

Ivan Bunin and Guy de Maupassant: Ties Across Creative Writing

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Abstract

If one compares the works of Guy de Maupassant and Bunin I.A., he or she will find that these two writers are related by a subject matter. In particular, attention is drawn to the description of relationship between men and women. It is essential that Russian writer's attitude toward the works of his French colleague-predecessor – a bright representative of European realism of the XIX century – changes as he develops in creativity. Textual analysis of similar (by plot) works of Maupassant and Bunin was carried out on the back of the experience of many writers, who have studied the legacy of both classics. Bunin is proved to be modernizing the realistic poetics and going a way of neo-realism – realism, enriched by the influence of modernism.

Keywords: Guy de Maupassant; Bunin I.A; realism; modernism; neo-realism; poetics; context; evolvement.

Introduction

In modern scientific journalism, there is a considerable amount of works describing research results on I.A. Bunin's creative writing – one of the last classics of Russian literature. The number of writings increased in 90th of the twentieth century, when his pre-revolutionary works and first exile publications were re-published in Russia. It would seem that the latter provides a broad scientific field for literary critics and scholars, but there are certain problem issues related the sphere of research on Bunin's creative writing from that time to the present. All modern studies are carried out mainly by domestic scientists. Thus, the main emphasis is on clarifying the Russian side of Bunin's work. Then, little attention is paid to the influence of another culture alien. This leads to the fact that research works do not have the necessary value for foreign readers. After all, a lot of people know about Bunin's relation to France. Thus, they would be interested in learning more about the French side of Bunin's work. Moreover, his "strict artistic talent with which he recreated a typical Russian character in the literary prose" was acquired while staying in France. Hence, he became the first in Russian literature, who received the Nobel Prize (Croise, 1954). This kind of research omission is very noticeable. This paper is the first step in studying this attractive little studied layer of Russian literature.

There was no scientific study, which would provide and generalize the assessments of Bunin's personality and creativity in France, until 2008 (Mikheicheva et al., 2008). In many works, of course, there were mentions about how Bunin worked in exile, who was his inspiration and

thematically related writer (Richard, 1974). However, if there was no research on the Bunin's relation to France, how can we expect full attention to the ties across creative writing of Bunin and Maupassant?

Data, Analysis, and Results

The similarities between Bunin and Maupassant were already mentioned by the first researchers of Bunin's work in Soviet literary criticism (Kuroedova, 1959; Danilin, 1968). Their joint interest in G. Flaubert and I. Turgenev could contribute to their rapprochement. Maupassant, the author of three articles about Turgenev, recognized himself as a student of Russian classic. However, Bunin was also studying with Turgenev (Meskin V. (2005). *Love in the prose of I. Bunin: a dialog with predecessors and contemporaries. Russian journal "Russkaya slovesnost" (Russian language arts), SchoolPress, 5*). Such a conclusion about the creative relationship of I. Turgenev, Guy de Maupassant and Bunin (Annenkov, 2013), unfortunately, does not fully cover the similarities and differences between Bunin and Maupassant.

In noting the obvious thematic closeness of the Russian writer Bunin and the Frenchman Maupassant, we disagree with the recognized Bunin scholar, who puts Flaubert in the place of Maupassant (Maltsev, 1994). Let us note that it was Maupassant who Bunin "loved and re-read", which was noted by his friends in emigration (Lyubimov, 1979; Roshchin, 2000). The relationship of Maupassant and Bunin (as he was called – "Russian Maupassant") is recognized in France. In response to the collection "Le Monsieur de San-Francisco" (1921), the reviewer wrote that the French would gain a lot from getting acquainted with the talented author and described him as a Maupassant among his compatriots (*Revue française, 1922*).

At the same time, critics noted the difference between Bunin's and Maupassant's letters. Namely, the impression of Russian writer's stories is determined by the mood of the story, but not by the ending, as in case of Maupassant's stories. Maupassant's "influence" on Bunin in France began to be discussed after a year and a half, when a new collection – "The Cup of Life" (1) was released. At the same time, one of the authors, writing about the "deep influence", has found the short description, departure from judgments and final conclusions in the works of both writers (Potins de Paris, 1924). Although, these features are hardly in Maupassant's nature. There was a lot of comparable publications published in French periodical (*L'Éropéen, 1934*), but only few of them provided satisfactory assessments (*Annales politiques et littéraires, 1933*). In fact, there were more high ones (*Populaire, 1933*).

Relation does not negate the fact that Bunin varied the early Maupassant's recognitions with irony. He moved away from Maupassant's style as he overcame the traditions of European realism and improves his creative manner, which reflected in learned methods of modernist poetics. "Hidden modernism" was being insistently discussed (Maltsev, 1994), although the writer denied his connection with modernism for a long time, and only in the forties admitted: "Calling me a realist "means either not knowing me, or not understanding anything in my extremely diverse writings ... "(underlined by the author) (Bunin et al., 2002). Maupassant had no involvement of such kind. The criticism of the early twentieth century have attributed Bunin's works that won him glory to neo-realistic (Zamyatin, 1988; Ivanov-Razumnik, 1922; Keldysh, 2001). Bunin overcomes the pressure of ideas devoted to social determinism; he prefers the reflection of "being through life" instead of the reflection of "history through life". These are the features of neo-realism. These features were inherent in the realism of the XIX century – in Maupassant's works – but they began to dominate only at the beginning of the new century.

Maupassant's discourse appears in Bunin's works quite often – somewhere more, somewhere less concretely. The story "New Year" (1902) is about a married couple, who incidentally found themselves in a distant farmstead on the New Year's Eve. Silence, which "can be only in the field in winter nights", brings together people, who are strangers to each other, for a while. In the heart-to-heart conversation, the woman says the words reflecting her own secret desires and puts them to Maupassant's mouth: "To be born, live and die in your own home" – as Maupassant says! "(2). The man corrects her: "These are the words of Saint-Beuve". According to the context, Maupassant is mentioned by a woman with a narrow mental outlook. In other works, Bunin continued the theme of unrequited love, love trap and adultery that is inherent in Maupassant's creative writings ("Room No. Eleven", 1884, "Abandoned", 1884, "Waiter, a "Bock", 1884, "Saved", 1885, etc.). Maupassant's style can reminisce in the Bunin's story, as in "The Unknown Friend" (1923). In its composition, there are features of "Maupassant" novel about the loneliness of a female soul and its deep longing on unspeakable, intensified by books of beloved writer (Slivitskaya, 2004).

It is noteworthy that Maupassant's name was mentioned in the "travel poem" – the genre name of "Waters Aplenty" (1925-1926). "The captain passed", recalls the hero-narrator, "and, since there was a Maupassant's "On the River" lying on my knees, I asked him whether he knew this book and whether he liked it". "Oh yes", he answered, "it's very nice". Further, he discusses the exaggerated significance of Maupassant's works in comparison with the "unshakable" the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas with a bit of provocation. However, the fact itself is significant: traveler-narrator, a character close to the author (the book was written during his journey to Ceylon) puts Maupassant's books on the one shelf with perpetual books. Below, he notes that "On the River" was "carefully read from the beginning to the end", believing that the reader knows about Bunin's habit of not reading an uninteresting writing all through. In modern literary criticism, "Waters Aplenty" is compared with "On the River" in terms of dialogueness (Malishevsky, 2014).

The first reference to Guy de Maupassant's name is in Bunin's story "Silence" (1901). The context of the reference is very sublime. Young people are resting on the shore of a wonderful lake in Switzerland – "in a blessed country of ... silence". Surrounding beauty fill with religious feelings. The magnificence of nature is as a sign of sacred being for them that explains the pantheism of ancestors: "How understandable is the deification of nature!" The realization that contemplated charm is timeless determines the movement of hero-narrator's thought, makes us think about the transience of human existence: "And yet, we are unhappy! What's the reason? Brevity of life, loneliness, wrong way to our lives?" Undoubtedly, he recalls the great predecessors, who have visited these shores once, paying particular attention to Maupassant: "Once there were Shelley, Byron here on this lake... then Maupassant, lonely and with the thirst for happiness of the entire world in his heart. All the dreamers, all, who loved and were young once, all, who came here for happiness, all of them have already passed and disappeared forever. Thus, you and I will pass too... ". Special attention to Maupassant here is not accidental: it is a Mopassant's and then Bunin's style – to feel happiness and talk about misfortune, to observe the infinity of nature and talk about the frailty of human life. There are many similar examples in French writer's works, in the "Diary", "On the River", in particular. The idea of Maupassant only as an expresser of "a miserable life ... filled with penny-wise calculations" is doubtful (Evnina, no date).

Subsequently, part of the phrase relating to Maupassant will be mentioned by literary historians and specialists in French prose writer, arguing that Bunin is one of the few Russian writers, who appreciated the work of his predecessor (Bannikov, 1987).

Two writers are related by subject matter – love, nature, by the awareness of both authors of transience of life, inevitability of dramas and tragedies in it. Bunin's artistic thinking is justly noted to be based on oxymorons: he is focused on such a quality of being as polarity (Slivitskaya, 2004). The content of his stories is often determined by contrasts: past – present, spring of life – chair days, love – hatred, life – death. In the latter, Bunin sees the dramatic mode of life. In "Silence", this vision is reasonably attributed to the French writer. However, this fully applies to Maupassant. Transience of life is a motif that has passed through all creative writings of one and other author. This fact is obvious to everyone, who read them; there are many examples.

What is the most important thing in life according to Bunin? Love, of course. The best part of his work is not only the cycle "Dark alleys" – the book that can be called an encyclopedia of love. Is the literature on love encyclopedic in genius predecessors – Dante, W. Shakespeare, A. Pushkin? Rather no. It is more about what does not exist or is very rare in the world. In Bunin, heavenly and worldly sides of love are harmonized; the body is as sacred as the spirit. In Bunin, a dream of happiness is inseparable from the dream of love, the dream of love is linked with the dream of a woman and a woman is a mystery. This chain of inferences is read as a palindrome – in both directions. In "Silence", thoughts about beauty evolve into arguments about a woman: "Women ... teased us with a thirst for sublime, romantic, sensual love..." Who has presented love, a woman, a thirst for love, a woman's thirst with such details before Bunin? Only Maupassant did. In the period of a critical attitude towards his predecessor, Bunin paid tribute to Maupassant's astute honesty. In Bunin's diary of August 3, 1917, there is a note: "He is the only one, who dared to say endlessly that human life is all under the power of a woman's thirst" (Bunin, 1917-1918).

However, there is also a difference, especially noticeable in female images. Maupassant has a large number of unworthy female characters – lustful, self-serving, deprived of maternal feelings ("A Warning Note", 1886, "La revanche", 1884; "Was It a Dream?", 1887; "Madame Hermet", 1887; , "A Parricide", 1882, "A Mother of Monsters", 1883, etc. Let us say that the last mentioned story is about a woman, who deliberately gives birth to freaks in order to sell them later for panopticon). There are no such women in Bunin's stories. There are demonic women among his heroines, but there are no unworthy. Feminine cunning is often a result of mysterious passion ("Caucasus", 1937, "Zoya and Valeria", 1940, etc.). Maupassant has balanced a number of negative female characters by a number of positive female characters – moral, selfless, compassionate ("The Will" (Le Testament), 1882, "True Story", 1882, "La rempailleuse", 1882, "Forgiveness", 1882, "Bellflower" 1886, "The Farmer's Wife", 1886, etc.), but they do not have what many Bunin positive heroines do – mystery, transcendence, "eternal femininity," all that modernism brought to "female poetics" (Maltsev, 1994).

In other words, Bunin shares Maupassant's view on the meaning of women in life, but draws them in the spirit of modern times: his female characters are special, not understandable to men, beings. Bunin's men characters are often based on sublime ideas of beauty. Such are the heroes of "Silence"; they "deify that ideal feminine image that has appeared in front of them". This Bunin idealization of woman in general – both noblemen and peasant women – is on the raise from early creative writings to the late ones, and will continue in his final collection "Dark alleys". The difference is clearly noticeable in stories with a similar theme. Maupassant's "A Country Excursion" (1881) and Bunin's "Sunstroke" (1925) are about adultery. However, French writer considers showing the vulgarity of bourgeois life is important, Russian writer – unpredictability of love, the mysterious power of female charm.

Many stories of Maupassant and Bunin – not only about love – are based on very similar compositional lines. In this case, differences in artistic thinking of both writers are even more

noticeable. For example, the stories "FOU?" (Maupassant, 1882) and "Steamer Saratov" (Bunin, 1944) are about love, more precisely, about the terrible power of jealousy. In both works, the man is jealous, adultery is only suspected, and suspicions lead to the cloudiness of understanding, to the tragic denouement – the murder of "snake woman". However, Maupassant creates the character of a sensual female liar, and Bunin creates a type of seducing woman. In one case, snake side manifests itself visibly and naturally, the woman has a "pink, moist tip of the tongue, trembling like a sting of a snake". In the second case, the word "snake" is mentioned only once in passing; the snake side here can be observed in the description of clothing, behavior, posture; she is a woman, she is a fatal (demonical) temptation.

The life of nature is another basis of Bunin's creative writings. There are only few researchers, who did not point out this feature. A. Blok was the first one to note: "Few people are capable of loving nature as Bunin does. And it's this love that makes his scope wide, his vision deep, his color and aural impressions so rich..." (3). However, Maupassant was also interested in nature's life. He wrote such short stories as "A Country Excursion" (1881), "Clair de lune" (1882), "The First Snowfall" (1883) and travel notes "On the River" (1888). Both writers appear as pagans, pantheists, their pictures of nature represent the space, the sun and the bright flora. However, there are also time-based differences in pictures of nature, described by Maupassant and Bunin.

Maupassant was a contemporary of great founders of impressionism, but their style is not in his nature, he came to literature and to Bunin, in particular, later. In terms of French classic, nature is functionally limited. It is a multicolored space, a home for all; the best inhabitants see the beauty of their home are able to change for the better under its influence ("In the Wood", 1886, "Le Horla" 1887, "The Night", 1890, etc.). In the story "Clair de lune" (1882), the old abbot decided to punish his niece with a stick, because she dared to go for a walk at night with an admirer. And he would punish, but the poetry of the night, of the starry sky, makes the old man drop the stick. This, in fact, writer's classic perception of nature was noted by a literary critic-compatriot. He wrote that Maupassant, who placed his heroes within with a clearly marked landscape, saw in nature, first of all, not colors, but the manifestation of life. Here, the life of a man and the life of nature are distanced (Neve, 1907). This is true, but the statement about the colors is a bit too judgmental.

The Bunin's pen for displaying nature is more sensitive, there is always an element of mysticism. Bunin's man is either merged with nature with his mysterious essence ("Antonov apples", 1900, "The Bird's Shadow", 1907, "Easy Breath", 1916, "Waters Aplenty", 1925-1926, etc.) or is overwhelmed with a desire for this merger: "I can see, I can hear, I am happy. Everything is in me," "Nature, open our chest for me, So that I could merge with your beauty...", "Sand, like silk ... I will stick to a gnarled pine..." Bunin's "law of beauty" is related with nature – nature helps his hero to overcome the fear of death. He finds peace of mind, a saving faith in immortality, as life is only a place to stay for a night: "... And in the early morning, dewy and white, Spread your wings among the rustling leaves, And disappear in the clear sky and bright - Return to your motherland, soul!" ("Night-logging", 1911). His "law of beauty" is more closely related to what can be called classical humanism.

Discussion

Indulgent-denial attitude towards Maupassant is reflected in a number of Bunin's diary notes of 1917-1918. It is noteworthy that he comes down on Maupassant for lengths, for repetitions, for "lifeless" heroes, etc., but reads and reads. Here, for example, note of August 20, 1917: "I am still

reading Maupassant. It is almost entirely with trifles, sketches, sometimes dirty" (Bunin, 2002). This same attitude is present in mature prose. In the story "Antigone" (1940), hidden flow of unexpectedly flared strong feelings is contrasted with the gray banality of everyday life. In a useless conversation reflecting this dullness and banality, the mention of Maupassant is symbolic: "What do you like to read?" He asked. "Now I am reading Maupassant, Octave Mirbeau..." "Well, yes, it's understandable. All women like Maupassant. He has everything about love". "What could be better than love?". Maupassant is mentioned ironically, as a sign of vulgarity, in the story "Galya Ganskaya" (1940): "I spent two springs in Paris just at that time," narrator refreshes in mind his younger days. "I imagined myself to be the second Maupassant in regards to love affairs and, returning to Odessa, walked as I was a dandy..."

To make the picture of Bunin's attitude toward Maupassant complete, we should also mention that Bunin wrote a sympathetic sketch "The End of Maupassant" (*Les Dernières Nouvelles*, 1928) in 1927, and two years later – "Bernar", appealing to Maupassant's work. Bunin made a new edition of this story shortly before his death. It was a self-critical summary that strengthened his philosophical character. "Bernar" is a brave sailor, the hero of Maupassant's sketch. The name of French writer is mentioned three times in this story-requiem. The fact that Bunin recalls to Maupassant while saying goodbye to the reader shows the respect and tribute to the master-predecessor.

Conclusion

The study of what is common or different between Bunin and Maupassant has a certain literary and historical interest. It is important not only as a significant expansion of knowledge and as a deepening of understanding specifically about Bunin's work. It will also help to expand the understanding of a phenomenon of inter-literary ties, which often determine the nature of national literature.

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