



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### A Discourse Analysis of the Image of Eastern Women in Bunin's Poetry and Their Representation through Folk, Symbolic, and Mythological Forms

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#### ABSTRACT

##### Introduction

The representation of Eastern women in global literature has consistently been shaped by a multifaceted array of cultural, historical, geographical, religious, and mythological influences. In Russian literature as well, the focus on the East and Eastern influences—particularly during the early decades of the twentieth century—represented a significant aspect of literary imagination. Among the authors who explored the East, Ivan Bunin (1870–1953), the eminent Russian poet and author, occupies a prominent place. Bunin's interest in the East extended beyond mere stylistic fascination; through his extensive travels, he gained familiarity with Iranian, Arab, Indian, and African cultures. This familiarity led to the depiction of female figures within his poetry, which manifest across three levels: mythological–symbolic, ritual–sacred, and ethnographic–popular.

The primary focus of this study is to examine how the Eastern woman is depicted in Bunin's poetry, the mechanisms through which this representation is constructed, and its connection to the mythological, natural, cultural, and religious elements of the East. To address this issue, a selection of his poems has been examined, including *The God of Noon*, *Ishtar*, *The Goddess*, *Elburz (Alborz)*, *The Roses of Shiraz*, *The Spell*, *The Slave Girl*, *In the Groves of Urvella*, *By the Black Nubian Huts*, *Feska*, *The Bride*, and *The Wife of Aziz*. In these poems, the Eastern woman is depicted at times as a mythological goddess and source of illumination and vitality, at other times as a ritualistic and mystical figure, and on occasion as an ordinary woman from among the populace, intricately intertwined with daily Eastern life.

A review of prior research reveals that earlier studies have predominantly concentrated on the intertextual and mythological aspects of Bunin's poetry; however, a comprehensive analysis of the Eastern woman across the three layers of myth, ritual, and popular culture has received little scholarly attention. Addressing this deficiency, the present study provides a comprehensive and systematic analysis of Eastern women in Bunin's poetry.

##### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis methodology within a descriptive–analytical framework. The research corpus comprises Bunin's poems with Eastern themes; through purposive sampling, twelve representative poems featuring women in a central role were selected. The analysis was carried out in three distinct stages:

1. Linguistic and Imagistic Analysis: Analysis of descriptive vocabulary, metaphorical devices, sensory imagery, personification, and the woman's connection with nature.
2. Mythological and Symbolic Analysis: Examination of intertextual connections with Iranian, Mesopotamian, Indian, and Semitic–African mythologies, as well as the symbolic roles attributed to women.
3. Ethnographic–Cultural Analysis: Focus on geographical features, indigenous components, soundscapes, color schemes, attire, customs, and the position of women within Eastern lifeworlds.

##### Keywords:

*Eastern Women, Ivan Bunin, Myth, Symbol, The Orient.*

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The findings are conveyed through an integrated approach employing discourse analysis, semiotics, and cultural analysis.

## Results

### 1. Woman as a Mythological–Symbolic Figure

In poems such as *The God of Noon*, *Ishtar*, and *The Goddess*, the Eastern woman adopts a mythic and transhistorical persona. In *The God of Noon*, the woman is portrayed as a radiant entity endowed with divine sensitivity. Her body transforms into a sacred canvas upon which light is cast and meaning is created.

In *Ishtar*, Bunin reconstructs the mythological duality of the Mesopotamian goddess:

- On the one hand, she is a warrior, powerful and vengeful;
- On the other, she appears as gentle, erotic, and springlike.

This duality gives rise to a female figure that embodies both fecundity and destruction—an archetype that recurs throughout ancient mythological traditions.

In *The Goddess*, Bunin depicts a woman akin to a ritual statue: composed, introspective, emotionally controlled, and seated in sacred immobility. This image conjures Buddhist and Hindu deities and imparts the poem with an ambiance of Eastern mysticism. Here, woman is regarded not as a material entity but as a symbol of metaphysical serenity and spiritual insight.

### 2. Woman in Relation to Iranian Culture and Nature

In *Elburz (Alborz)*, Bunin places the woman in close association with the revered Alborz Mountain, an emblem of illumination, purity, and majesty. The woman radiates like beams of the sun and is associated with the divine horizon of Iranian civilization.

In *The Roses of Shiraz*, the woman is depicted amidst the gardens of Shiraz, surrounded by red roses, pearl-like tears, and Persian fragrance. She integrates the poetic essence of Iran through:

- The delicacy of flowers,
- Mystical spirituality,
- Bright Eastern colors,
- And the poetic presence of morning light.

These images illustrate that Bunin regarded the East not solely as a geographical region but as a domain of spiritual and poetic significance.

### 3. Woman as a Ritualistic and Magical Subject

In *The Spell*, the Eastern woman executes ancient rites. She stands amidst flames, fumes, and oil, recites incantations, and performs sacrifices. Here, she is neither passive nor subservient; instead, she is empowered, proactive, and endowed with spiritual agency.

In *The Slave Girl*, woman becomes elusive—neither a revered goddess nor a wholly human subject, but a figure positioned between desire and absence. Her reticence and remoteness convey significance.

### 4. Woman in Everyday Life and Ethnographic Representation

In *By the Black Nubian Huts*, the Nubian woman is depicted not through visual imagery but through auditory cues. Her melody resonates in the evening breeze along the Nile and harmonizes with the natural surroundings. This mode of representation incorporates the woman into the experiential world of the Nubian community.

In such representations, woman is neither depicted as a deity nor as an abstraction, but as a concrete, living entity originating from popular culture.

### 5. Woman as a Philosophical–Cosmic Force

In *The Groves of Urvella*, woman is depicted as Māyā, the mother of Buddha. She embodies the “illusion of the world,” the origin of creation, and the boundary between existence and liberation. In this poem, the woman is depicted not as a specific individual but as an ontological principle upon which the very existence of life depends.

This viewpoint elevates the depiction of women in Bunin’s poetry to a philosophical and abstract plane.

## Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that the Eastern woman in Bunin’s poetry holds a central, multifarious, and intricate position. She is not a mere ornamental feature of exotic

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scenery, but rather the catalyst of meaning, bearing mythological, cultural, and philosophical significance. Women in Bunin's poetry manifest across three interconnected levels:

1. The Mythological Woman: An intermediary between mankind and the creative energies, embodying illumination and sacred duality;
2. The Ritual Woman: An embodiment of sacred rituals, protector of life and death, and conduit of spiritual authority;
3. The Popular Woman: An element of the cultural fabric of the East, connected with sound, color, fragrance, and daily life.

These three dimensions constitute an interconnected framework of meanings through which Bunin comprehends and depicts the East. Thus, the Eastern woman in his poetry symbolizes an embodiment of intercultural aesthetics, travel experiences, and the poet's engagement with unfamiliar worlds.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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