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DEMIURGY IN THE WORKS OF PELEVIN

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Abstract

V. Pelevin's novel "T" was published in the fall of 2009, and its resonance continues to this day – both in blogs and in the media. This article examines the phenomenon of demiurgy in the works of Viktor Olegovich Pelevin as a key principle for organizing artistic reality. The philosophical, mythological, and postmodern foundations of the writer's demiurgic thinking are analyzed, as well as its connection to issues of simulation, power, subjectivity, and language. Particular attention is paid to the image of the author-demiurge, the demiurge characters, and the reader as a participant in the construction of meaning.

Keywords: A. Schopenhauer, V. Pelevin, demiurgy, literary criticism, artistic reality, novel “T”, postmodernism, classification, philosophy, Russian literature.

Introduction

Pelevin's novel was published in the fall of 2009, and the resonance continues to this day - both on blogs and in the press. No wonder. Viktor Pelevin is the UFO of our modern literature. The object is seemingly obvious, yet mysterious. Some passionately immerse themselves in ufology ("Pelevin studies"), while others claim that the object doesn't exist, but has simply lurked.

When a prominent critic writes about him and his new work: “almost like the Dostoevsky of our time” [3. p. 41], and then goes on to talk about his powerful imagination and specific philosophy, while another prominent critic declares: “Pelevin is not a writer at all, if we invest this concept with the least serious content” [5. p. 41], then you must agree that the object of analysis shimmers

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teasingly, sometimes disguising itself as an optical illusion, sometimes being exactly that.

As for ufology, I'm a skeptic, but Pelevin is a real figure to me (even "most real" – if we recall the a realibus ad realiora). He figures in current cultural mythology no less than flying saucers, yet remains unidentified in many ways. In the immediate, incidental sense of his work: he is one of the best (and where else are they in the realm of great prose?) satirists, who has lashed out at the entire consumer civilization and its particularly ugly incarnation in post-Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, his criticism, reminiscent of Konstantin Leontiev, Spengler, and other classics of conservatism, and far more illuminating and intelligible than the writings of leftist French writers (whom Pelevin managed to mock in one of his stories), easily qualifies as momentary banter ("a talented feuilletonist").

The object in question is also unidentified in the sense that, like any thinking artist, he writes a single metatext from novel to novel - and in this he differs from "quality" fiction, whose creators, consciously or not, driven by the prevailing circumstances, always begin with a clean slate. And such consistency, accompanied by a deepening of the inner theme, is often characterized even by admirers as self-repetition, and the diversity of his writing technique as eclecticism. Pelevin, they say, "has been repeating the same mantra for two decades now," being "the chief eclecticist of our eclectic and frivolous era" (Edelstein, again). How one can be both a monomaniac and an eclectic is unclear, but this ill-considered contradiction suggests that readers, initially drawn by the novelty of Pelevin's imagination, increasingly feel powerless to answer the question: why is this being written? This is the main aspect of Pelevin's unrecognizability. Well, any public idol inevitably ceases to be one if they cling not to this public role, but to their own guiding thread. The emerging disillusionment with Pelevin once again convinces me of the reality of his greatness as a writer. [1. p. 141]

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Basinsky's apt words: "The virtual atmosphere of his prose is always permeated by the force field of a very real Russia" apply to the novel "T" to a far greater extent than the critic has managed to notice. He, like most of those who responded, is referring to those episodes of the novel that satirize the transformation of the literary and book publishing industry into a purely market-driven commerce, cynically recouping loans received from incompatible clients. Count T. is none other than the hero of an adventure story, concocted by a team of "creators" who, along the way, try to adapt to the convulsive instability of the Russian economy and Russian politics, thus twisting their character's fate this way and that. However, even at this elementary and basic level of his writing, Pelevin is not only witty but also quite unpretentious. Here's an observation that extends beyond such a particularity as the commercial literary kitchen: "The main cultural technology of the 21st century <…> is the commercial exploitation of someone else's grave. Corpse sucking is our most respected genre…" A now-glaring feature of both snobbish and pop culture is named by name — a formula for the exhaustion of a civilizational aeon far more precise than the empty term "postmodernism."

Meanwhile, the "force field of real Russia" permeates Pelevin's novel even more deeply, reaching the realm of the spirit. The quarter-century-long collapse of the nation's mental panorama — the fleeting dismemberment of homo soveticus, the brief enthusiasm surrounding the church renaissance and its inevitable decline, the idols of "accursed wealth and great fornication" that subjugated the "Pepsi generation," and finally, the crisis-driven growth of spiritual anxiety and spiritual demand in the face of the vacuum that had opened up — found in Pelevin a chronicler of these milestones, which he transforms into fantasies and parables. And not only a chronicler, but also an observer of all this from within himself. A seeker of meaning. [2. p. 11]

In Pelevin's most famous novel, Chapaev and Emptiness, there is an excerpt from the psychiatric "case history" of Pyotr Pustota, which reads like a bashful self-

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caricature of Viktor Olegovich: "...he began to intensively read philosophical literature - the works of Hume, Berkeley, Heidegger - everything that in one way or another examines the philosophical aspects of emptiness and non-existence. <...> Considers himself the sole heir to the great philosophers of the past." If this is mania grandiosa covered with a fig leaf, then it has some basis. The fact is that Pelevin, who positions himself as a Buddhist (one has to believe that this is not a pose, but a position), is also excellently versed in European philosophy and, most importantly, like Prutkov's hypocrite in cheese, finds a taste for it. He has a rare ability to translate philosophical doctrine into a figurative and plot plane by means of a modeling imagination. An ability that is not often encountered; By analogy, I can only recall Borges's "Tlön," which depicts a conspiracy of idealist philosophers, or, in Lem's "Star Diaries of Ijon Tichy," an episode where Hegelian-Marxist totality leads to cemetery harmony...

"Chapaev and Emptiness" and "T," separated by fifteen years, form a dilogy, as the author himself clearly hints, needlessly introducing the figure of the young Chapaev into the new narrative, simultaneously playing up the previously barely glimpsed figure of the lamaist Jimbon and developing the vision outlined in the early novel: Leo Tolstoy (now Count T.) skating across the frozen Styx.

Yes, all these years Pelevin has been repeating the same "mantra" – about nirvana as liberation from the world (in his accentuation, from the world of vulgarity, hostile to beauty), about the path to the "Inner Mongolia" of the spirit, which in its current vocalization is "Optina Pustyn," punningly deciphered as "I choose (from the Latin optare) emptiness." But now he repeats it in a manner that has confused readers. "Chapaev and Emptiness" is written with a pen unequivocally confident in its implications. Essentially, it is a didactic work by a missionary of his faith, where the dialogues between the mystic Chapaev and the "enlightened" Jüngern with Peter Emptiness offer examples of Socratic "maieutics" (that is, the "step-by-step" guiding of a future disciple to a certain truth through leading questions and vexing remarks). All of this is wrapped in the exquisitely crafted

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veneer of a historical romance thriller and reinforced by inserted short stories from the aesthetically unacceptable present day. Buddhism is considered a religion of salvation [1. p. 41], and the novel was written by someone who had embarked on the path to salvation. Perhaps this inspiration was communicated even to those who did not understand what the author wanted from them, and was one of the reasons for its wild success. Those who remembered "Chapayev" were apparently quite offended by its philosophical sequel [2. p. 77]. It irritatingly concentrated the spiritual bewilderment that had been permeating the public air. In "T," the "intelligent" dialogues, inseparable from the plot's progress, are not guided, until the final section, by any authoritative mentor; the hero, unlike Pyotr Pustota, must confront hostile partners in them, constantly feeling duped - so there weren't many willing to follow him through this labyrinthine maze. [6. p. 171]

The main external innovation, however, was the pessimistic disdain the author displayed for the current literary enterprise, including his own. "T" is written almost entirely in pastiche, unlike the "juicy" fiction of Chapaev. Dictionaries define pastiche as a "reduced form of irony." More specifically, it is the use of other people's motifs and styles for the needs of a narrative, while simultaneously ridiculing or mocking them. At the same time, the narrative itself can be conducted with a serious purpose and contain the author's desired "message." The term is considered "postmodernist," as is the phenomenon itself; but long ago, A. Turgenev called his friend Pushkin's text "The Last of the Relatives of Joan of Arc" a pastiche, where, within the guise of a stylized mystification, the author says very important things—primarily about Voltaire...

In his novel "T," Pelevin openly, one might even say brazenly, rehashes the retro detective stories of B. Akunin, the pseudo-historical revelations of Dan Brown, "Blue Lard" and "Dostoevsky Trip" by V. Sorokin, the economic twists and gangster slang of Yu. Latynina (aka E. Klimovich), and much more. Even the "outrageous" publisher's blurb: "'T' is a new novel by a writer whose era saw

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Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and Putin serve the people"—it's the same old game, a reworking of the well-worn joke about Brezhnev as a minor political figure in the era of Alla Pugacheva. Here you go, eat it! (It's a joyful read, especially if you discern where everything comes from, and at the same time grasp the connection with one of the novel's main doctrines—the motley fragmentation of man's outer and inner worlds; this stalker always kills several birds with one stone.) Moreover, it's obvious that the author places all these examples of modern "readability," including his own composite product, on the same level as the output of the team of scribblers who gave life and destiny to Count T.: "There are serious doubts that the text by which you arise has the right to be called literature," Count T.'s primary demiurge, Ariel Brakhman, frankly states. Nowhere before has the author so literally implemented his Chapaev's advice: "Wherever you find yourself, live by the laws of the world you find yourself in, and use these very laws to free yourself from them." Even the publication of a novel about Count Lev Nikolayevich T. in 2010, Leo Tolstoy's anniversary year, is the same kind of publicity stunt that Pelevin, following Chapayev's advice, didn't disdain. It's a kind of neznasa (non-resistance to evil by violence) technique, interpreted in the new novel as a tactic of Eastern martial arts: yielding to the enemy in order to defeat him.

A good thief can do anything. Count T., a daredevil in his prime (what adventures can you squeeze out of an old man from Yasnaya Polyana holed up in his estate?), is not only a sympathetic figure, with whom the reader quickly learns to sympathize; he also possesses certain traits of the real Tolstoy's mental world, which Pelevin needs for his central arguments. The idea of liberating one's self and liberating oneself from one's self is from Tolstoy's circle of contemplation and "circle of reading"; no other "alien grave" would be so suitable for exploration here.

"People are like rivers," wrote the real Tolstoy, replacing a static concept of character with an impulsive flow of shifting moods. Pelevin creates one fantasy

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model after another for this view of individuality. First, there's the "lesson in polytheism" taught to Count T. by a certain Princess Tarakanova: the human soul is alternately possessed by various pagan deities, say, Mars, then Venus - he is a being composed of the shifting passions of his own, a thoroughfare, a gateway. Or, with a nod to the authority of Kabbalah: "The soul is a stage on which twenty-two powers operate. <…> Every person is created at any moment by the temporary balance of powers." But the hero, unwilling to accept these assurances, is preoccupied with the search for his "self" as an unchanging point of fluid existence. In fact, this search is identical to his striving for the goal of his mystical journey - Optina Pustyn, a place whose significance is as yet unknown to him. [4. p. 11]

The matter becomes radically clearer - and more complicated - when T. learns that he exists as a fiction, a fictitious person, since he is a literary character, entirely dependent on his author(s). Here, I note, a summary history of the Russian 2000s is skillfully tacked onto the plot, integrally depicted as a fight between the "security and liberal security officers" and reflected in a series of difficulties of one small publishing enterprise. At first, there is the fulfillment of a fashionable clerical order for an alternative biography of the great Leo (his reconciliation with his mother Church, along the way yet another pastiche on the popular theme of historical alternatives in our prose: what if the Decembrists had won, Pushkin would have killed Dantes, etc.); but then - out of nowhere - a crisis, the loss of the previous client, and the Islamist pressure of the Chechen lobby; A failed attempt to sell the product to the West, remaking it into a computer shooter set in the center with a familiar Dostoevsky; and finally, when everything in the country seems to be returning to normal, a return to the old trough. Since today "a writer is required to transform life's impressions into a text that brings in maximum profit," then his hero is left obediently following the fickle tactics of extracting it; these tactics are fed to the "creators" by the demons of the market -

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marketers ("rocketologists" and "marketers," as T. reinterprets the fatal word that has flown into his head from the 21 st century).

The point, however, is not that T. is forced to become the hero of literary trash, rather than something more respectable. And it's not even that his feelings and actions, fragmenting his personality, are the responsibility of not one, but a bunch of demiurges, similar to the pagan gods of Princess Tarakanova (someone for eroticism, someone for drive, and someone - the "metaphysician of the absolute", the ironic hypostasis of Pelevin himself - for the efforts of the searching consciousness).

The relationship between author and hero is a question that, while important for narrative art, is essentially both religious and philosophical. The novel contains an episode depicting the infusion of one of the characters, through Kabbalistic magic, into Hamlet - a hero not of a throwaway type, but of a classic work. As long as this participant in the experiment lived within the confines of Shakespeare's text, his inner world was Hamlet's world, but as soon as he strayed from the play's framework, he found himself in a void. The question of the demiurge as the guarantor of the created individual is raised, and whether Shakespeare is the notorious Ariel Brahman or God himself is irrelevant in this case. Is it really impossible to free oneself from such a dictate, which renders the human self secondary and derivative, and pull oneself by the hair into an autonomous existence? This is an extremely sensitive issue for Pelevin, as he has long been at odds with Christianity and, more broadly, theism. "Author" and "hero" are more fundamental concepts than what one can read about them in Roland Barthes (who, according to critics, Pelevin was inspired by). Those who complain about the blatant banality of Pelevin's novel - the confrontation between the hero and his author - I advise them to turn to the Book of Job, where this "banality" is glaringly obvious.

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