

ARTISTIC REALITY AND ITS FEATURES IN THE WORKS OF V. O. PELEVIN IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

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Abstract

This article proposes to read the book by V. O. Pelevin "Dialectics of the Transitional Period from Nowhere to Nowhere" through intertextual references to the poem by N. V. Gogol "Dead Souls". Modifications of the images of the troika bird and dead souls, as well as references to the facts of the life of the Russian classic are revealed. The identified elements allow us to determine one of the thematic blocks in the book - the theme of the historical path of Russia and the development of society.

Keywords: V. Pelevin, postmodernism, playing with the reader, narrative structure, narrative strategy.

Introduction

The works of the famous contemporary Russian writer V. Pelevin, from our point of view, are distinguished by obvious, intentionally roughened intertextual and autointertextual connections. Moreover, it can be said that intertextuality in V. Pelevin as a postmodernist writer is "the main artistic device through which the conceptuality of the text is realized" [2. p. 10]. As I. Yatsenko notes, "intertexts in a postmodernist text are organizing structures, and the study of one or another intertext will inevitably lead to penetration into the meaning of the postmodernist text" [2. p. 10]. In this regard, V. Pelevin's book "Dialectics of the Transitional Period from Nowhere to Nowhere" is a rather striking example. The writer refers to a variety of Russian and foreign cultural pretexts, ranging from ancient mythology and Russian classics of the 19th century to "Star Wars" and Pokemon (Japanese cartoon pocket monsters). The intertextual layer of Russian classics is quite clearly revealed: the pages of the novel "flicker" with allusions and reminiscences of the so-called "programmatic" texts of the 19th century: "Eugene Onegin" by A.S. Pushkin, "Crime and Punishment", "The Idiot" and "The Brothers Karamazov" by F.M. Dostoevsky, "Resurrection" by L.N. Tolstoy, "Dead Souls" by N.V. Gogol, "The Death of a Poet" by M.Yu. Lermontov, "The Lady with the Dog" by A.P. Chekhov, "What is to be Done?" by N.G. Chernyshevsky. Each of the named pretexts plays an important role in understanding the meaning of the book, however, within the framework of this work, we will turn only to Gogol's reminiscences, which organize one of the thematic blocks in "DPP(NN)1" and allow us to read the book in the context of the search for Russia's historical path. V. Pelevin's books are relevant because they reflect the Russian reality close to the time of their writing. The author clearly and sharply reacts to crisis situations in the life of Russia: be it politics, business, information boom, corruption, banking fraud, etc., presenting in his work apt, vivid and sometimes sharply satirical plots-interpretations. Moreover, they often have a real or fictional esoteric background (the Sumerian cult of the goddess Ishtar, Zen Buddhism, the Chinese "Book of Changes", the teachings



of Che Guevara, lycanthropy, the teachings of the super-werewolf, the cult of amitafo, etc.). At the beginning of the writer's creative path, his texts were filled with anti-Soviet pathos ("OMON Ra" – the mythical nature of Soviet space, "The Recluse and the Six-Fingered Man" – a bird incubator as a model of the society of the Land of Soviets), in the nineties, in Pelevin's books, Russia is presented in the perestroika and post-perestroika periods ("Chapaev and Emptiness", "Generation "P""), at the beginning of the 21st century – a new transitional period of Russia on the threshold of two millennia, the so-called period of "paradigmatic shift" [2. p. 34].

It is in this era that the characters of the novel Numbers, the story Macedonian Critique of French Thought, and the stories One Vog, Akiko, and Focus Group live: bankers Stepan Mikhailov and Georgiy Srakandayev, secretary-referent Myus Dzhulianovna, the son of an oil oligarch Kika Nafikov, Jedi major Lenya Lebedkin, the Chechen brothers Isa and Musa, the fortuneteller Prostislav, the PR technologist Malyuta (known to us from the novel Generation P), Ytsuken, and others. Each of the characters is captive to their own personal consumer identity: "But in the post-industrial era, the main thing is not the consumption of material objects, but the consumption of images, since images have a much greater capital intensity. Therefore, in the West, we take on an unspoken obligation to consume images of ourselves..." [2. p. 81]. Thus, Stepan and Georgy – antipode heroes – live by the numbers 34 and 43, and each of them has a double identity: Stepa is the Pikachu Pokemon and at the same time the embodiment of the number 34, Zhora is the Donkey 7 cents and 43. Mus consumes the image of himself as a Pokemon, Lebedkin – the killer Leon from the film of the same name and the Jedi from George Lucas's Star Wars, Kika Nafikov fell into the captivity of a schizophrenic interpretation of Baudrillard's work "Symbolic Exchange and Death", and the kamikazes Isa and Musa dream of reaching the stage of a shrapnel-fragmented body. The characters in the story "Focus Group", unlike those mentioned above, also represent a cross-section of average people who have died and entered some kind of afterlife ("Focus Group" is one of the methods of social survey in advertising marketing): Desdemona, Barbie, The Lady with the Dog, Motherland, Montigomo, Teletubby and Excellent Student. It is important to note that the book clearly shows the process of depersonalization of characters – people of the post-industrial era: consumer images, social and cultural clichés and brands become human names, and among them proper names also lose their individuality, and social statuses become brands: "This is the consumption of images associated with material objects. <...> I am the Pokemon Myus. <...> your friend Lebedkin – he is a Jedi. And Tony Blair smiles at us from the TV – he is the Prime Minister" [2. p. 82]; "SCANDINAVIA, ARMANI, GUCCI, PRADA, BURBERRY, BRABUS, MERCEDES GELANDEWAGEN, VICHY PUETAINE, TRINIDAD FUNDADORES, KREMLIN" [2. p. 303-304]. The final stage of depersonalization is reflected in the name of the character in the story "Akiko": Qwerty is just six buttons in a row on a computer keyboard (qwerty). All the characters in the book, central and episodic, are closely connected by the plot: Isa and Mussa "protect" the owner of the "pocket" bank Stepa Mikhailov, Myus is his secretary and sexual partner, as well as the object of discussion of the level of glamour in the women's toilet of the restaurant "Scandinavia" (the story "One Vog"), Srakandaev is Stepan's antipode partner in banking, Malyuta creates for Mikhailov and Srakandaev a television project "Chubayka and Zyuzya", Major Lebedkin replaces the "protection" of Stepan Mikhailov and Georgy Srakandaev, and then leaves for the fifth main department for combating terrorism on the Internet, Kika Nafikov is the owner of an oil company for which the antipode bankers work. The character of



the story "Akiko" at the address of the credit card coordinates turns out to be one of the employees of "Alfa-Bank", like others, part of a single banking system of money laundering, and the seven deceased in "Focus Group" turn out to be witnesses to the transition of the absurdly deceased Georgy Srakandaev to another, "better" world. The plot connects all the characters of the part "The Power of the Great" into a single knot, presenting us with a grotesque model of modern Russian society. Moreover, the author consistently puts forward the idea that the mechanism of information consumption and interaction, which Russia represents in the book, is only a part, a "cog" in a more global - world mechanism of consumption: "Do you even know how many people are in the chain? <...> This used to be a country. And now the whole free world, get it, no? And the unfree one too" [2. p. 259].

The leitmotif of the section "The Power of the Great" is the idea of emptiness, the falsity of the consumed images of oneself and various faiths in the "religious market": "And one more thing," Binga called out to him (Stepan Mikhailova – A.V.), "the solar number can be anything. And the lunar one too. It's not about the numbers, it's about something completely different <...> If you don't see it right now," she said, "who and when will explain it to you?" [2. p. 34]. At the end of the novel "Numbers," Stepan Mikhailov is very close to answering the question of what is really important and true: the number 34, written in binary code, appeared in the form of a hexagram of the "Book of Changes" with the meaning "mistakes of youth, underdevelopment." However, the hero could not get rid of the habit of consciousness and, having lost the fetish number, found a new one. One of the main ideas of "The Power of the Great" is the idea of the falsity, the simulative nature of the world created by human consciousness and existing only in it. The connection with the leitmotif of searching for the wind is obvious, becoming a metaphor for the "quiet voice of truth", which can be heard, according to the author, only under the condition of complete silence, and therefore, the absence of words and the world they create, that is, emptiness. The initial untruthfulness of the self-identification of the characters of "The Power of the Great", their grotesque images, mutated axiology, as well as the depersonalization of the inhabitants of the Russian "post-industrial society" depicted in the book speak of the simulative nature of the very existence of V. Pelevin's characters. The unquoted title of N.V. Gogol's poem, as well as the nickname given to the writer by Senkovsky, Bulgarin and the Slavophiles - Homer [1. p. 19], used by the author in "Elegy 2", a kind of introduction to "DPP(NN)", allows us to draw a parallel with Gogol's landowners, "dead" Russia:

*"Homer, your list of dead souls
In the middle already" [2. p. 5].*

This allusive connection with Dead Souls introduces a new layer of meaning into the theme of Russia's path: on the one hand, the characters in V. Pelevin's book are, to some extent, "dead souls" existing in an innumerable number of simulacra, having driven themselves into a virtual dead end by the power of their own minds alone, spiritually degrading (spirituality ("spiritual fast food") in the writer's book is on a par with such consumer products as prestigious cars, brands of the best fashion designers, invisible cocktails, etc.). That is, in relation to the characters in The Power of the Great, we can talk about their spiritual, "symbolic" death, and it ("Macedonian Critique of French Thought") covers the entire country, and moreover, the entire world (remember: N.V. Gogol wrote about the intention to show all of Russia as it is). Thus, the author of "DPP(NN)," making a social cross-section of modern society, consistently carries out the idea of emptiness,



the falsity of any stereotype/simulacrum and the amazing power of the human mind, capable of endowing any thing or phenomenon with sacred power. Sacred power of such a degree that it is no longer human mental constructions that move the world created in their consciousness, but invented simulacra that control their creators. On the other hand, "dead souls" (in combination with the name of Homer) also introduce into the thematic complex a deeply philosophical motif of the author's silence (symbolic death of the author) and give the artistic world of the book a broad epic scope. Like N.V. Gogol, who burned the second volume of the poem, the author of "DPP(NN)" in the image of a student of the Gradual Ordering of Chaos ("Record of the Search for the Wind", part of "ZhZL"), having seen the Great Path, in search of truth comes to only one thing: it is necessary to shut up, to stop producing words, the world will disappear, and it is in this emptiness that the "quiet voice of truth" will flash: "... words are always dualistic, subject-object <...> They are capable of reflecting only conceptual thinking, and truth has not even spent the night there. Words at best can try to indicate the direction, and even then approximately." [2. p. 162].

Of no small importance in the implementation of the theme of Russia's historical path in the 20th century, from our point of view, is the appearance in the text of "Numbers" of the famous image of Gogol's troika: "Both Styopa and Srakandayev were small living cogs in the engine of an incomprehensible Mercedes - a birch "Gelandewagen" with three flashing lights, which replaced Gogol's troika, and just as irresistibly - hark! - rushed to nowhere across the snowy plain of history" (emphasis added - A.V.) [2. p. 127]. Undoubtedly, the "birch "Gelandewagen" with three flashing lights", like the troika, is a symbol of Russia, new, in the period of the so-called "paradigmatic shift" on the border of two millennia. The change in the traditional image of the troika indicates a substitution of the essence of the main question. If in "Dead Souls" the question was asked: "Rus', where are you rushing, give me an answer..." (emphasis added – A.V.), then in "Numbers" the classic philosophical question of the author of the poem is transformed: not where, but how. Because the direction of movement of the history of Russia, humanity, an individual human life and its consciousness on the path to truth is designated by the author on the very first page of the book – in the title: "Dialectics of the Transitional Period from Nowhere to Nowhere" (emphasis added – A.V.). The word "dialectics" implies the very processuality of the path, the importance of how the movement goes, and not where, since the direction of the path is set by negative adverbs with the meaning of place: from nowhere to nowhere. Thus, the writer introduces into the book the image of emptiness, traditional for his work, which acquires the features of truth. Since the course of Russian history in the twentieth century, in our opinion, is only one of the thematic blocks in "DPP(NN)". In addition, dialectics is one of the main methods of philosophical cognition of the world, based on the analysis of all possible points of view on the subject under study. As a rule, such a comprehensive analysis of various points of view comes down to a clash of two opposing essential positions, which are usually called thesis and antithesis. It is this method that structures the artistic world in the book: each text of the book presents various facets of perception of the process designated as a "paradigmatic shift" - in stories, a novel and a story, attention is paid to one or another character of the book, which, as we have already said, are closely connected by plot. In this way, dialogicity of points of view and a properly dialectical depiction of the picture of the world are achieved.

The book by V. Pelevin, despite the apparent disunity of the works included in it, from our point



of view, is a single text, distinguished by its thematic multi-layeredness. This multi-layeredness is created and structured by various cultural intertexts. Thus, Gogol's reminiscences create a new layer of reading the book and contribute to the implementation of the theme of Russia's historical path, which (theme - A.V.), receiving an esoteric background in the text, unfolds into a more global one: the theme of the so-called "damned" questions - where, how and why a person lives. Finally, at the end of "DPP(NN)" the theme of the Path expands and abstracts, opening into a new semantic layer of the novel: the search for the path to Truth, ending in death, silence, emptiness: in the moment between simulacra of oneself clothed in words and replacing each other.

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