It is remarkable for its scope of the material, the breadth and diversity of risen issues. Being a novel of a summarizing character, it generalizes things and events which took place almost half a century ago. The inquiry of Russian life and Russian manor, which are associated with Bunin himself, is developed in the novel.

A man, according to Bunin, may become subjected to the power of space. A priority dimensional image which embodies the Russian land is represented by the field. The feeling of loneliness in France, this small country, precipitates longing for the endless expanse of Russian fields.

The meaning of the word «field» in the Russian language is polysemantic: 1) the space outside the town or village; a blank treeless and vast plain, 2) a tillage or husbandry sown with grain, 3) an open extend [7; 258], 4) the space which can be embraced by an eye [10; 957].

For Bunin Russian field can connect the cosmic universal and the national realms, it can allow an artist to penetrate into the mystery of life in Russia. In the novel Russian field appears as the embodiment of a God-given space of Russia. Having discovered a nearby estate, the character begins to settle in the space of a field and then a ravine, a barn, a stackyard, Proval, Vyselki. This element of «empty spaces» captures the character. Thus, the topic of a Russian field is associated with the motif of loneliness.

Deserted fields serve as a personification of desolated Russia: «May be my childhood was sad because of some special conditions? <...> Deserted fields, a single estate among them. <...> In wintertime it was like an endless sea of snow, but in summer — a sea of breads, herbs and flowers ... and the eternal silence of these fields, their mysterious silence ...» [4, 9]. It should be noted that the epithet «deserted» does not imply a physical vacancy of space. This is character's perception or comprehension of space. He perceives the space, filling it with his own sense. There is always perception of space. Arseniev's comprehension of the mysteriousness of Russian existence and land makes him a national writer. Russia itself and a Russian field turn out to be enigma. Arseniev apprehends this conception of Russian mystery through the conception of a field and space. He would like to hear the «word» from the land and, being involved in this secret, to find his way into the national culture. Both Russian land and Russian field possess a voice, but their words are hidden in silence. Thereat such mystery can be figured out by feeling and experiencing, not by trying to guess it. Not accidentally Bunin interprets metaphorically a field as a sea of breads. It is an important genetic characteristic of the earth. Phenomenon of husbandry acquires a great importance in the novel. Arseniev recalled his affection to the peasant's work: he carried bread, trashed from morning till night, he felt exhausted like his horse, he mowed till bloody blisters, but he fell asleep thinking that tomorrow he would be able to mow again. According to Bunin, a field reunited noble and peasant psychology. Assimilation of the earth and the land to the expanse of water (sea, ocean) exposes, on the one hand, its spontaneity and, on the other hand, describes the field as boundless, homogeneous space. A sea of breads can be «yellow, thick and lush in mid-summer» (with the help of these epithets Bunin facilitates visual and tactile perception of space), it can «glisten like silver in the sun», it may become «brown by the fall», and «boundless, snowy» (visual and tactile perception) in the winter, that is, the land is always alive and moreover it represents the change of seasons. Here emerges a special time-space relation of a field and the earth. Colour specification always played an important role for Bunin. According to the dictionary of symbols, warm yellow hues render solar characteristics of gold. Yellow is regarded as a colour of youth, happiness and abundance. It possesses a remarkably high symbolic value in countries professing Buddhism, because of its association with the saffron robes of Buddhist monks. This colour, which was originally worn by criminals, has been chosen by Gautama Buddha as a symbol of humility and separation from the bustle of the world [11; 96]. Yellow fields in Bunin's works exude youth, joy and abundance. Finding harmony in the world of nature, the character is separated from romping reality.

Silver colour presupposes purity, chastity and harmony [11; 325]. The field of such colour conveys virtue and unity with the external world. A shade of hope for the future glimmers in Arseniev's heart.

Brown, being a symbol of humility, renunciation and poverty, probably arose from the obvious and logical association with a spotty clay soil [11; 156]. Brown field's colouring symbolizes transition from a warm, fertile summer into autumn. Bunin's brown fields manifest separation or renunciation. The hero makes farewell to the field and to everything precious «in this remote and forgotten land».

White fields, according to Bunin, serve as a symbol of purity and peace but, on the other side, it may become a symbol of death: "Why God has chosen Nadya,

the darling of the entire house? The whole house was oppressed and depressed, but yet no one expected that this oppression would suddenly resolve in a late evening nanny's scream. She flung the door into the dining room open and cried out wildly that Nadya «was ending». Yes, this terrific word — «is ending» — for the first time resounded to me one late winter evening in a dark depth of snowy fields and lonely mansion!» [4; 37]. Mark the epithet «dark» which defines these «snowy fields». Thus, «dark snowy fields» give birth to a philosopher within a Russian man.

A field presents an open space that has no boundaries and can «absorb a man». A.K. Grek notices: «The names with actual spatial semantics express the idea of limitless, endless (sometimes open), indifferent to a person or threatening him space» [6; 395]. Sometimes Arseniev looks lost in the space of a field, therefore a field is endowed with sadness and grief. The world makes us ponder on the essence of existence. A person is found under the influence of this world.

Bunin notes that only people may undergo this depression caused by the «call of space». Arseniev demands: «If any marmot or lark is grieving in silence or solitude? No, they have nothing to enquire, nothing to marvel at...» [4; 9].

The relationship between a man and a place where he was born, is confirmed by the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev in his work «about the power of spaces above Russian soul»: “geographical factor is of «paramount importance» <...> **Russian soul is suppressed by immense Russian fields** and snow, it is sunk and dissolved in immensity... (the words are italicized by us — T.G.) A Russian is a man of the earth. These spaces or fields can be viewed as an inner spiritual evidence of Russian destiny. This is geography of Russian soul» [3; 62-63]. Berdyaev explains the breadth of Russian character: «It is Russian land which rules over a Russian man and it is not him who dominates» [3; 65]. The subject of spatial endlessness became one of the fundamental features of Russian culture. It is possible to trace out the idea of “outstretch”, “spread” in Bunin’s works. Not coincidentally Balavin pointed to Arsenyev: «You, I think, can not serve — you have different dreams. You are, like oracles, stretching too far. Arseniev replies: “Indeed, I secretly stretched into it» [4; 131, 132]. One meaning of the lexeme «to stretch» in the Russian language indicates to reach out into the distance [7; 470]. Arseniev thus felt necessity of «inhabitation» of the world, comprehension of space.

The character recollects: «I was born and grew up (...) in a completely **open field**, which any European can hardly imagine. A great vastness of space, no barriers or boundaries around me. **Where after all did our estate merge with a boundless field?** I saw the field and the sky» [4; 36]. Attributive construction «open field» is a folklorism, it draws us to the Russian folklore and ancient literature. At that period the nature personified the Russian land. A man is again found at the mercy of space. This space is not subjected to human dimensions.

The space of this estate merges with an endless field, its expanse, spaciousness, extend. The word «extend» is connected with the word «stretch». Researchers give the following meanings of the word «extend» in the Russian language: 1) simple, empty, unloaded place; relative (not absolute) vacuum, 2) the space of three dimensions 3) freedom, will. «To extend» denotes to spread, to occupy some space [7; 470]. These concepts are opposed to the notion of «comfort». That's why the character cannot bear even a thought about marriage, children, and comfortable family life: «Are we really tied up forever and going to live together till the vale

of years? And like everyone else, we'll have a house, children? The latter seemed to me especially unbearable» [4; 230].

The space of the house is opposed to the space of the field: «I remember a great deal of such scarce, short days (...), **sadly wearing me down** by house and home, and then by dreams of a city's antiquity, of a **free autumn's extend**, seeing from here» [4; 61]. Arseniev observes space, an outer extend and his soul is longing for leaving the house, even for going outside the city.

According to Yuri Maltsev, «a dark and mysterious life of a soul (...) destroys the time» that leads «to the release of time, which Bunin was dreaming about» [8; 105]. But it is not «free from space». What is this space? If the «protagonist» of the work is «Russian soul», in the tradition founded by the ancient Russian literature, its space must be traced in the Russian land [12; 153]. In the novel «The Life of Arsenyev» a Russian field becomes the space for this «Russian soul». Its openness and endlessness determines those features of a so-called landscape mode of thinking. This is essentially important for the disclosure of an artist, formation of a writer.

Arseniev perceives something that only an artist who has opened a «voice» of the Russian land can feel. Bunin's nature is pantheistically endowed with soul and wisdom: «The depth of the sky, the distance of the fields **have told me about something else**, something different, as if existing apart from them; aroused a dream and longing for something I was missing; **touched me with an obscure love and affection** to something and someone unknown...» [4; 9]. The epithet «**obscure**» (love) highlights his yearning for the transcendent. «Being familiar, the world is opened again in the distance: fields, their rustic simplicity and freedom» [4; 12]; «Where was I born and was grown up? What have I seen? No mountains, no rivers or lakes, no forests — only bushes in the hollows, sometimes groves here and there and only occasionally there was something like forests, some Zakaz, Dubrovka. Only **fields, fields, a boundless ocean of breads...**» [4; 15]. A sound perception plays an important role here. A numerous repetition of the lexeme «field» stresses endlessness, infinitude of the space. Here again the earth appears as one of the four elements.

The Russian field may perform as personification of harmony, a paradise place in a province: «...shimmering like dull silver, **the waves of a spanless rye sea run endlessly** over the slopes. They gloss and sparkle, **rejoicing themselves** in their density and outrage...» [4; 16]. An artist immortalizes a moment in which divine beauty and joy of the world are manifested. The field acquires the value of spontaneity, uniformity. «Expanses of spanless rye sea waves» become a symbol of a constant motion. Here the nature performs as the protagonist, who leads an independent life: «The fields were already empty and spacious, but still **bright and cheerful** like in summer» [4; 44]. Thus, Bunin's field plays the role of an actor.

The field's extend may trigger the feeling of joy: «**the field's space yellowed** and glittered dryly, it evoked warmth, light and happiness of the last summer days» [4; 45]. Yellow field's space appears like a symbol of light, warmth, prosperity, welfare, youth and joy. «I was pleased by **sunny, dry extend of fields**; open and as if being sandy they were endlessly covered with mop. Everything inside me demanded something **desperately clever**» [4; 171]. What does it mean for Bunin — «desperately clever»? It is referring to the bravado inherent in the Russian character. A man lies within the power of space, «sunny, dry extend of fields.» A man is

no more entirely subjected to his will and the usual logic. Extend of fields gives the Russian soul an opportunity to «roam». That's essentially for Bunin to conceive what people feel in such situations, what happens to them on this earth. The epithets «sunny», «dry», «open», «sand» involve visual and tactile perception.

A field, like a garden, wines and dines «...we were moving on, getting round Zakaz by a thick millet field, silky glistening in the sun with its brown, bowed to the ground beads full of grain, which rustled particularly dryly and loudly beneath our feet» [4; 45]. In the Russian version of this part it is possible to observe the sound alliteration: «z-l-s-sh». It encourages the readers to hear a ringing but dry sounding of beans. In all the types of natural-objective descriptions of the world Bunin appeals to a sound painting. At the same time Bunin does not comment his feelings, they are transmitted through the level of sounds. The field here embodies fertility, prosperity and joy. In the novel Bunin conveys the contact between a human being and his location. Metaphorically, the character is nourished by a word of the Russian land, he hears and possesses it. The hero is dragged into the life of the field, for that reason he perceives it and feels the universal loneliness.

Summing up, Bunin sensates the voice of the Russian land and Russian fields inside; it allows him to become a Russian writer. The power of space or the power of a Russian field predominates over a Russian soul.

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