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MOTIFS OF ESCHATOLOGY IN THE EARLY PROSE OF VICTOR PELEVIN

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Abstract
The lack of research into Viktor Pelevin's work and the role of eschatological motifs and images refracted through the prism of postmodernism in his works determines the relevance of this study. Its aim is to examine the peculiarities of the embodiment of images of eschatological mythology and their selection in the process of the author's creation of novels in the 1990s.
This article examines the use of motifs and images from eschatological mythology in Viktor Pelevin's novels of the 1990s, as well as the metaphorization of the author's surrounding reality with their help. The object of study is the first four novels by V. Pelevin in chronological order: Omon Ra (1992), Life of Insects (1993), Chapaev and Void (1996), and Generation 'P' (1999). After writing these, the author took a break from writing until 2003.

Keywords: Postmodern novel, novels by Victor Pelevin, mythological novel, eschatological plot, eschatological novel.

Introduction

This selection of works for analysis is due to the fact that in them, the theme of Soviet decadence gradually gives way to the realities of the "new" Russia of the new Russians, but does not yet go beyond the post-perestroika discourse: the generation (including readers) that had not known the pioneer movement, society had not yet immersed itself in ubiquitous mobile communications and the internet, the country was in the throes of economic crisis and still harboured illusions about the friendship and assistance of the West, the Putin era and the era of the global war on terror had not yet begun. These circumstances left their mark on Pelevin's novels of the 1990s. As Frumkin notes, Pelevin "is a writer of the previous era who found himself in a new era," "he is a classic, somewhat old-fashioned writer who is

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terribly surprised by the coming era of virtual worlds and hallucinogenic technologies" [13. p. 43]. During this period of creative calm, the author published only the short story "Timeout, or Evening Moscow" (2001) and several essays. In subsequent novels, Soviet themes perform slightly different functions and take on other forms. According to N.I. Shrom, Pelevin, as a postmodernist writer, is "characterized by an eschatological fin de siècle mindset." [4. p. 143]. Eschatological motifs permeate all of his works to one degree or another. The end of the century intensifies these motifs in his work, while in the novel Numbers (2003), a certain contrast can already be observed in the worldview of the eras.

According to A. Genis, Pelevin treats reality in exactly the same way as artists have always done: he mythologizes it [1. p. 82]. The problems of mythology in Pelevin's works have been examined in the works of V.I. Demin, A.V. Dmitriev, D.N. Zarubina, A.S. Nemzer, M.V. Repina, and others.

In search of a suitable mythological framework for the bizarre artifacts of Soviet civilization, Pelevin turns to archaic beliefs, to the most ancient layers of consciousness (A. Genis) [1. p. 83]. In his works, Pelevin focuses only on certain mythologies or their combinations: ancient Egyptian, Sumerian-Akkadian, Indian, Tibetan, Germanic-Scandinavian, and North American Indian, as well as on motifs from religious traditions such as Abrahamic, Buddhist, and Taoist. At the same time, as A. Belov notes, "ignoring scientific research in the field of ancient Babylonian beliefs, Pelevin prefers to invent them himself, mixing ancient myths of all countries and peoples into a single vinaigrette" [2. p. 37].

Frumkin notes that Pelevin writes "as they wrote in the good old days of realism," that in his works "everything is logical, everything is complete, the plot lines are not left unfinished" [13]. However, his novels strive to provide comprehensive, mythologically definitive answers to the questions "how?", "why?", and "what for?", but at the same time, they always appear to the reader only as the beginning of a phrase, the beginning of an explanation, the beginning of a myth with the ending "to be continued." Their mythological nature is realized through the reflection of mythological plots accumulated by world literary creativity. The embodiment of eschatological motifs in this external aspect of the mythological nature of Pelevin's four novels is the subject of our consideration. The problems of eschatology in Pelevin's works have already been addressed by V.Y. Irkhin, M.I. Katsnelson, N.G. Likhina, N.L. Shilova, and others.

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According to S.M. Telegin: "At the turn of the 20 th and 21 st centuries, inRussia we encountered not just a mythological novel, but an eschatological one,that is, a work that reveals not only the mythologicalcontent or basis of existence, but also its eschatological prognosis [11, p. 184].Often in the modern world, the eschatologization of the consciousness of the ordinary person is associated witha sense of loss of stability and growing aggression. For the masses,stability is of paramount importance. Only a stable and unchanging past gives a persona sense of confidence in a stable present and a better future. It is worth taking away aperson's belief in the past (in the infallibility of the mythological paradigm), andeschatological sentiments will begin to grow in relation to the future, andambitious-paranoid sentiments in relation to the present [10, p. 73]. According to eschatological myths, social instability threatens the stability of the cosmos. At the same time, the search for a way out of the universal cycle, indifferent to human destinies, leads to another, supernatural world, aimed at attaining a supersensory state—Buddhist nirvana, or eternal bliss in the afterlife, as in Egyptian mythology. Eschatological mythology is actualized in connection with the intensifying sense of the transience of being. The archaic desire to strengthen the stability of the cosmos through ritual means is replaced by a tense anticipation of a final universal catastrophe, which is supposed to bring deliverance from the misfortunes of this world (V.N. Toporov) [12, p. 670]. It is precisely these moods that the author creates in his novels.

In Pelevin's novels, both large-scale, cosmic (from the Greek “κόσμος” – “world”) and small-scale, personal eschatology are easily discernible. Thus, as a particular case of its realization, on a social and personal level, the characters in the novels experience the collapse of their ideas about the world, i.e., its destruction, end, and, often, the symbolic death of the hero and his rebirth in a new capacity. This eschatology is directly linked for the characters to life discoveries that, as a rule, dispel or distance the prospect of a “bright future,” even though they believed that it existed somewhere: for Omon, it is the discovery of the behind-the-scenes reality of flights to the moon; for the maturing heroes of The Life of Insects, it is the realization of the harsh reality of life's predestination; for Pustota, it is the realization that the reality from which he will escape will be replaced by another, no better; for Tatarsky, it is the realization of the illusory nature of what he previously took for predictable reality. Pelevin's individual-personal eschatology is

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more often a judgment passed on the heroes by circumstances, but... according to the laws of inexplicable postmodern karma. Even for Vavilen Tatarsky, who has achieved not only personal safety but practically world domination, judgment and a death sentence are only a matter of time. Sometimes, the death of a character is described in a very touching way, as in the case of the dung beetle in The Life of Insects.

On a cosmic level, Pelevin's eschatology is most vividly revealed on the political plane—it is the collapse of the state, the state system, the system, and the social order. Thus, in Omon Ra, it is sarcasm about wooden dummies and other inconsistencies between declarations or slogans and reality, "virtual realities created by totalitarian violence and totalitarian propaganda" [13]. In The Life of Insects, it is the hopeless, hopeless darkness of an all-determining, miserable environment, part of which is implied to be the social order or system, which was particularly vividly conveyed by the description of the life of ants. In Generation "P," it is the debunking of the soap bubbles of political image and the illusory possibility for the people to be the source of power. But in all the novels, it is the contrast between the decline of the state and the personal desire for life and a bright future as one of the eschatological alternatives.

In V. Pelevin's works, the myth of a bright future is presented in a simulated manner, revealing its symbolic nature, devoid of sacred meaning (E.A. Kurochkina) [3, p. 75]. Such is the desire of Omon for the moon, insects for light or their human projections for a better life, Vavilen Tatarsky for the top of the "ziggurat," and Peter Pustota for enlightenment. But while in the latter case the characters achieve their goals at least virtually, in the first three this is unattainable. The nature of this unattainability in the novel The Life of Insects is well conveyed by the words of the American mosquito Sam to the prostitute fly in response to her request to take her away with him: "You see, Natasha..."

According to E.A. Kurochkina, the profanation of the myth of a "bright future" is presented in The Life of Insects through a literal reproduction of this metaphor—moth-like people strive toward bright lights at night [3, p. 75]. The future that the characters in Pelevin's novels strive for is not Paradise—it is precisely a "bright future."

K. Makeeva points out that almost all of Pelevin's works show the idea of the characters getting absolute freedom and reaching the highest level of development

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of their Ego, as a stage at which they learn, understand, and express themselves, quoting S. Kuznetsov: “Whoever his characters may be—chickens, insects, dead people, or cosmonauts—they gradually realize the illusory nature of ‘reality’ and strive toward true existence, symbolized by the world outside the window” [4, p. 45].

An alternative to the “bright future” in Pelevin's novels is presented by the idea of a bleak afterlife or hell.

Thus, according to S. Nekrasov, “The Life of Insects” is a kind of paraphrase of Dante's “Divine Comedy,” in which Soviet reality turns out to be a peculiar version of hell, where the torment of hell is represented by the hopeless experience of specific states of mind [5, p. 48].

Eschatological motifs of hell occupy a special place in the novel Chapaev and Pustota. Chapaev and Petka discuss philosophy and the structure of the universe, visit the afterlife, and at the end of the novel drown in the Ural River—the “conditional river of absolute love” that brings liberation from the wheel of Samsara (S. Nekrasov) [5, p. 49].

The posthumous fate of the human soul turns out to be no less pressing for Pelevin's characters, who inhabit the turn of the 20th century, than it was for medieval admirers of the visionary genre [14, p. 9]. She highlights two passages in the novel Chapaev and Void, where motifs of hell are presented in the story of Kolyan, who translates a pamphlet about the “afterlife” into criminal slang: "I read what happens after death. In real life, everything is familiar. I recognized it right away. Kapaze, court, amnesty, term, article. To die is like going from prison to the zone. They send your soul to this heavenly transit station, called Mytarstva. Everything is as it should be, two guards, all the paperwork, solitary confinement below, paradise above. And on this transit, they pin crimes on you—your own and others'—and you have to defend yourself against each charge, etc." Eschatological motifs also determine the content of the key episode of the seventh chapter, in which Pustota, accompanied by the mysterious and powerful Baron Jungern, takes a peculiar tour of the latter's “domain” – Valhalla, “one of the branches of the afterlife.” The structure of the episode corresponds to one of the basic canons of the genre, in which a visionary, with the help of a competent guide, visits the afterlife, where he learns about its structure and gathers information about the afterlife of people [14, p. 10].

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The image of this otherworldly place can serve as one example of the author's postmodern cultural eclecticism: “This is one of the branches of the afterlife,” said Jungern, "the one that concerns me. It is mainly people who were soldiers in their lifetime who end up here. Perhaps you have heard of Valhalla?“ But, in fact, only the phrase ”this idiotic rule about the sword in the hand“ refers to Valhalla, and Pelevin's atmosphere is more reminiscent of Helheim. At the same time, it is not hell, because: ”It looks like they will be bulls at a meat processing plant. Such leniency is common nowadays. Partly because of Buddha's infinite mercy, partly because there is a constant shortage of meat in Russia." Here, the “six-armed deity with sabers in his hands” is not so much the lord of Buddhist hell, Naraka-Yama Dharmaraja, whom the author probably alludes to, but a creature with an appearance more characteristic of one of the dharmapalas, the defenders of Buddhist teachings. Thus, Pelevin's afterlife in the novel Chapaev and Void can hardly be associated with a single cultural and religious tradition.

Equally bizarre is the combination of Sumerian-Akkadian mythology with Germanic-Scandinavian mythology in the description of the supposed end of the world in the novel Generation P," where, alongside the description of the goddess Ishtar, the image of a sleeping dog suggests that of a chthonic monster, the giant demon wolf Fenrir, or his doppelganger, the dog Garm.

Pelevin uses eschatological images and motifs as metaphors for the socio-political reality surrounding him. The coding of images of the surrounding reality in metaphors and comparisons in Pelevin's novels is so detailed, comprehensive, hyperbolic, and grotesque that it could be compared to the semiotic hybridization in the works of James Joyce or Hieronymus Bosch.

Thus, in Pelevin's novels of the 1990s, we can observe the metaphorization of the reality surrounding the author through motifs and images of eschatological mythology. Motifs of the end of the world, journeys to the afterlife, rebirth in a new form, and the cyclical nature of rebirth can be traced. There are also reminiscences of Dante's hell and hell as represented in Eastern religions. At the same time, all images of eschatological mythology in the author's works reveal features of cultural eclecticism.

The topic under consideration may be of practical interest in the creation of courses on the history of modern Russian literature and the modern literary process, as well as for further research in the field of eschatological themes in the postmodern novel.

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There is hardly any doubt left that the system of symbols used by modern Russian mass media is completely false and expresses the ideology of consumption, and that this symbolic umbrella is covering the country more and more tightly. Everyone everywhere, including the mass media, is saying that something must be done to prevent future generations from being lost in this ever-strengthening system of false symbols. But in order to oppose something, you have to know what that something is. Viktor Pelevin's novel Generation "P," whose main theme is the rejection of consumerist ideology, is of great interest in this regard.

A few words about Pelevin's work in general. His novels tell of virtual worlds based on systems of false symbols. The author has an extraordinary sensitivity to the immersion of man in words and the conditioning of human life (from elementary everyday existence to lofty aspirations) by the quality of those words. Words create both the world and man; they stand between man and reality, between man and his self. Man lives in a virtual world created by language and speech. His living space is shaped by a system of mythologems. The heroes of Pelevin's novels are prisoners of systems of false names: Soviet-style communism (Omon Ra), the value system of the cooperative era (The Life of Insects), the whole complex of mass phenomena of the 1990s (Chapaev and Void, Generation "P"). They are incapable of either soberly assessing reality or breaking through to their true selves.

The central plot of the novel Generation "P," around which the entire system of contextual metaphors and symbols develops, is the rebirth of the main character, Vavilen Tatarsky, from a writer to a copywriter, and his professional and career growth as a media worker. This process is simultaneously a gradual depersonalization of the hero, consisting in the suppression of his personality and the formation of an identity (a system of commercial symbols) in its place, and, ultimately, the transformation of the hero himself into a commercial symbol. The artistic reality of the novel is the fruit of the author's free play with the names of real trademarks, the names of real political figures (both of which he classifies as market products), as well as ancient myths and historical facts. The author explains his right to do so by the fact that all of them are empty forms existing in virtual worlds long ago entangled in the snares of the false word of the human mind. These forms acquire their meaning only after receiving a certain ideological content. Ideology (i.e., what motivates people's actions) in the commercial and political information space in which the novel's action unfolds is established by Mammon—

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here a symbol of the ideology of consumption that is engulfing Russian society. The novel draws a direct parallel between the ideology of consumption, which turns a person into an identity, and the enemy of humanity.

The falseness of names, leading to the destruction of both man and the world, is the main theme of the novel. All the names that make up the hero's life, both past and present, are false. They are false, relative, and empty, capable of disappearing and turning into anything. Even the hero's own name is false. He perceives this state of affairs as an opportunity for unlimited freedom to manipulate words, as an opportunity to create his own false names. Once he realizes this fact, the protagonist also understands the power that these opportunities give a person. In search of power and money, he becomes a media worker and embarks on the path of creating false names.

The hero's name, given to him by his father, a member of the 1960s generation, is Vavilen, which combines the names of Vasily Aksyonov and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and is a false mythological motif of the 1960s. Ashamed of his name (and thus rejecting his father's ideology), the hero prefers to be called simply Vladimir. It is during this period that the author, like Diogenes, goes in search of a man in the market and finds him in Vavilen Tatarsky, a writer who dreams of living and working for eternity. But the era changes and the system of symbols changes, eternity disappears and is replaced by uncertainty, the main problem of which is survival. Vladimir once again becomes Vavilen, but now he is a man named after the ancient city of Babylon, a symbol of pride, the desire for power, the loss of true language, the confusion of languages, and the towering of nations. All these motifs are developed in the novel. But the main thing is the author's mythological motif of the Great Lottery — a game with no name, which involves solving three market riddles. The only way to play is to either solve the riddles or die. The winner gains access to the Babylonian ziggurat, where he ascends to join the golden idol of the goddess Ishtar and becomes her husband (this symbolizes the acquisition of the greatest wealth and supreme power, which in this system means the greatest wisdom). Such is the hero's life path: he manages to solve all the riddles and rise to the level of the first person on television - the ziggurat of consumer society. In reality, this path to the top turns out to be a path down - to an underground room in Ostankino (an analogue of the underworld), where nothing but money, not even human life, matters.

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The beginning of a new life for Vavilen is marked by the disappearance of the old system of symbols and the emergence of something that does not yet have a name: uncertainty, where everyone learns about everything from television and newspapers. The game that the hero enters, becoming a copywriter on the first step of his career in the media—the main myth-generating machine of consumer society — has no name. The slogan NO NAME accompanies the hero at all stages of his career and is an indicator of the correct direction. The absence of a name is the same as a false name, that is, the realm of the prince of darkness.

Having risen from the bottom to the top of the media structure, the hero masters the goals and principles of this structure, the goals and principles of creating false names and symbols.

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