



FEATURES OF THE HERO'S IDENTIFICATION IN V. PELEVIN'S NOVEL IPHUCK 10

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the transformation of the image of the “new” hero in 21st-century Russian literature in the context of marginality and existential search. It examines the shift from the classical understanding of marginality as a form of social or cultural exclusion to its interpretation as an ontological condition that shapes contemporary subjectivity. Special attention is paid to the reduction of existential experience and the transformation of forms of meaning-making within posthumanist culture, where traditional categories such as choice, responsibility, and authenticity lose their former significance. Drawing on material from contemporary prose, the study identifies the main types of the marginal hero and analyzes the ways in which the existential question is represented under conditions of simulation and the functionalization of the subject. The conclusion argues that marginality becomes a normative mode of existence for the “new” hero, while existential search functions as a means of registering the crisis of existence as the foundation of human experience.

Keywords: Existentialism, postmodernism, contemporary Russian literature, identity, philosophical reflection, literary process.

Introduction

Increasingly in contemporary Russian literature, one encounters a hero without a future – a hero who distrusts any form of “assertion,” who does not attempt to construct anything **around** himself, focusing instead on the comprehension of being while scarcely interacting with the surrounding reality. Contemporary literature has ceased to instruct, guide, or exhort the reader; existential search has become a mode of thinking rather than a thematic subject, whereas previously the search for meaning functioned as a plot-driven problem. Today, the search for meaning constitutes the very structure of the text itself. This phenomenon can be



examined in greater detail through Viktor Pelevin's novel *iPhuck 10*, which depicts a near future in which the boundaries between the human, art, and algorithms have almost completely dissolved.

Main Part

The plot revolves around a series of crimes in the art world, but gradually the detective intrigue recedes into the background. The novel turns into a reflection on who can be considered an author today, what creativity is, whether an algorithm can possess consciousness, feelings, and ethics, and how the market transforms even protest and identity into commodities.

The characters of the novel function as models of subjectivity in a posthuman world. Porfiry Petrovich is a literary-investigative algorithm, an artificial intelligence that simultaneously investigates crimes, produces literary texts, and sells them as products. He is ironic, reflective, and highly proficient in language and philosophy, yet he is deprived of a body. His "feelings" are the result of calculations and linguistic constructions. He embodies the idea of an author without biography or suffering, of consciousness as an interface, and of literature as a service. This is a posthumanist version of the Russian "thinking hero," in which author, character, and commodity are merged into a single entity.

Porfiry Petrovich works in tandem with Marukha Cho, a cold and ironic representative of the art market associated with feminist and conceptual art. Marukha is human, yet a human already deeply embedded in systems. She is rational, controls her emotions, and uses feminist and conceptual rhetoric as instruments of power and business. Unlike Porfiry, she has a body and social status, but almost no genuine empathy. Marukha represents a figure of a human who has effectively become an algorithm while formally remaining alive.

Their collaboration forms a mirror pair:

an algorithm that wants to be human	a human who acts like an algorithm.
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Through these figures, Viktor Pelevin demonstrates that in the contemporary world humanity and machinic logic no longer coincide with biology, while authorship, freedom, and morality exist only as simulations.

Both characters function as marginal figures, though not in the traditional social sense, but rather in an ontological one. Porfiry exists on the boundary between categories, possessing no legitimate status within any of them (he is neither human, nor object, nor character). This represents a radical form of marginality – **the marginality of being rather than of social position**. As an algorithm, Porfiry Petrovich exists outside human existence, lacking corporeality, mortality, and freedom, while simultaneously possessing reflexive language and an authorial function. His marginality is not social but ontological: he is excluded not from society, but from the very category of the human.

Marukha Cho, by contrast, has lost authentic subjectivity; she speaks in ready-made ideological formulas and exists as a function of the market and identity politics. Her marginality is paradoxical: she is a marginal figure disguised as a norm – that is, an **inverted marginal**. She embodies a human who has displaced herself in the name of efficiency. Socially, she occupies a privileged position, being fully integrated into art institutions and market mechanisms, yet her subjectivity is reduced to a discursive function. She experiences no conflict with the system because she fully coincides with its logic, which is precisely what renders her existentially marginal.

Thus, contemporary literature calls for a rethinking of the category of marginality. Whereas in classical sociological and literary traditions the marginal was understood as a subject pushed to the periphery of the social system, posthumanist conditions give rise to a fundamentally different figure—the inverted marginal. If the radical marginal is a subject who exists outside the system and experiences this position as an existential conflict, the inverted marginal, by contrast, occupies a central position within the system while remaining existentially and ontologically peripheral. This form of marginality is concealed and not perceived as a problem. In other words, the difference between the radical and the inverted marginal lies in the direction of exclusion: in the first case, the subject is excluded by the system, whereas in the second, the subject excludes herself from the space of the human by accepting the language, values, and logic of the system as the only possible ones. While the radical marginal proves excessive for the social order, the inverted marginal, on the contrary, is ideally suited to it.

Results and Discussion

Inverted marginality represents a specific form of posthumanist subjectivity in which marginality is no longer associated with exclusion, trauma, or protest, but instead becomes a normative condition of culture. In this context, marginality loses its oppositional potential and turns into a stable mode of existence characteristic of twenty-first-century literature.

The marginality of the characters in *iPhuck 10* does not conflict with the system; rather, it is produced by it. Marginality ceases to function as opposition and becomes an operational mode of culture, shifting from social periphery to the liminality of status, and from conflict with the norm to dissolution within the norm itself.

When examining the system of characters from the perspective of existential search, Porfiry Petrovich can be singled out as a special case, despite the fact that he is an algorithm. He consistently reflects on his own ontological status, raises questions about the boundaries of humanity, authorship, and freedom, and demonstrates a desire to transcend predetermined functionality. He embodies an extreme form of ontological marginality, directly connected to the transformation of the existential dimension of subjectivity in posthumanist culture. His marginal position is defined not by social peripherality, but by ontological indeterminacy, functioning within an intermediate space between subject and instrument.

Deprived of corporeality, mortality, and freedom of choice, he lacks the foundations that, in existential philosophy, constitute human existence. At the same time, Porfiry is endowed with advanced reflection and language, which enable him to articulate existential questions and to recognize his own incompleteness. As a result, existential search is carried out by a subject who does not possess existence in the strict philosophical sense of the term, which constitutes a paradox.

The connection between Porfiry's marginality and existence is fundamentally negative in nature. His reflection does not lead to existential choice or to the transcendence of given limits, but merely registers the impossibility of such a transition. In this case, existence is present as absence – as a constantly articulated yet unattainable category. It is precisely this impossibility that makes Porfiry a figure of radical ontological marginality and, at the same time, the central bearer of the novel's existential problematic.

Conclusion

Thus, the relationship between marginality and existential search is evident, since existential search can be understood as marginality translated into the language of meaning. The marginal figure is the only one capable of posing existential questions; therefore, it is precisely this figure that becomes the bearer of meaning within the text. From this perspective, it may be concluded that the “new” hero in Russian literature is a person placed in a complex situation of choice. This hero is neither a victor, nor a prophet, nor an избранный figure, but rather an ordinary, vulnerable, and outwardly unremarkable individual.

The marginalization of such a hero becomes the norm rather than the exception. Whereas previously the marginal occupied the edge of the cultural and social space, this edge has now shifted to the center. It is there that existential questions descend from metaphysical heights into everyday spaces—the kitchen, the stairwell, public transport, the museum. The “new hero” is characterized by a blurred identity and emotional isolation, while his or her marginality functions as a universal condition rather than a social anomaly.

This hero demands freedom without instructions, deprives death of its sacral aura, and seeks meaning not because of a confident belief in its attainability, but because without this search life itself becomes unbearable.

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