Death of the Author (?) in Viktor Pelevin's Novels: Power, Conspiracy, and Disappointment

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore a contradiction implicit within postmodernist thought which concerns the question of authorship. It suggests that Roland Barthes's "death of the author" might well be incompatible with the capitalist mentality which has become a theme of as well as an external condition for the existence of postmodern literature. A focused analysis of selected texts by Viktor Pelevin's demonstrates this problem and suggests a possible resolution, at least within this author's works: there seems to be a shift of focus from the 'author' (as conceived by V.V. Vinogradov and perhaps assumed by Barthes), as sole and final arbiter in the question of who dictates the meaning of the text and the 'writer' as the focal point of branding (a point perhaps anticipated by Fredric Jameson). This thesis explores issues of authorship in Pelevin's *The Helmet of Horror* (*Шлем ужаса*), *Chapaev and Void*, (*Чапаев и Пустота*), *t*, and *Generation «П»* by referring to reader-response theory (an outgrowth of Barthes's death of the author), auteur theory, as well as Vinogradov's "image of the author."

Abstrait

L’objet du présent mémoire est l’analyse d’une contradiction implicite dans la pensée postmoderniste relative à la question de la paternité littéraire. Nous soutenons que la « mort de l’auteur » proclamée par Roland Barthes est incompatible avec la mentalité capitaliste qui est devenue un thème de l’existence de la littérature postmoderne ainsi qu'une de ses conditions externes. Notre analyse d’une sélection de textes de Viktor Pelevine confirme ce problème et nous amène à proposer une possible solution, du moins en ce qui concerne l’œuvre de l’auteur. Il semble y avoir un glissement (tel qu’imaginé par V.V. Vinogradov et sans doute assumé par Barthes) de l’auteur en tant qu’arbitre suprême vers l’écrivain comme seul point de marquage (ce que Fredric Jameson a sans doute anticipé). Ce mémoire explore des questions de paternité littéraire dans *Minotaure.com : Le Heaume d'horreur* (*Шлем ужаса*), *La Mitrailleuse d'argile* (*Чапаев и пустота*), *t,* ainsi que dans *Homo zapiens* (*Generation «П»*) de Pelevine en invoquant l’esthétique de la réception (un prolongement de la « mort de l’auteur » de Barthes), la théorie de l’auteur, ainsi que l’« image de l’auteur » de Vinogradov.

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A Note on Transliteration and Translation

Russian names and titles cited in this dissertations are transliterated according the Library of Congress (Modified) style. Exceptions are made when citing from published translations and studies.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations in the text are mine.

Introduction

While postmodernism, as a broad literary movement, follows somewhat distinct paths of development in countries all over the world,[1] there are certain features that remain central to any local brand of literary postmodernism. One of these is the notion of the death of the author – an idea first stated by Ronald Barthes in his essay "The Death of the Author" (1967).[2] For instance, Hans Bertens claims that the death of the author is a concept that is central to the postmodern world view along with the idea of "the emancipation of the reader," and "self-referentiality of literature" (179). Similarly, Ulrich Broich considers the death of the author as one of the "strategies and devices" of postmodernism, closely related to intertextuality which in itself is "central to a postmodernist understanding of literature" (251). This means that postmodern thought acknowledges the impossibility of writing something new, the only role left for the author is that of compiling intertextual links and constantly referring to someone else's words. It also celebrates the emancipation of the reader who is finally seen as the creator of his own meaning, the author of the text that he is reading.

However, this simple picture is complicated by the absolute domination of capitalism in today's world – a situation which, on the one hand, is the source of postmodern culture, and on the other, one of its themes. Art has become a commodity in the capitalist system, and it is fully aware of its new status. This phenomenon has been noted by quite a few scholars of postmodernism. For instance, Fredric Jameson claims that in the postmodern world, "[r]epresentation, knowledge and information become commodities; advertisements become the sign of the times; the artworld becomes a market, like any other" (qtd. in Carroll 99). Similarly, Eagleton notes: "Postmodernism,

[1] For more details on the differences between local variations of postmodernism throughout the world see Hans Bertens's and Douwe Fokkema's *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice.*
[2] A detailed discussion of this essay will follow.

confronted with this situation [contemporary commodity fetish], will then take the other way out. If the work of art really is a commodity then it might as well admit it, with all the sang froid it can muster" (368). This commodity fetish has resulted in the resurrection of the author as brand.[3] The author becomes a celebrity whose personality and individual style are a factor in the audience's decision to buy his work. Even more importantly, the figure of the writer once again becomes important in the readers' understanding of his writing. In this sense, today's author is quite similar to an *auteur* – a concept used in film theory to refer to the director as a single creative force, a source of meaning, an individual style, and a brand.

This thesis will attempt to resolve this contradiction in postmodern thought by analyzing the works of Viktor Pelevin, one of Russia's most famous postmodern writers.[4] Pelevin's work is an appropriate test case for this topic for various reasons. Firstly, many of his novels lend themselves to meta-literary readings, some of them (for instance, *t*, 2009) engage with the question of authorship directly. In fact, novels like *Shlem uzhasa* (Helmet of Horror, 2006) and *t* can potentially be read as critical/philosophical treatises on the position of the author in postmodern fiction. In addition to explicitly engaging with the concept of authorship in his literary work, Pelevin has been very persistent in enforcing a certain author-image on his reader and meticulous in his branding and marketing strategies

[3] In her analysis of Elfriede Jelinek's media image, Jeanine Tuschling reaches a similar conclusion: "in the age of modern mass media, the author is not dead, but has returned as a commodity in the social fiction of the celebrity writer" (97). It is important to note that Pelevin's case is quite different from that of Jelinek in that authorship is also the theme of his works. In addition, there are certain nuances (discussed below) in which the author-narrator distinction made in this thesis differs from that of Tuschling.

[4] Even though he himself claims to be not a postmodernist, but a turborealist (Dalton-Brown, "Illusion-Money-Illusion" 39). Andrei Lazarchuk defines turborealism as "literature of the virtual world in which we exist." Turborealist writers do not believe that it is possible to tell truth from fiction: "Turborealism implies the following: our world, in general, is a collective fantasy or, at least, a description, an information package; we get only a very small portion of information about it from our senses (and even this portion can be considered unreliable given what we know about the mechanisms of perception), we get much more in the form of messages transmitted to us by quite a few people. We do not have the opportunity to control these streams of information, nor can we check the veracity of these messages. We can only choose whether we believe them or not. In this way, any knowledge about the world can with equal probability turn out to be true and false. Turborealism realizes that there is no way to tell truth from fiction - and that, nevertheless, one has to live and make decisions in these conditions" (Lazarchuk).

as well as use of various media. A close reading and analysis of several of Pelevin's key novels demonstrates that the author is hardly dead. In fact, he is perhaps more alive than ever, seeing as he employs a variety of devices in order to conceal his own power, to trick the reader into believing that she is the creator of the text in front of him, and yet to subtly manipulate him at the same time and guide him towards an interpretation preferred by the author. In this way, the content of Pelevin's works always seeks to persuade the reader of his power vis-à-vis the text, while structure and form (literary devices) are used to assert the primacy of the author.

The novels that are particularly helpful in revealing the workings of this theme in Pelevin's overall corpus are the following: *Chapaev i Pustota* (Chapaev and Void, 1996), *Generation «П»* (1999), *Shlem uzhasa* and *t*. *Chapaev and Void* is a novel about Petr Pustota, a young man who seems to inhabit two temporalities at the same time: that of the late 1910s and the 1990s. In the former timeline, Petr fights alongside Vasilii Chapaev and falls in love with Anna, but in the latter, he is patient in a psychiatric ward participating in group therapy sessions. This novel calls for an examination of authorial presence: the layers of removal that Pelevin establishes in the foreword toy with the idea of authorship and authority. While the key message of the novel is that Petr, the protagonist, is the creator of his own world, the foreword works to undermine that idea. Similarly, even though initially the reader is given the opportunity to decide which of the two temporalities is the 'real' one, by the end of the novel this question (which most likely seems to the reader to be the main mystery of the book) becomes obsolete, the author thus takes the reins of interpretation back from the reader.

Generation «П» introduces the reader to Vavilen Tatarskii – a poet-turned-advertiser, whose 'writing' is emblematic of the death of the author: his slogans and ads are all based on quotes or ideas taken from Russian literary classics, his claim to authorship of these products is also highly doubtful for various reasons related to the nature of the 'genre' (advertising) as

well as to his own approach to the process of writing. Tatarskii's creative aspirations are also related to the death of the Russian intelligentsia which, given the literaturocentric nature of Russian culture, manifests itself in the decline of literary quality.

Helmet of Horror is perhaps even more daring in its treatment of the author. This 'internet novel[5]' essentially writes itself, or, rather, it is written by its own characters who are communicating in a virtual chatroom. *Helmet of Horror* blurs the lines between characters, the reader, and the author until it becomes completely unclear as to who is authoring what. In order to do so, the novel cleverly buries the author and dramatizes the premises of reader-response theory: the characters are isolated from each other and trapped in a labyrinth; they attempt to escape from it by engaging in the act of interpretation of the world around them and of world as text (they have to rely on the information that the others provide in the chatroom in order to understand where they are). Throughout their exchange, the reader is continuously suggested to be the actual author of the novel because he has the power of interpretation and brings his own perspective to it. Yet this suggestion is subverted when the characters turn out to be parts of the helmet of horror (multiple personalities of the same author, or agents of the cunning demiurge) which exists in order to entrap Theseus (the reader). Therefore, this novel can help explore questions like the emancipation of the character, reader-response theory, and author's manipulation of the reader. In addition, *Helmet of Horror* also constitutes a curious experiment with genre.[6] While the internet novel may be seen as a descendant of drama or of the epistolary novel, there is undoubtedly more to this choice of form than meets the eye. As such, this form resonates with many postmodernist

[5] "Internet novel" is not a recognized term, but it will be used for the sake of convenience in this thesis in order to refer to *Helmet of Horror* – a novel written in the form of an internet chat.

[6] Pelevin's decision to write this particular story in the form of a chat obligates him to accept the formal conventions that come with the internet novel. For instance, unlike a short story (or, to use an internet genre, a blog), a chat cannot have a narrator and is written by multiple contributors – by the participants of the chat. Furthermore, unlike a regular novel (but very much like a play), an internet novel cannot have a narrator. Lastly (although more could be said if this thesis was concerned with outlining the development of new contemporary genres), unlike a play, an internet novel does not have the luxury of any kind of stage directions.

and posthumanist ideas: it questions the existence of reality, addresses the contemporary concern with the dehumanization of subjects, strengthens suspicions of possible conspiracies, and reflects the actual modes of communication in modern capitalist society.

Finally, the novel *t* openly engages with the Russian literary tradition and questions traditional understanding of authorship, while, it seems, offering a reader-response theory in exchange. Its protagonist, Count T. finds himself on a journey to a place he cannot remember anything about. He then meets Ariel', a mysterious being who claims to be his creator and his author. Gradually, T. wonders whether he can write himself into existence and engages in a battle with Ariel', a battle he eventually wins. Towards the end of the novel, the reader finds out that the novel *t* belongs neither to T., nor to Ariel': instead, Lev Tolstoy is offered as the author; he dreams the novel while wearing a magic amulet that lets him see the future. This novel is relevant to this thesis in that, in addition to the importance of the reader in interpretation, it brings up the notion of the emancipation of the character as an alternative creator of his own textual world. However, the way in which this novel is structured (in many ways, like a Russian nested doll) serves to ironize this message and to reassert once again the powerful figure of the author behind every literary work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars around the world have debated the content of Pelevin's novels. It is widely assumed that the circumstances of Pelevin's life have greatly influenced his worldview and found an outlet in his novels which can be potentially read as encyclopedias of life in post-Soviet Russia. Indeed, in more general terms, several scholars note the importance of Russia's history in the development of Russian postmodernism and its regional specifics. For instance, in his "Russian Literary Postmodernism in the 1990s," Mark Lipovetsky notes:

> [T]hose writers whose works would later be named as classics of Russian postmodernism did not actually perceive their art as opposed to the modernist tradition, but rather dreamed of a revival of this tradition which had been interrupted by the aggressive nature of totalitarian culture. (32)

Therefore, Lipovetsky distinguishes Russian postmodernism from the Western postmodern tradition on the basis of its self-positioning. Referring mostly to authors writing in the 1990s, he claims that their version of postmodernism was influenced by the literary development under Soviet rule. Nevertheless, Lipovetsky does find key strategies and themes of Western postmodernism in Russian literature of the 1990s (including works by Pelevin). It is therefore possible to conclude that even though Russian postmodernists may have set themselves different goals in the beginning, their writing developed in a direction similar to that taken by their Western colleagues.

In addition, Lipovetsky quotes a relevant point made by Jean Baudrillard in *The Gulf War Did Not Happen* (1991):

> Eastern Europe saw the collapse of Communism, the construction of which had indeed been an historic event, borne by a vision of the world and a utopia. In contrast, its collapse is borne by nothing and bears nothing, but only opens on to a confused desert left vacant by the retreat of history and immediately invaded by its refuse. ("Russian Literary Postmodernism" 48)

The suggestion here is that the historical circumstances in which Russian postmodernism came to the fore were uniquely conducive to this kind of a worldview. What for other countries was more of a philosophy, became a reality for the former citizens of the Soviet Union. Elana Gomel puts forward a similar idea in her "Viktor Pelevin and Literary Postmodernism in Post-Soviet Russia:"

> [P]erhaps the "cultural logic" of post-Soviet Russia depends as much on the unresolved issues of its national history and identity as it does on the more familiar processes of market economy and technological development. If indeed utopian disillusionment has been foundational to postmodernism, the

> country whose attempt to build a utopia resulted in a national catastrophe has experienced this disillusionment in a different way than those watching from the outside. (340)

Gomel further argues that the work of contemporary writers on post-Soviet space inevitably entails the use of postmodernist literary strategies and devices aimed to address the postmodern reality of their lives (since utopian disillusionment is the source of postmodernism) and to deal with the trauma inflicted by the collapse of a potential utopia. Thus, these writers become interesting not only on the basis of their literary merit, but also (and, it seems, more so) for their point of view with regard to the present and the future of their countries as well as for their immediate responses to recent events.

In this context, it is not surprising that most scholarship that exists on Viktor Pelevin to date is focused on content analysis in several key areas. Perhaps the most popular of them is scholarship pertaining to the issue of trauma caused by and/or nostalgia for the Soviet Union. For instance, Angela Britlinger interprets Pelevin's *Chapaev and Void* as the author's attempt to "consider the Soviet experience and the Soviet hero" (43) and "to "remind us that the past continues to cast a long shadow" (44). Alexander Etkind in his turn suggests that Pelevin's *Ampir V* (Empire V, 2006) and *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (The Sacred Book of the Werewolf, 2004) are manifestations of "postcatastrophic memory" (631), the catastrophe in question being repressions in the Soviet Union. Etkind argues that the undead characters of these two novels (werewolves and vampires) are in fact allegories whose purpose is the "defamiliarization of the past and the return of the repressed" (ibid). This reenactment of loss in literature produces a healthy outlet for repressed feelings and thus allows to deal with past trauma. Alexei Yurchak uses Pelevin's *Generation «П»* as an example of the kinds of responses people had to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Vitaly

Chernetsky exposes the various instances in which Pelevin offers criticism of the Soviet Union, and suggest that:

> [i]n all of these texts … the political aspect does not play the leading part; rather, breakdown of the empire leads to the breakdown of stable identities, and what fascinates the author is the characters' precarious journey through this realm of identities in flux as they search for greater understanding of one's place in it. (108)

In this way, Chernetsky emphasizes the unique postmodern condition of Post-Soviet Russia that was mentioned earlier: the sudden breakdown of identities caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Writing at the time that he does, Pelevin certainly provides some insights into the present state of Russia. Mark Lipovetsky, Boris Noordenbos, Lyudmila Parts, and Marina Peunova seized the opportunity to explore the contemporary status of the intelligentsia via Pelevin's novels. In "New Russians as a Cultural Myth," Lipovetsky outlines the image of a New Russian[7] (*novyi russkii*) and its production in three discourses: the traditional discourse of the Russian intelligentsia, postmodernist discourse, and the discourse of New Russians themselves. The scholar suggests that it is possible to interpret the figure of a New Russian either as members of a new intelligentsia (or, he states, at least this is how they view themselves), or as an anti-intelligentsia. By way of content, Noordenbos discovered "the advent in Russian letters of megalomaniac fantasies about the restoration of Russia's imperial or totalitarian status" (147). At the same time, Peunova's "Russian Critical Intelligentsia Since 1985" questions that the intelligentsia even survives in today's Russia. Her basic concern is that contemporary Russian political dissent has turned into compliance where before the "spirit of opposition, moral criticism of authority, and the belief that freedom is

[7] The term "New Russian" appeared in post-Soviet Russia to refer to the new class of rich businessmen who rapidly achieved wealth (according to the stereotype, by using criminal methods) during Russia's transition to a market economy in the 1990s.

inextricably linked to the establishment of a just social order had been, since the mid-19th century, the main definitional characteristics of the Russian intelligentsia" (Peunova 232). Peunova concludes that

> [T]he younger generation of intellectuals saw this "going to the state" (*khozhdenie vo vlast'*) as an indication of the *shestidesjatniki*'s [sic] corruption by power. This move delegitimized the intelligentsia and dealt a final blow to the concept of the intelligentsia as a dissenting critic of the regime. (233)

Peunova refers to the content of Pelevin's *Generation «П»* as she describes the present state and mindset of the Russian intelligentsia. Finally, Parts works with this same novel to a somewhat similar purpose: she discusses the Russian intelligentsia as a cultural myth which itself relies on culture as its justification. Parts discusses the protagonist of *Generation «П*,» Vavilen Tatarskii, whose career "parallels the post-perestroika cultural crisis in Russia and the degradation of the Word, which, in turn, symbolizes the demise of the intelligentsia" (435).

While all of the abovementioned scholars focus on the content of Pelevin's novels, there has also been some work done in contextualizing Pelevin's writing and tying it to literary movements or searching for genre affiliations. As such, Alexandra Berlina proposes Pelevin as an exponent of magical realism in Russia. Berlina lists all mentions of Russian magical realism in the critical literature and is disappointed to find very few. She argues that there are significant grounds for establishing the existence of magical realism in Russian literature and even suggests Nikolay Gogol, as one of its precursors. Berlina also provides several definitions of magical realism and compares them to Pelevin's literary strategies and to the key themes of his works. Unfortunately, Berlina's call for a deeper investigation of Russian magical realism seems to have remained unanswered. Perhaps more fruitfully, Elana Gomel uses Pelevin in order to discuss the differences between Russian and Western

postmodernism in "Viktor Pelevin and Literary Postmodernism in Post-Soviet Russia." Gomel provides an insightful reading of several of Pelevin's works: she concentrates on the ways in which Pelevin treats time, space and history and how his treatment compares to that of his Western counterparts. She concludes:

> Neither an imitation nor a repudiation of Western postmodernism, Pelevin's oeuvre represents a bold attempt to expand and modify such postmodern artistic tropes as space, simulacrum, and fragmented subjectivity to respond to Russia's unique national needs. (350)

In another essay, Gomel explores Pelevin's genre affiliations ("Science Fiction in Russia: From Utopia to New Age"). In particular, she connects his works to the Russian science-fiction tradition and especially to the Strugatskii brothers (437). Gomel also proclaims the decline of 'hard' science-fiction in Russia and the rise of fantasy, which in Russia is characterized by "[c]onspiratorial, paranoid, and quasi-fascist views" and manifests itself as a "highly popular-generic hybrid that combines elements of thriller, dystopia, mystery, and horror" (439). Sofya Khagi also persuasively demonstrates Pelevin's relation to the sci-fi tradition and especially his allusions to the works of the Strugatskii brothers ("One Billion Years"). Khagi finds strong similarities between Pelevin and the Strugatskiis in their choice of tropes, plots, themes, and the overall atmosphere/mood of their novels.

Finally, one other field of research that is impossible to avoid when it comes to any postmodern literary work is intertextuality: liberal intertextual references are a core feature of Pelevin's style.[8] Studies in this area range from explorations of one particular intertextual link such as Mattias Agren's search for *The Matrix* in contemporary Russian literature, or Anna Ljunggren's and Alison Traweek's articles on the treatment of Greek myth in Pelevin's *Helmet of Horror* to more general or theoretical questions related to intertext in Pelevin. For

[8] Remember that Barthes defines the text as "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146). What is interesting, however, is that Pelevin seems to be using intertextuality in order to revive the author rather than to demonstrate his death. This idea will be explored further in Chapter Two of this thesis.

instance, in his "Survival of the Catchiest: Memes and Postmodern Russia," Eliot Borenstein proposes meme theory as a way of approaching intertextual links in Viktor Pelevin's and other Russian postmodernists' works. According to Borenstein, "ultimately a meme is anything that can be subject to imitation: 'tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or building arches'" (464). Moreover, memes are about purchase values more than they are about utility or meaning. Therefore, an author's choice of an intertextual reference – a meme – will depend on its recognizability instead of its meaningfulness in a given context. Meme theory agrees with the theory that the author is dead, in fact, it argues that human agency is virtually inexistent both in terms of the human capacity to write creatively and in terms of the mind's propensity to discriminate between various units of memetic material. Alternatively, I.I. Iatsenko explores possible modes of intertextuality and the principle of non-selection using Pelevin as one of his examples.

Meanwhile, there is relatively little research connected to form/structure and to the question of authorship in Pelevin. Sally Dalton-Brown's article entitled "Looking For The Creator: Pelevin And The Impotent Writer In *T* (2009) and *Ananasnaia voda dlia prekrasnoi damy* (2011)" is extremely insightful yet it could benefit from a more systematic approach to Pelevin's work and an examination of this issue in his other texts. Dalton-Brown rightly claims that Pelevin is looking for a definition of authorship in the contemporary, necessarily postmodern, world ("Looking For The Creator" 200). Yet she finds this theme exclusively in the novel *t* when, as will be demonstrated, it is much more pervasive in Pelevin's work. Moreover, Dalton-Brown fins that "Pelevin depicts the relationship between reader, author, and character as collaborative" (ibid), but in such a way, that the author has even less power than his 'colleagues.' For example, she points out that "[t]he character might be able to embody some form of potency unattainable to the author, to 'live beyond the text' in which the author himself is trapped" (206). While, justifying her article's title, Dalton-Brown

continues to find evidence of the author's impotence in Pelevin, she concludes on a rather positive note:

> Like his fellow authors who also struggle with authorial impotence, Pelevin has no particular answer to this postmodern problem, but unlike his Western counterparts, he hints at his literary context in continuing that familiar (and very nineteenth-century Russian) spiritual search for answers to the 'eternal questions' of who we are, and what life is really all about. (218)

Indeed, one can suggest that authorial power (at least outside of the text, in the 'real' world) consists in the influence that the said author can exert on his readers, be it enlightenment, inspiration, or provocation of thought. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, there is much more to be said about the theme of authorship as it is raised in Pelevin's work, the image of the author himself and the techniques he employs in order to sustain the reader's (and the characters') belief in his impotence, so as to more subvert it later all the more unexpectedly and cruelly and to establish his power.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of Ronald Barthes's most influential essays, "The Death of the Author," was written in 1967 in response to contemporary literary debates on the importance of an author's personality and biography in literary criticism (Carlier 387). Even though the essay's title seems to announce a recent death of the author, Barthes suggests that the author has always been dead, for as soon as writing begins, a "disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death" (142). Interestingly enough,[9] Barthes blames capitalist ideology for artificially supporting the author's life by attaching "the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author" (143). Barthes laments that critics have been searching for the 'true' meaning of literary works in the biographies of authors, when in reality, "it is language

[9] In the context of the present thesis, Barthes's mention of capitalism is ironic, since, as will be demonstrated further, it is precisely this ideology which offers absolute power to the author.

which speaks, not the author" (ibid). In this way, Barthes seems to deny the very idea of authorial intent or creativity: the author becomes merely a medium for language. More importantly, the modern scriptor (who replaces 'the author') stands in no relation to the text he produces and is born simultaneously with it. Since the scriptor "no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, [and] impressions" (Barthes 147), there is no need for him to spend extensive amounts of time on writing and re-writing: the scriptor's work is not as meticulous as that of his predecessors who arrogantly perceived themselves as Authors:

> For him [the scriptor], on the contrary, the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin - or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins. (146)

Barthes also connects the figure of the Author to that of God even if only to state that this connection (made by numerous critics in Barthes's lifetime – and still today) is erroneous, for "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning" (ibid). Perhaps postmodernism has subscribed to the idea of the death of the author precisely because of this Nietzschean rejection of a divine order or absolute truth. This rejection entails the obsolescence of the literary critic: in the writing of a scriptor, "everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed … but there is nothing beneath" (Barthes 147).

Another one of Barthes's arguments that seems to be attractive to postmodern scholars[10] is his view of the contemporary writing process:

> The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres [sic] of culture … the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (ibid)

[10] See, for example, Ulrich Broich's "Intertextuality" (specifically, p. 251).

Thomas Karshan, who takes precisely this inability to avoid quotations as the definition of the death of the author, suggests that "Barthes, Michel Foucault and other French post-Structuralist thinkers [in] the late 1960s, were, then, reporting on a death that had taken place 30 years earlier" (203). Karshan's understanding of the death of the author sounds plausible: modernist writers' understanding of authorship and of writing itself indeed emphasizes the use of intertextuality. Yet postmodernists' range of sources is much broader and their literary allusions are, arguably, much less purposeful[11] which allows the author to more successfully avoid being associated with any points of view that he might bring in via his use of intertextuality.

Finally, according to Barthes, given the extensiveness of intertextual references, the loss of the author's voice at the moment of writing, and the primacy of language over authorial intent, it is not the author who unifies the text, but the reader: "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148). The idea that the death of the Author allows the birth of the Reader has led to numerous discussions (both in criticism and in fiction) of the importance of the reader in creating a text, as well as the potential emancipation of the character. Thus, the 1970s saw the birth of several distinct strands of reader-response theory[12] which focused on the reader as the creator of the text. According to this theory, different readings of the same material can produce different 'texts' derived from the reader's personal experience, motives, upbringing and the influence of his community. Most in line with Barthes's argument, however, is the strand of reader-response theory that is called "affective stylistics" which claims that it is the act of reading itself that creates the text and only in this context does the reader become the new author (creator).

[11] Indeed, the postmodern use of intertextuality has given birth to meme theory (originated by Eliot Borenstein) which is briefly summarized in the literature review.

[12] The five strands are: transactional reader-response theory, affective stylistics, subjective reader-response theory, psychological reader-response theory, and social reader-response theory. This theory will mostly be relevant to Chapter One of this thesis, which is where it will be covered in more detail.

Indeed, even though Barthes does call for the birth of the reader, he explicitly states that "the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (148).

Despite the fact that Barthes's "death of the author" is, first and foremost, the notion that the author's (writer's) personality should not be a factor in interpretation or criticism, scholars have used this concept to refer to a variety of phenomena. Ulrich Broich and Thomas Karshan, for instance, refer to the death of the author when talking about intertextuality, while Gomel claims the concept suggests that "the actual identity of the writer is unimportant compared to his textual persona" ("Oscar Wilde" 74). Dalton-Brown ("Looking For The Creator") and Alastair Hird, on the other hand, mention Barthes in their discussions of the liberation of the reader and a potential liberation of the character.

While the abovementioned scholars take Barthes's argument at face value, there have been several re-readings of "The Death of The Author" by various scholars who persuasively argue that it was intended as satire.[13] For example, J.C. Carlier traces the line of arguments to which Barthes was responding and concludes that "the notion that biographical factors should be disregarded by critics was already widespread" (388) by the time that Barthes's essay was published. Carlier then refers to Barthes's other works to suggest that an earnest denial of respect for biography would have been inconsistent with the general position taken in his other writings.[14] Moreover, Carlier dissects the essay in question and demonstrates that there are deliberate self-contradictions in it – i.e. there is

[13] John M. Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* challenges the notion that the author is (or ever was / ever will be) dead and analyses the scholarship which proclaimed its death in the first place. Burke also looks for contradictions within Barthes's works and for the ways in which Barthes modified his theory later or attempted to take his statement back.

[14] More specifically, Carlier writes: "In addition, Barthes mocked his narrator's denial of the distinctive contribution of the author, the denial of the value of biographical approaches, by writing Barthes par Barthes, that movingly pictorial autobiography which deconstructs the coy convention of third-person presentation" (391).

evidence of the author's intention to produce satire (389). One of his astute observations is that Barthes signs his original essay thereby undermining or mocking his own argument:

> If he really believed the views of his fictional narrator,[15] he would not have dared to sign it, for that action would have contradicted not only the claim that the traditional concept of authorship is nonsensical, but also the related claim that the producer of a work is not the author but the reader. (Carlier 390)

Hird similarly analyses Barthes's essay and finds traces of irony in it. As such, he suggests that Barthes's method sets out to contradict the message that he places on the surface of the essay and in this way, the method itself becomes the key message of the essay. Hird demonstrates that Barthes uses intertextual references in order to "guide the reader down the correct predetermined interpretive and intertextual avenues" (295). Thus, according to Hird, "the article's author is wielding a significant directive influence over the multiplicity delivered to the reader, by packing additional, submerged intertext into the article" (297). This technique allows Barthes to manipulate his reader and to conceal the author. Yet a careful consideration of the strategies employed in the text and of Barthes's overall critical stance "reveals the still-present author, attempting to create the illusion of his own demise" (Hird 297).

Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" (1969) is equally crucial in addressing the notion of authorship in the contemporary world. While many of his arguments are in agreement with those of Ronald Barthes, Foucault suggests that today's scholarship needs to address the author-function, while putting the author himself (i.e. the author's personality or biography) to death: "I wish to restrict myself to the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it" (115). For Foucault, again, this "figure" is not the writer

[15] Carlier reads "The Death of the Author" as a piece of fiction written not by Barthes-as-the-renowned-scholar, but by Barthes-as-the-fictional-narrator.

himself: the writer dies once he begins writing, thus giving birth to the author who has a particular function within the text itself (and almost becomes one of its characters).

Bearing some similarities to Barthes, Foucault suggests: "the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of 'expression'; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority" (116) thereby denying the writer the ability to express himself. Instead, he claims that writing creates "an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears" (ibid). More specifically, he states that "the quibbling and confrontations that a writer generates between himself and his text cancel out the signs of his particular individuality" (117). Thus, whenever a writer begins to write, he loses his identity or personality and thereby enters (whether consciously or not) into his own death, as Barthes puts it.

In addition, Foucault discusses the function of a critic after theorizing the death of the author. Perhaps in a nod to Barthes, he states as a given that "the task of criticism is not to reestablish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works (188). Instead, Foucault suggests that "criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships" (ibid). At the same time, his essay nuances the definition of an author through a detailed discussion of the difference between the name of the author and the author-function. Thus, Foucault demonstrates that

> [U]nlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the author remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence. (123)

In this way, even though the author is inseparable from his texts, it is not the personality that should matter to the critic or to our interpretation of the work, but the image of the author as an author of discourse as well as the image of the author that is purposefully constructed by

the writer: “It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the ‘author-function’ arises out of their scission—in the division and distance of the two” (129). In short, Foucault suggests that the author is to be viewed not as a creative personality in search of self-expression, but as part of the discourse or as just another structural element.

The analysis of theory on the author reveals an important problem of terminology: the need to distinguish among the many varied senses of the term ‘author.’ On the one hand, there is the biographical author who is simultaneously author as public persona – he can perhaps be referred to as the writer. This title will help avoid confusion with the author as construct: the one who performs what Foucault calls “the author-function” or the one whose image emanates from the text in all its entirety according to V. V. Vinogradov. Yet this classification of author-terms is largely irrelevant when it comes to Pelevin: he exploits contemporary media and uses various literary strategies so as to blur the distinction between author, writer, and sometimes even narrator or character in order to be able to issue a single authoritarian interpretation of his texts and to become a brand.

This thesis will consider Barthes’s notion of the death of the author during the examination of the figure of the author in Pelevin’s work, yet it will also suggest that in a postmodern world, his figure has been forcefully revived by the necessities of the capitalist market and it is impossible (if not unacceptable) to avoid it when discussing contemporary literature. In fact, it is perhaps necessary to expand Foucault’s author-function to include the image of the writer (which has today become public and sometimes even purposefully constructed) as a functional part of the discourse created by said writer.

In the chapters to follow, this thesis will investigate the ways in which Pelevin responds to Foucault and Barthes’s theories (primarily the latter, considered both in the content and in the structure of Pelevin’s works), how he constructs his author, and what

strategies he uses to manipulate the reader. In other words, this thesis will examine whether the theoretical premises of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault ring true in Pelevin's literary output. By relying on Pelevin's work, it will evaluate whether, at least within this particular author's oeuvre, the paradox or the contradictory image of the author figure in postmodern literature and thought can be successfully resolved.

Chapter 1: Reader-Response Theory as a Theme in Pelevin's Work

"Все зависит от того, кто на это смотрит." (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 296)
"Фсе сделано изтово, кто смотрет." (Pelevin, *Shlem uzhasa* 212)
"И потом, истина всегда зависит от смотрящего." (Pelevin, *t* 362)

In the conclusion of his "Death of The Author," Ronald Barthes famously proclaims "the birth of the reader" (148). Even though the implications of this birth are not explained in the essay, from its content one can deduce the following: since the author can no longer be seen as the sole creator and thus proprietor of his own work (because he is only a medium for language which speaks for itself, and because he can only constantly refer to infinite discourses of others preceding him), the reader becomes the actual creator during the act of reading or interpretation. Alternatively, since the 'explanation' or the 'meaning' of the work cannot be found in the author's biography or personality, it has to reside in the personality and competence of the reader. Reader-response theory is essentially based on these implications and while the theory itself is very diverse, its main proposition is exactly that reader becomes the creator of the text he is reading. While the death of the author itself will be analyzed in the second chapter of this thesis, this chapter will assess the validity of the reader as the author's replacement first in theory and thereafter in Pelevin's oeuvre. First, it will analyze the propositions of various strands of reader-response theory in order to check whether the birth of the reader must necessarily come "at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 148). Second, it will use the premises of reader-response theory as the basis of its definition of a reader-creator[1] to approach Pelevin's novels (primarily *Helmet of Horror*) and to demonstrate that they can, in fact, be read as novels about the process of reading: that their readers become characters while characters also become readers, and the depiction of the act of reading constitutes

[1] In other words, reader-response theory will be referred to in order to see how the reader is constructed as the creator of the text in the absence of the author.

the plot.[2] Finally, this chapter will demonstrate that just as the figure of the author remains quite prominent in most reader-response theories, so is there a strong sense of irony overriding the suggestion that the reader is the creator of the text in Pelevin: form, structure, and framing of Pelevin's novels all work to conceal the author's power from the reader and in this way, to make him all the more powerful.

According to Lois Tyson, there are five key strands of reader-response theory. These are: the subjective, psychological, social, and transactional reader-response theories, as well as affective stylistics. Subjective reader-response theory was formulated primarily by David Bleich and it rests on the "subjective paradigm" (1976) which establishes that "[k]nowledge … is the subjective construction of our minds, which are more accessible to us than anything else" ("The Subjective Paradigm" 331). This has several implications for literary criticism. First, Bleich claims that critics must recognize their own subjectivity in order to be more productive and "renounce the demand for objective truth" ("Pedagogical Directions" 457). Second, it is not only critics who are always affected by their personal experiences and emotions – so are readers in general. Thus, since 'true meanings' do not exist and since humans are subjective beings, the literary critic's job becomes the interpretation of readers' responses to texts:

> [M]eaning is made and not found, made through the action of successive responses ... Strange as it may sound, meaning is created as if the text did not exist, and the truth of our meanings is no less fictional than the text we read. (Bleich, "Emotional Origins" 40)

In his critical essays, Bleich analyses written responses of selected readers to texts of their choice. The purpose behind this kind of analysis is to reach a deeper understanding of the reader (his responses are the material for psychological analysis and, perhaps, therapy), an

[2] Anna Ljunggren also fleetingly notes that "the very process of interpretation replaces action and the plot" of *Helmet of Horror* in her essay titled "The Minotaur on the Russian Internet: Viktor Pelevin's *Helmet of Horror*." In the rest of her essay, Ljunggren investigates the nature of virtual reality in the novel.

attempt to help different readers understand each other (development of tolerance), and an effort to reveal the biases and stereotypes of certain communities which can form within society. Interestingly enough, Bleich sees a work of art as an "author's response to his own personality" (ibid). On the one hand, a critic can therefore also attempt to engage in biographical criticism so as to analyze the personality of the author as a reader of reality. On the other hand, seen as an outlet for subjectivity, a literary work can become an opportunity for both writer and reader to engage in a mutual act of literary creation: "It is not inconceivable that critical pleasure and creative pleasure are, after all, the same and that the truth and/or beauty associated with these two experiences are created by identical psychological mechanisms" (ibid).

Psychological reader-response theory shares the basic premise of subjective reader-response theory: it denies the existence of an objective reading of a literary work. One of the theory's key proponents, Norman Holland ("Unity Identity Text Self," 1975), suggests that while there is no meaning inherent in the text, a reader's response to it can reveal a lot about the reader himself because his psychological reactions to texts will be the same as to real-life events. Psychological reader-response theory proposes a complete re-evaluation of the reading process and claims that readers interpret texts in order to restore their inner equilibrium. Therefore, interpretation is seen as a psychological as opposed to an intellectual process, even though readers do tend to couch their interpretations in aesthetic, intellectual, moral, and social abstractions after the fact. For Holland, a text is "just what the writer wrote or, to take the word back to its etymological root, *texere* ('to weave'), what he wove, as in a textile" (813). Here "textile" recalls Barthes; the whole sentence does, in fact, demean the role of the author who is suggested as only a weaver: not in charge of the text's theme (what Holland calls "unity"). The person in charge, then, is the reader:

> The unity we find in literary texts is impregnated with the identity that finds that unity. This is simply to say that my reading of a certain literary work will differ from yours or his or hers. As readers, each of us will bring different kinds of external information to bear. Each will seek out the particular themes that concern him. Each will have different ways of making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies. (Holland 816)

The critic's job is to analyze a reader's response in order to find his identity theme and to understand what it is exactly that the reader is responding to. As a method of psychoanalysis, this view of literature and criticism expounds reading as a therapeutic activity through which a reader (even if his responses are not analyzed by a professional), will first, activate his defense mechanisms in response to a work of literature and in this way, engage and enhance his coping mechanisms. Second, he will use the text to create a "fantasy" that is pleasing to him; and third, the reader will re-fashion his extra-literary identity based on the literary work that he has infused with this fantasy (Holland 818). Literature thus retains its didactic element according to psychological reader-response theory but only insofar as the reader is the one in charge of deciding what the lesson of a literary work is: the notion of authorial intention (and perhaps creativity as well) is completely rejected here.

Transactional reader-response theory is somewhat more mindful of the role of the author even though it, too, sees the reader as the ultimate creator. In this way, Louise M. Rosenblatt, the key proponent of this strand of theory suggests that both text and reader are indispensable in the production of meaning. For her, the text provides a stimulus and a blueprint for the reader:

> First, the text is a stimulus activating elements of the reader's past experience - his experience with literature and with life. Secondly, the text serves as a "control," a blueprint, a guide for a critical reworking and ordering of what has been called forth into the reader's consciousness. "The poem" is what the reader, under the guidance of the text, crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, image, thought, and feeling which he brings to it. (Rosenblatt 126)

According to Rosenblatt (1964), the text allows multiple interpretations but at the same time, since there is a blueprint in it, it does not give the reader complete freedom: some readings are simply not supported by the text. Thus, reading – in Rosenblatt's terminology, the creation of a 'poem' – is a transaction between an author-created text and an active reader. Rosenblatt seeks to limit the role of the author in her theory; she claims that the author is no more than another reader or the creator of his own 'poem,' for one could, supposedly analyze the author's personality so as to determine what his poem would be (127). In a similar manner, she prefers to say that not the author, but the text "delimits and patterns" readers' interpretations (ibid). Nonetheless, the figure of the author and the notion of authorial intention seem to loom behind the text's power to restrict a reader's creativity: otherwise, who is the creator of the blueprint?

The last two strands of reader-response theory both trace back to Stanley Fish. His earlier article on affective stylistics was written in 1970 and its key idea is that the critic is to carefully note how a given text affects the reader. This entails a close reading with meticulous attention to the construction of clauses and building of expectations which are or are not later disappointed. More importantly, it is the act of reading itself and the effect produced by it which comprises the meaning of the text:

> It [the text] is no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an event, something that happens to, and with the participation of, the reader. And it is this event, this happening – all of it and not anything that could be said about it or any information one might take away from it – that is, I would argue, the meaning of the sentence.[3] (Fish, "Literature in the Reader" 125)

[3] Fish reiterates this same idea later in the essay: "What I am suggesting is that there is no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence (paragraph, novel, poem) and what its words mean. Or, to put the matter less provocatively, the information an utterance gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning. It is the experience of an utterance – all of it and not anything that could be said about it, including anything I could say – that is its meaning" ("Literature in the Reader" 131).

To Fish a reader's response is his reaction to a string of words: expectations as to what will come next in a given sentence based on "syntactical and/or lexical probabilities" ("Literature in the Reader" 127), the reaction to the fulfilment (or, equally, if not more importantly, non-fulfilment) of these expectations, attitudes towards characters, events, or objects presented in the text and whether these attitudes change or are questioned in the course of reading. Most importantly, Fish assumes that a reader responds not to a text as a whole (i.e. after reading has been completed), but a sequence of segments of utterances: reading for Fish is an experience, an event,[4] during which the reader is continuously affected by the smallest fragments of the text and is therefore constantly engaged in the production of responses.[5]

Even though Fish's affective stylistics is centered on the reader, it does not seem to view the author as dead. In fact, authorial intention in this strand of reader-response theory is used to explain the origin of reactions induced in the reader:

> In my account of reading, however, the temporary adoption of these inappropriate strategies [by the reader] is itself a response to the strategy of an author; and the resulting mistakes are part of the experience provided by that author's language and therefore part of its meaning. (144)

[4] A text can deliberately make the process of reading difficult (Fish, "Literature in the Reader" 131, 135). This notion is, if not borrowed, then reminiscent of the Russian Formalist school, more precisely, of the ideas of OPOIAZ. For example, Viktor Shklovsky ("Iskusstvo kak priem" or "Art As Device," 1917/1919) saw *zatrudnennaia forma* (form made deliberately difficult to read) as the key device of art: "The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the "ostranenie" of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is its own end in art and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art" (80). The difference between the two scholars' positions is that Shklovsky views the form as autonomous, while Fish deems it necessary that there is a reader to 'activate' the text and to respond to it.

[5] In addition, Fish suggests that a text will oftentimes instruct the reader as to how to read it or will even portray the experience of reading within itself (for instance, the narrative might contain an image of a character reading something).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Fish constructs a portrait of the "informed" reader[6] who is able to experience the whole text without missing anything in it. This hypothetical reader has to have an adequate level of knowledge of the language in which the text is written, including a certain semantic proficiency (understanding of colloquialisms, idioms, professional jargons and dialects); he must also have literary competence in order to be able to recognize and to be affected by intertextual references (145). If the average reader (or, perhaps, the average critic) is an informed reader, then, according to Fish, there should be no significant variations in how readers respond to texts: "What happens to one informed reader of a work will happen, within a range of nonessential variation, to another (147-8).

Stanley Fish's social reader-response theory was formulated around 1980 and explored in detail in his *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980). This theory considerably diverges from affective stylistics in that it puts much less emphasis on the process of reading and on affect. In some ways, this also detracts from the importance of the author in the production of a text. Social reader-response theory suggests that readers' individual responses to texts are products of the influence of the interpretive communities to which they belong. For instance, a high-school literature class can be an interpretive community, given that the teacher has a strong opinion as to what constitutes good literature and how this literature is to be read; a critical school or a literary movement are more sophisticated interpretive communities with their own particular interpretive strategies and approaches to texts. The number of acceptable interpretations of any given text is then determined (and limited) by the number of interpretive strategies recognized by the literary institution (Fish, *Is There a Text* 343). Therefore, meaning can be said to reside in the strategies that

[6] Most likely, this portrait is a variation on the "implied reader" (a term coined by Wayne C. Booth in 1961) – the phrasing perhaps attempts to free the reader from authorial intention even though this escape is not offered by the rest of the theory.

readers apply to texts and not in the texts themselves. This approach to texts explains the possibility of arriving at different interpretations of the same text by different readers and by the same reader at different times. It also diminishes the role of the author (compared to Fish's affective stylistics) and embraces the fact that all knowledge is a construct: in this way, all interpretations of the text are equally valid as long as the strategies used in producing them are recognized by other scholars.

In general, while reader-response theory does promote the reader as the key creator of the text (some strands of the theory suggest that the text does not even exist until a reader picks it up), opinions vary as to the death of the author among its proponents. Rather, the author seems to be relegated to the background, avoided or mentioned only in passing. In subjective and psychological reader-response theories, the author is demoted to the position of a reader (one amongst many; each of their interpretations considered equally valid), while the text itself becomes less a work of art than simply a mirror for the reader to look into. In transactional reader-response theory, the author is the creator of a blueprint: some creative power and authorial intention are still granted to him – he is not dead. Yet he has the most power in the theory of affective stylistics: here, the author is a master manipulator who patiently plans out every word which can affect the reader and in this way, produce meaning.

Pelevin's works, consciously or not, engage with many of the ideas of reader-response theory outlined above. The quotes used in the epigraph to this chapter constitute a link between these three novels all of which, to varying degrees, ostensibly promote the reader as the author (creator) of the text that he is reading – the reader thus apparently takes the place of the author in Pelevin's universe. Perhaps the most daring in terms of its incorporation of the reader is Pelevin's *Helmet of Horror*. On the one hand, the genre chosen by Pelevin for this text – that of the internet novel or novel as a transcript of a

thread in a chatroom –[7] works to turn the reader into one of the characters of the novel. On the other hand, this form also allows him to portray the characters of the novel as readers – both readers of text (the internet thread itself) and readers of the world as text[8] (recall also Holland's theory that readers respond to texts in the same way they respond to real-life events). The genius of Pelevin's choice of form lies of course in the fact that text literally becomes the world for the characters of this novel: other characters' messages are assumed to faithfully describe the world around them. Therefore, *Helmet of Horror* can be read as a book about the experience of reading.

The death of the author is, in a way, reenacted on the very first page of the novel: since the book is written in the form of an internet chat, it begins with the author nowhere in sight (not represented by a narrator, not incarnated in a preface or epigraph). Once he opens the book, the reader faces a page with the following words:

> Started by ARIADNE at xxx p.m. xxx xxx BC GMT
> *I shall construct a labyrinth in which I can lose myself, together with anyone who tries to find me – who said this and about what?*
> :-) (*The Helmet of Horror* 1)

The strategy of forcing the reader to identify with the protagonist or protagonists is key to many of Pelevin's other works. For example, in *Chapaev and Void*, the reader's inability to discriminate between the two realities of the novel's protagonist, Petr Pustota (or to understand which reality is the 'real' one), parallels the confusion of the protagonist

[7] Pelevin himself refers to the genre of his novel as "*kreatiff*" in the subtitle of his book. This noun originated from the English adjective "creative" and is in the *yazyk padonkaff* (padonkaffsky jargon), a cant language developed by Russian intellectuals who had early access to the internet (from 1997 onwards). The key rule of the language is the use of phonetically accurate but grammatically incorrect spelling and frequent use of profanity. The term "*kreatiff*" in this language means a text that is being commented or one that is given up for commentary or criticism ("Iazyk padonkov"). Alternatively, it is said to also just mean the intellectual property of an author or "*afftar*" in padonkaffsky jargon ("Slovar' zhargona padonkov").

[8] Ernst Robert Curtius was the first to trace the evolution of book metaphors that originate in Latin Middle Ages and are later picked up by Renaissance thinkers in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* which was originally published in 1953. According to Curtius, "the Renaissance shook off the dust of yellowed parchments and began instead to read in the book of nature or the world" (319). The conception of the world as text has since then entered academic discourse (see, for instance, Hans Kellner's "Who Is Reading the World as Text?").

himself who cannot decide which of the two timelines is real and which is illusory. Similarly, Pelevin's well-known short story "Zatvornik i Shestipalyi" (Hermit and Sixfinger, 2013) similarly relies on the reader's identification with the main characters. The story begins in the middle of a conversation and, like *Helmet of Horror*, without any exposition. Therefore, especially given that the characters are discussing matters of philosophy and the meaning of life, the reader is forced to identify with the protagonists and to assume that they are humans in a parallel universe. However, after several pages he discovers that they are in fact chickens on a chicken farm.

Pelevin follows a similar yet more complicated strategy in *Helmet*. Here, the reader not only identifies with the characters, he becomes one. Just like any other character of the novel, the reader reads the chat as though it is taking place in live time and starts right at the beginning of the thread. He does not know where he or the characters are supposed to be (in which country, city, or on which planet), why they are there and what has happened to them. Also like the characters, the reader will be forced to attempt to answer these questions in the process of reading the chat thread.

As the reader turns the pages of the novel, eight characters come to establish their presence by responding to the thread started by Ariadne. He finds out that their user names[9] were given to them by a mysterious administrator (perhaps a ghost of the supposedly 'dead' author) who locked them in identical yet isolated rooms and provided them with the only means of communication – the chat web page – which, according to Organism(-:, "isn't the Internet, just looks like it. You can't link to anywhere else from here" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 2). Moreover, all communication is monitored and

[9] In the order of appearance, the characters' user names are: Ariadne (Ariadna in the original), Romeo-y-Cohiba, Organism(-:, Nutscracker, Monstradamus, IsoldA, UGLI 666, Sartrik. Pelevin first released *Helmet of Horror* as a radio play; in the original radio play as well as in Andrew Bromfield's English translation of the novel, this character was named Sartrik, yet in the first publication of the book the character is renamed Sliff_zoSSchitan), and Theseus (who, for a brief moment, also mutates into TheZeus). All user names are spelled in the Roman alphabet in the original text except when the characters refer to each other in their messages.

censored by the administrator who prevents the characters from using profanity[10] or sharing any information that can identify them. The characters have to read their rooms for clues and to discuss Ariadne's seemingly prophetic dreams in order to understand what is happening around them. Their investigation closely resembles the process by which a reader normally attempts to make sense of a book and, moreover, relates to (or, rather, embodies) many premises of reader-response theory: in many ways, it postulates the reader as the creator of his own meaning or of his own text.

The characters' strategy of dealing with the situation they find themselves in is essentially to recognize and follow up on intertextual references. In this manner, the character-readers choose to believe that their reality (recall, again, the metaphor of the world as text) contains a blueprint, on the basis of which they can draw conclusions about what they are to expect. These readings can be fleeting, such as simple recognitions of symbols or objects. For example, when Organism(-: informs the others that he woke up in a "pooftah's housecoat with nothing underneath it," Nutscracker replies: "It's not a housecoat. It's a *chiton* – the kind of tunic the ancient Greeks used to wear" (6-7). The characters can also draw more significant conclusions on the basis of concatenations of facts. For example, after Ariadne's dreams, user names, symbols in the rooms as well as the clothes provided to the characters have been carefully analyzed by all participants of the chat, Monstradamus[11] suggests that they are all in a labyrinth guarded by the Minotaur (38-41). Based on this interpretation of reality, Monstradamus attempts to predict what is to come later in the book: "Well, what can we do? Wait for Theseus, who will lead us out of the labyrinth. And hope the joke doesn't go too far" (40).

[10] Except when Sartrik curses in padonkaffsky jargon.
[11] One of the smartest characters of the novel whose intellectual prowess suggests that he might be seen as Fish's informed reader.

This interpretation eventually wins, to a varying extent, the support of all the characters. That it is possible to reach a consensus of this sort, that a text can function as blueprint, bears out the basic premise of transactional reader-response theory. Curiously, though, alternative (minority) interpretations of the situation provided by the other characters in the novel embody the premises of psychological reader-response theory. For example, UGLI 666's interpretation of the facts reveals more about her own personality than about the situation itself:

> **Organism(-:** I don't get it, are we seriously discussing someone's dream?
>
> **UGLI 666** I think…
>
> **Nutscracker** New members, please introduce yourselves to the group straightaway. What do you think?
>
> **UGLI 666** The Lord sent her that vision to make us repent.
>
> **Romeo-y-Cohiba** That's just great. We've been locked up in here, and we have to repent? Repent for what?
>
> **UGLI 666** What we were locked up for.
>
> **Romeo-y-Cohiba** And what were we locked up for?
>
> **UGLI 666** Each of us for his own reason. For it is said: "There is no man that shall live without sin, though his life be but a single day."[12] (30-1)

In this way, UGLI 666 reveals her religiosity by providing an extremely religious reading of the facts. Even though she possesses the same information as Monstradamus, her interpretation is radically different from his, as evidenced if not conditioned by her faintly liturgical language. Two possibilities emerge. First, the text allows for this multiplicity of interpretations. Second, each of Pelevin's characters in this novel actually finds, as Norman Holland suggests, his or her own unity in the same text; this unity is "impregnated with the identity that finds that unity" (816). These characters approach the text (or world as text) with the particular external information that they have accumulated over their (albeit, fictional) lives and make it bear on their personal interpretations of the same text.

[12] In the original, "яко несть человек, иже жив будет и не согрешит." This in itself is another intertextual reference to an Orthodox prayer for those who have passed away ("Molitvy za usopshikh").

The novel's insistence on the reader's importance in the creation of a text – and his liberty to – manifests itself in two ways. First, the use of intertextual references in the novel is very liberal: there are references to both low and high culture. In this way, the scope of cultural references (to religion, mythology, classical literature, pop-culture, padonkaffsky jargon) both limits the number of possible interpretations and also opens the text to a multiplicity of readings. This is somewhat humorously suggested at the very beginning of the novel: characters notice that their rooms are filled with objects covered with the sign of the asterisk which Nutscracker recognizes as "the symbol they use in books for a footnote" and, funnily enough, "[i]t's even on the loo paper, every sheet" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 5). Thus, the text itself seems to suggest from the very outset that characters, like regular readers, will have to recognize and interpret intertextual references (hence the asterisks), including those supplied by material on the level of toilet paper. Moreover, the interpretation of this text as a whole will depend on which intertextual links are recognized and which are deemed relevant by the reader.[13] Lev Danilkin notes this as a distinctive feature of *Helmet of Horror* in his review: "The size and the meaning of this labyrinth depend exclusively on the cultural competence of the reader." For example, as Ariadne describes the setting of one of her dreams, she mentions some bronze statues: "like something from a Japanese cartoon film – naked teenagers being strangled by tentacles twined around their bodies" (18). IsoldA recognizes the reference – "She's talking about *mangas*, young girls, who are raped by demons with their tentacles" (19), but when Monstradamus steps in to explain the theory behind this kind of pop-art, Nutscracker dismisses the entire exchange as irrelevant.

[13] Ulrich Broich considers "[t]he emancipation of the reader" one of the marks of postmodern style: it "liberates the reader into reading his own meaning from (or into) the text, into following some of the intertextual echoes of the text while ignoring others and at the same time bringing in his own associations with additional texts" (252).

Second, this liberal use of intertextual references is supplemented by personal labyrinths: a specific one for each character of the novel. When the characters figure out how to open the doors to their rooms, behind them each finds his own special kind of labyrinth which resonates with that character's biography or personality. Thus, for instance, the room of the religiously-inclined UGLI 666 opens into a church where two men are waiting to help her on her way to repentance. To achieve salvation she has to find the way out of several labyrinths: trace her way out of a labyrinth painted on the wall with her finger or walk through a labyrinth painted on the floor on her knees, all the while thinking about her past and future. Monstradamus's labyrinth is somewhat less straightforward: "There's a table standing against the wall directly under the seal. And a stool by the table. And on the table there's a black sheet of paper, a pencil and a pistol with a single bullet" (214). This kind of labyrinth suits with Monstradamus's pessimistic personality: he is highly suspicious of the chat, its participants, and the whole situation he finds himself in from the very beginning and throughout the novel. His labyrinth itself then either maps out a choice between living or dying, writing or not writing a suicide note, or, in Monstradamus's own words, stands for what "starts afterward" (ibid).

In this way, *Helmet of Horror* accommodates a variety of readers and interpretations both in its form (through its use of a wide range of intertextual references to low and high culture) and in its content – by incorporating characters with diverse interests, backgrounds and personalities, and creating a personal labyrinth for each of them. Aleksei Vernitskii ingeniously compares this novel to a morality play:

> Plays whose action takes place inside of a single consciousness or a single soul are known as morality plays. The characters of these plays are allegories: personifications of different human qualities and psychological states which fight each other for domination of the human soul.

While Vernitskii himself takes this similarity to morality plays literally (he interprets the events of *Helmet of Horror* as a fight between character traits before the birth of a human being), one could also take it as a further confirmation of the idea that the characters of the novel are representative of the most common types of readers.

However, *Helmet of Horror* also offers an ultimate reader, one whose perspective is superior to all others, embodied by the character Theseus. As the ultimate reader of *Helmet of Horror*, Theseus should supposedly be able to disentangle the web of references in the text, to solve the riddle – in other words, to lead the other characters out of the labyrinth like his mythological namesake. There is an uncertainty as to who Theseus might be, but the text often seems to hint at the reader/critic. While characters do suspect each other of being the Minotaur or Theseus to varying degrees,[14] or even suggest that they themselves are the hero everyone is waiting for,[15] it is also possible that Theseus is reading the chat but has not made himself known to the other characters. For example, when the tension becomes too intense for him, Monstradamus calls out into the cyberspace: "Hey, Theseus! I know you can hear me!" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 216). This desperate call is the closest that an internet novel can get to an apostrophe, the trope that allows a narrator to directly address a disembodies other, in this case, the reader. Yet while in classical Russian novels, for instance, this trope often helps expose the artificiality of the world in the novel or to expose the mediating presence of the author, in *Helmet of Horror*, the fact that this phrase is uttered by a character severely compromises the boundary between life and text as well as reader's position with respect to that boundary. The reader entered the chat simultaneously with the other characters, he has been reading it, receiving and analyzing the clues provided in the chatroom at the same pace as all the other character

[14] For instance, Nutscracker confesses: "To be honest, Monstradamus, I used to think you were Theseus" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 216).
[15] In this way, Sartrik suggests that he is Theseus while all other characters are parts of the helmet of horror that he is wearing (217-23).

participants. Moreover, the reader, like the character participants, does not know who Theseus is and by page 216, he is bound to question himself whether he could be Theseus.

In fact, the novel does suggest that any critic (or informed reader) is Theseus and that there are multiple possible Thesei. More specifically, Nutscracker shares with the other characters the observation that his personal labyrinth is "like a TV editing room" full of very curious tapes:

> The tapes all contain pretty much the same thing: a television address by someone putting himself forward for the job of Theseus. In most cases the candidate is a middle-aged man with a pleasant face and good diction. He's sitting in front of some kind of symbol, with a dozen microphones standing on a table in front of him. He promises to deal with the Minotaur and lead everyone out of the labyrinth. Before that, naturally, he expounds his own vision of what the labyrinth is and who the Minotaur is. (200)

For the first half of Nutcracker's description, Theseus candidates sound very much like politicians: they all have pleasant faces, good diction, and promise to deal with the most acute problem – that of the Minotaur. However, the last sentence of this description portrays Theseus as first and foremost a critic: his most important function is, "naturally," interpretation of the labyrinth itself. Nutscracker then goes on to provide more detailed descriptions of the various candidates' speeches and it becomes increasingly clear that the candidates are critics.[16] For instance, one of them is identified as "[a] professor of history … The man said the labyrinth is a symbol of the brain. An exposed brain and a classical labyrinth even look very similar. The Minotaur is the animal part of the mind and Theseus is the human part" (201). In an even more curious turn of events, Nutscracker refuses to choose a candidate for the job because he is not sure if there is any point in making any

[16] There is a hint of irony underneath the fact that scholars of different schools of thought should have to compete against each other – like politicians during an election – as to the validity of their interpretations of the text. Equally comic is the portrayal of another critic-candidate for the role of Theseus: Nutscracker describes a Frenchman whose interpretation of the labyrinth relies heavily on the notion of discourse – the implication seems to be that the man is Michel Foucault whose work famously defined discourse – and yet this man has a "wild shock of hair" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 203) while Foucault's hair was thin in his youth and disappeared altogether in his old age.

choice at all. It is as though the character does not believe that there are right or wrong interpretations – he allows all of them to co-exist by refraining from choosing between them.

Finally, Sartrik brings the point home by suggesting that "[e]verything's made out of the person who sees it. Because it can't possibly be made out of anything else"[17] (220). A variation of this same phrase occurs in *Chapaev and Void* – a novel of which *Helmet of Horror* is most likely the sequel. If the latter work is described by its author as "the first work in all world literature the action of which occurs in complete nothingness,"[18] (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*, back cover) then *Helmet of Horror* has to be the second. Its plot amounts to a detailed description of the processes of reading and interpretation; it produces a null result at the end, where it is revealed that the entire exercise of interpretation was staged and ultimately meaningless: the characters themselves turn out to be the Minotaur. As Theseus escapes from them/him, the beast is reborn as the Minosaur and the novel thus acquires a circular structure – the events described in it are bound to repeat themselves, albeit next time it will be Minosaur who terrorizes the reader. Furthermore, the 'action' happens in a contemporary and very real form of nothingness – in the internet. The absence of a coherent space, time, reality, and, most of all, narrator almost turns this novel into a pure abstraction whose interpretation seems to rely entirely on the reader's subjectivity. Nonetheless, the ending of the novel cruelly subverts every proposition previously advanced by the characters. An analysis of the novel's plot and framing clearly shows the author's irony in suggesting the reader as the creator of the text.

The mere act of opening the book subjects the reader to the will of an author who lures him into an illusion of free will. From the very outset, the unwitting reader puts on

[17] In the original, Sartrik writes in padonkaffsky jargon but this peculiarity is lost in translation: "Фсе сделано изтово, кто смотрет. Потому что издругово это сделать нельзя" (Pelevin, *Shlem uzhasa* 178).
[18] In the original, "первое произведение в мировой литературе, действие которого происходит в абсолютной пустоте" (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*).

the helmet of horror, and the whole story leads him to take it off. Thus, when Ariadne reads the answers to the eternal questions towards the end of the novel, the reader is forced to agree with her: "in truth, all of this from the beginning to the end is entirely pointless..." (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 254). Indeed, by the end of the book, nothing has actually happened: the characters are still in the labyrinth, the Minotaur has been reborn as Minosaur, and the reader is led to believe that history runs in circles in this alternate reality. And yet, for the reader, everything has changed, because he has progressed from ignorance to knowledge, he has become aware of himself and of the way his helmet of horror works. He has realized that the characters with whom he was imprisoned in the labyrinth, were actually the prison itself;[19] they were parts of the helmet that were meant to deceive him by distracting him with, for instance, the pursuit of meaning from intertextuality.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that intertextual references are used to suggest the reader's autonomy in the production of meaning in the text. However, this freedom is subverted towards the end of the novel where characters reveal themselves to be both the helmet of horror and the Minotaur wearing it – the first letters of the characters' names taken together spell out the word "MINOTAUR" (258). The reader's identification with the characters (described above) is turned against him when characters are revealed to be his enemies. As soon as Theseus makes his brief appearance only to vanish forever, the characters drop the pretense and the reader finds out that the whole novel, their whole conversation, has not been in earnest:

> **Organism(-:** What difference does it make to us? How did we give ourselves away?

[19] This notion perhaps echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Huis Clos* (No Exit, 1944). The play depicts three characters who find themselves locked in a mysterious room together. It soon becomes clear that the characters are deceased and being locked with other people is their punishment. The play is the source of Sartre's famous quotation: "L'enfer, c'est les autres" which translates as "Hell is other people" (Sartre 45).

> **UGLI 666** We get distracted. Make too much fuss. Talk off the point, all this stuff about Versailles and Mona Lisa.
>
> **IsoldA** Ugly, you don't mind us living here, do you?
>
> **UGLI 666** This time it was Ariadne who blurted everything out. That's why he gave us the slip. (263)

Thus, not only have the characters been putting on an act to trick Theseus (the reader) into coming to rescue them (and thus finding himself entrapped within the helmet of horror), but, according to UGLI 666, this was not their first time. The characters are, in a way, complicit with the author in their desire to trap the reader in the book. The very title of the book becomes, ironically, part of if not key to its ultimate deception: opening *The Helmet of Horror* is the same as putting it on, i.e. being tricked by its characters into solving a non-existent mystery.

Within these same few lines, UGLI 666 reveals that the characters' discussions of intertexts or deductions as to their meaning were distractions for the reader and had no independent value. With this in mind, the second-time reader will perhaps note hints of (the author's?) sincerity in what had previously seemed to be mutual mockery among characters. Consider, for instance, the following exchange between Monstradamus and Nutscracker, discussing the statues in Ariadne's dream and their apparent resemblance to *manga* scenarios:

> **Monstradamus** It's an expression of the repressed subconscious frustration resulting from defeat in the Second World War. The schoolgirl raped in these cartoons symbolizes the Japanese national spirit, and the monster that sprouts these multiple phallic tentacles represents the modern western-style corporate economy.
>
> **Nutscracker** Or maybe they're just octopuses?
>
> **Monstradamus** Octopuses? How original. I'd never have thought of that. (19)

If the reader believes Monstradamus's response to be earnest (as opposed to sarcastic, in reaction to Nutscracker's dismissal of his expertise), then this exchange can serve as an

early (and well-concealed) indication of the direction which the novel will take. In general, as the ending of the novel demonstrates, intertextual references, instead of ensuring the reader's interpretive freedom, as suggested throughout the text, serve to distract him and create in him expectations which will ultimately be disappointed. The passage also serves as a warning not to read too much into the text which is, in a way, reiterated when Nutscracker explains his decision not to choose a Theseus: "I'm not really sure … how he'd be going to lead me out of the labyrinth, when the room has no doors or windows" (209) dismissing the importance of critics and criticism altogether.

With regard to the novel's structure and genre, the figure of the author looms behind the choice and execution of both. Even more interestingly, the author exists both inside (as a character in) and outside (as the writer of) the text: in the former position, he has the power to manipulate his character-readers and in the latter – to lead his actual readers to whatever conclusion he, the writer, chooses. The first goal, as briefly discussed above, is achieved, by thwarting the reader's expectations, by engineering the novel's master deception based on the concealed unreliability of all characters. The author's image and manipulation strategies within the text are much more complicated and curious.

Within the text, he is the chat administrator who supposedly[20] dictates the form of the text and enforces the rules of the game. In other words, he monitors and censors users' messages: he prevents them from using curse words or sharing any information that can identify them. He also checks their messages for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The feature which makes the administrator seem most like an author is that it is he who chooses the characters' names. According to Romeo-y-Cohiba: "it wasn't me who invented the name. It just appears on the screen when I send a message" (8). Moreover, the administrator seemingly provides the characters with a sense of purpose and the illusion of

[20] Remember that the characters are untrustworthy and therefore the nature and even the existence of the administrator is questionable.

free will. An interesting example of this phenomenon is the story of IsoldA and Romeo-y-Cohiba: here, the author uses both character names and carefully constructed personal labyrinths of expectations never to be fulfilled. Thus, IsoldA's name (Isolda is the Russian version of Isolde or Iseult) is a reference to a character from the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman tale about Tristan and Iseult. In the beginning of the novel, IsoldA is immediately paired up with Romeo-y-Cohiba whose name is also a reference to the Italian tale of Romeo and Juliet immortalized by William Shakespeare (1597). The other characters of *Helmet of Horror* assume that Romeo-y-Cohiba and IsoldA are destined to meet precisely on the basis of their names. To Ariadne's "I think they're in love," Monstradamus replies: "According to their names, they have to be. Imagine being called Romeo. What else could you do?" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 72). In addition, the author traps Romeo-y-Cohiba and IsoldA into thinking that they are in the same labyrinth (by designing their individual mazes as near-mirror images of each other) and that, therefore, they were destined to find each other. After a series of attempts, they manage to meet and engage in intercourse, but after they exchange a few messages, it becomes clear that they had been lured to a secluded location, raped each by an unknown creature, and that in fact, they had been in completely different labyrinths the whole time. In fact, it is entirely possible that it is precisely because of their names that they cannot be together: IsoldA and Romeo-y-Cohiba belong to different tales set in different countries. On the whole, all his functions considered, the administrator is essentially the creator of the "blueprint" Rosenblatt mentions when laying out her transactional reader-response theory. He opens the text up for interpretation (by creating a chatroom and including an appropriate amount of intertext within it), and yet also sets the rules of the game thereby preventing the characters from straying too far from his agenda.

The author is also represented in the text by the Minotaur or, rather, the latter serves as an allegory for the former: the Minotaur (supposedly) traps characters in the labyrinth, while the author traps the reader into buying and reading the book.[21] The author sustains his readers' interest by providing a large variety of intertextual links for us to recognize, by representing the broadest possible variety of readers in the novel's many characters and by designing a puzzle to generate mounting suspense (the characters' fear of the Minotaur). All of these functions are doubled by the Minotaur in the text. Ariadne's second dream both confirms and complicates this allegory. There, she finds herself in a lecture hall where one of the Minotaur's servants delivers a lecture on the helmet worn by his master. The helmet itself, as mentioned above, can be read as a metaphor for the novel as a whole. In this context the helmet's relationship with the Minotaur parallels the author's relationship with his text. The Minotaur as well as the Minotaur's perception of himself emerge from the helmet, and yet the Minotaur that emerges from the helmet is already wearing the helmet, which means: "the helmet of horror appears in the separator labyrinth, which is located inside the helmet itself" (92). This of course relates brilliantly to the presence of the author both inside and outside of *Helmet of Horror* as a text – it is he who creates everything that is, and yet remains part of what he has created.

There is one more layer to this author-text-author spiral: the reviews of the novel written by its own characters and printed on the back cover of one of the original editions of *Helmet of Horror* (all written in padonkaffsky jargon):

> Афтар, расбигись и убей сибя апстену! // user Sliff_zoSSchitan
> Афтар лжжот. Имхо[22] КГ/АМ,[23] прости Господи! // user UGLI 666

[21] Pelevin's marketing strategies will be discussed in Chapter 3.
[22] Transliterated from the English IMHO – in my humble opinion ("IMHO").
[23] Normally, this is abbreviated from "криатифф гавно - афтар мудаг" ("Slovar' zhargona padonkov"), yet it is also possible that user UGLI 666 is using Sartrik's version of the abbreviation: "Креатифф Гавно/Афтар Минатавр" (Pelevin, *Shlem uzhasa* 183).

> Нираскрыта тема эпистемологии. Аффтар залезь ф газенваген и выпей йаду! // user Minotaur
>
> Смиялсо. Афтар пеши есчо. // user Theseus (Pelevin, *Shlem uzhasa*)

> Author, kill yourself by running into a wall! // user Sliff_zoSSchitan[24]
>
> Author lies. IMHO kriatiff [this creative work] is shit / the author is an ass [or the Minotaur], forgive me Lord! // user UGLI 666
>
> The theme of epistemology is not fully developed. Author, get into a *Geländewagen* and drink some poison! // user Minotaur
>
> I laughed. Author, write more. // user Theseus

Once again reality blends with fantasy: characters created by the author are able to comment on the author's work and thus embed his image permanently in the text. And yet it is the author who created these characters as well as their reviews and therefore wields ultimate power over his text. If those characters truly were meant to personify various types of characters in the text, then the author has surely demonstrated his ability to manipulate his readers in every way, including even their responses to (reviews of) his own novel which, for him, are easily predictable. Adding to these levels of irony, Lev Danilkin notes that

> In fact, if one looks closely enough, he will recognize Pelevin not only in Sartrik, but in each of the eight characters. Nutcracker,[25] the cynical campaign manager. Romantic Romeo-y-Cohiba. Ugli, the ascetic Christian. Brutal-jovial Organism. Simple-minded Isolda. Bookish Monstradamus. Mysterious and headstrong Ariadna. Do you understand in whose head this is all happening?[26]

Pelevin's *Helmet of Horror* thus first suggests and then dismantles the notion that the reader is the creator of the text he is reading. In fact, the reader of Pelevin's texts finds himself in the same position as the reader envisioned in most strands of reader-response

[24] This character is named "Sartrik" in Andrew Bromfield's translation and in Pelevin's original radio play.
[25] Danilkin chooses to ignore the "s" in Pelevin's "Nutscracker" and refers to this character as "Shchelkunchik" – literally, Nutcracker.
[26] Note that Danilkin thus goes beyond the mere suggestion of an allegorical connection between the Minotaur (i.e. the amalgam of all characters, since they are revealed to comprise the Minotaur in the end) and the author. Danilkin's interpretation concerns the personality of one very specific author – Viktor Pelevin. This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

theory: unable to break free from the author. While most of the novel serves to trick the reader into seeing himself as the savior, the grand interpreter, this notion is later rejected and mocked multiple times. Take, for instance, the fate of Sartrik, who arrogantly claims to have solved the riddle towards the end of the novel: "Because you're all nothing but bits and pieces of the helmet of horror. I figured that out ages ago" (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 222). Sartrik then concludes that he has outwitted the system whereas in fact, he has succumbed to an interpretation derived from the particulars of the novel. In so doing, he has put on the helmet of horror and, by the end of the book, has become part of the helmet itself: he is the S in "Minosaur" (270). Similarly, towards the end of the novel, the reader realizes that the Theseus candidates Nutscracker looked at were all wrong for the job. The real Theseus appears only once to destroy the Minotaur by essentially refusing to follow the author's misleading textual references – the thread of the conversation. His only words when he appears are: "MINOTAURUS!" and "Fuck U" (258-9). That is to say, if there is a lesson in the novel as to what constitutes a perfect reader, then it has to be a person who does not indulge in random interpretation and fantasies, for Theseus is the only one able to emancipate himself from the Minotaur and take off his helmet of horror.

In this way, the author of *Helmet of Horror* seems to suggest a new use of intertextuality, one that can be turned against the notion of the death of the author. In this novel, intertextual references are not used for their value as links to the discourses of others. In other words, they are meaningless, adding nothing to the semantics of the text. Nor do their individual references constitute or in any way affect the meaning of the text itself. In general, even though the author does fake his own death in *Helmet of Horror* – as evidenced by the absence of any visible narrator in the chat thread,[27] by a dense, even

[27] Pelevin's choice of genre is ingenious in that, on the one hand, a chat does not have a narrator – an obvious figure which is in charge of the construction of meaning – yet, on the other hand, it does have an administrator who creates the chat room and keeps an eye on the conversation.

supersaturated web of intertextual references, or by the decision to center a novel on the birth of the reader – he reappears aggressively toward the novel's end where he is represented by the Minotaur and looms behind numerous deliberately constructed and then disrupted expectations. He is even more obviously present upon a second reading. This author weaves his text out of intertextual references, but he uses them only as wallpaper on the walls of his labyrinth – he does not care what these references point to as long as they point to something that might distract the reader. Moreover, the novel destroys the idea that the reader is to replace the author as the creator of his own text. Instead, it reasserts the power of the author who is able to create a world out of nothingness and to not only make it credible enough for the reader to associate with its characters, but also to make those characters come to life on the back cover of the Russian edition.

Chapter 2: Author-Characters and Character-Authors

As discussed in the previous chapter, *Helmet of Horror* engages with the theory of the death of the author by suggesting, albeit ironically, that the reader is the creator of his own text. However, much more pervasive throughout Pelevin's works is the theme of the demise of the Russian intelligentsia which is consistently connected to the demise of literature and authorial creativity by virtue of the literaturocentric nature of Russian culture. Thus, many of Pelevin's protagonists are writers (authors), are involved with writing to a varying degree (these will be referred to as author-characters): for instance, Petr Pustota – the protagonist of *Chapaev and Void* – scribbles an occasional poem, Tolstoy and Ariel' in *t* are professional novelists, and Vavilen Tatarskii in *Generation «П»* is an aspiring young poet who begins a career in advertising in pursuit of financial stability.[1] In these novels, the issue of authorship is raised in two ways. On the one hand, careers, writing processes, and products of Pelevin's author-characters testify to the contemporary authors' inability to write something new without reference to the discourses of others as well as to the commercialization of literature (a shocking development, indeed, for such a literaturocentric culture). On the other hand, these novels promote the protagonist as the creator of his own text or of the world-as-text (an alternative to the reader-as-creator after the death of the author) – what the title of this chapter refers to as the character-author. Yet this alternative creator of the text is also undermined by the actual author[2] (Pelevin himself) by means of prefaces, plot disruptions, and thwarted expectations.

[1] It is worth noting that Pelevin is most likely responding to the Bildungsroman, a genre which became particularly popular in Russia in the early nineteenth century and centered on a protagonist who is a budding artist. This protagonist was tacitly replaced by the failed artist (consider, for instance the unfulfilled, vaguely literary aspirations of the protagonists in *Oblomov* (Goncharov, 1859), *Evgenii Onegin* (Pushkin, 1832), "Diary of a Superfluous Man" (Turgenev, 1850). Otto Boele notes that the degradation of this kind of protagonist peaks in the 1890s with, for instance, Ignatii Potapenko's "Not a Hero," the characters of which sell their talent to the "popular press" just like Pelevin's Tatarskii or Ariel' (45).

[2] Chapter Three of this thesis will discuss the conflation of the figures of author and writer in Pelevin's oeuvre and self-image.

AUTHOR-CHARACTERS

The fate of Pelevin's author-characters – and that of Vavilen Tatarskii in particular – has often been taken by critics as Pelevin's commentary on the role and image of the intelligentsia in 21st-century Russia. In this way, Lyudmila Parts analyzes *Generation «П»* "as a chronicle of the transformation of a class [the intelligentsia] and its myth" (441). While Marina Peunova concentrates on propensity for dissent as the key characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia in her analysis of its fate in the same text, Parts chooses to emphasize the importance of literature in the intelligentsia's self-definition:

> Since Great Russian Literature is among the fundamental components of Russian national identity, the repository of aesthetic and moral riches, the act of attaching oneself to it, and thus appropriating its status, helps the intelligentsia to justify its perceived position of spiritual leadership. (438)

Mark Lipovetsky also points to the importance of literature in Russian culture and history and even suggests that by the twentieth century, "literature had become the secular religion of the intelligentsia as the key agent of modernization" (*Paralogii* 29). This allows Parts to tie the degradation of the word as portrayed in Pelevin's novel to the demise of the intelligentsia. In particular, she emphasizes the devaluation of literature in a capitalist system,[3] the infiltration of the Russian language with English vocabulary, and the gradual rejection (or gradual forgetting) of old literary symbols and figures (Parts 444-47).

Tatarskii's career is, indeed, emblematic of the decline of the intelligentsia, both in terms of the group's propensity to dissent and in the quality of its literary product. Recently recruited to work for an advertising agency by Sergei Morkovin, a former peer from the Litinstitute,[4] Tatarskii is asked to write a series of slogans to prove his worth to the company.

[3] Lipovetsky similarly connects the end of lieraturocentrism to the advent of capitalism and the commodification of literature in his reference to M.Berg: "The ultimate crisis of literaturocentrism, in his [Berg's] opinion, occurs only after *perestroika*, during the 1990s, when symbolic capital earned by literature is converted into symbolic capital in the sphere of politics and intro 'regular,' economic, capital" (*Paralogii* 31).
[4] Literary Institute.

When he has difficulty writing an ad for "Parliament" cigarettes, Tatarskii decides to look for an old college paper on the history of Russian parliamentarism, but finds instead a mysterious binder with a title that says "*Tikhamat*" (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 38). This document is the first of a series of pseudo-scientific/mythical/historical/philosophical treatises that can be found in the novel. "*Tikhamat*" narrates the story of a goddess named Ishtar and her three riddles, the answers to which can make any man her husband. This marriage (or, rather, "a sexual union" with her atop the tower of Babylon) would then lead said man to "wealth and absolute wisdom" (41). Further, (after discovering the binder) Tatarskii has an incredible experience induced by his friend Gireev's hallucinogenic mushrooms which leads him to believe that he has found the real tower of Babylon. This experience converts Tatarskii to a new faith and, a few days later, he impulsively buys a planchette for spiritualist activities and uses it throughout the novel in order to contact the spirit of Che Guevara. Che responds with a long lecture that reveals the ways in which the capitalist system manipulates and exploits humans. One of the instruments for manipulation, for instance, is the television which becomes "a remote control for the viewer" (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 81). Che goes on to talk about the "ORANUS" – the organism of which every individual human being is only a cell (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 109). Each cell serves to gain as much money for the ORANUS as possible and to simultaneously experience pleasure when spending money. Advertising, then, is necessary in order to persuade humans to spend more money by suggesting that certain products will bring them happiness or define them as individuals.

In many ways, this lecture opens (or should open) Tatarskii's eyes to his own subservience to the system. Indeed, he initially changes careers from selling beer in a kiosk and writing poetry "for eternity" to advertising only because he is offered a large enough sum of money: "In a split second Tatarsky had calculated what ten per cent of twenty thousand would be. He swallowed hard and stared at Morkovin with dog-like eyes" (Pelevin, *Homo*

Zapiens 10). Later in his career, Tatarskii buys himself a Mercedes (that classic signifier of success) and suddenly begins to notice things he had never noticed before – things like patches on his friend Gireev's pants (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 284). Previously consumed by what his eccentric friend had to say, Tatarskii is suddenly disenchanted: the signs of his friend's poverty seem to devalue Gireev's self-proclaimed wisdom. The narrator comments: "That is how the displacing wow-factor operates in our hearts; but when Tatarsky was struck by its imperceptible blow, he gave no sign that he'd lost interest in the conversation with Gireiev" (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 224). It is not clear at this point whether Tatarskii realizes that he is under the effect of the wow-factor, in fact, he probably does not even understand exactly why he has suddenly lost interest in Gireev, for the impact of the wow-factor was so "imperceptible." On another occasion, the narrator similarly describes a potential wow-factor caused by the pleasure of driving a Mercedes and seeing the jealous faces of people waiting for their bus. This wow-factor, curiously, does not affect Tatarskii (who is, in fact, driving his Mercedes past a bus stop). It is not, however, because Tatarskii has been enlightened by Che and has learned to ignore these manipulations – the narrator suggests several potential reasons for Tatarskii's indifference to envy: "Perhaps the difficulty lay in some specific after-the-rain apathy of the punters standing at their bus stops, or perhaps Tatarsky was simply too nervous: there was a review of his work coming up, and Azadovsky himself was due to attend" (179).

Tatarskii's own views and reactions to wow-factors are so deeply entrenched in the system[5] that he turns out to be incapable of even individual dissent against servitude to the ORANUS. Tatarskii does not wish to defy the system (either individually or by enlightening others): he wants to exploit it for his own benefit. Indeed, Che's lecture becomes Tatarskii's inspiration: he stops in the middle of it in order to write down several ideas for commercials.

[5] Thus perhaps even rendering dissent impossible in a capitalist system.

Moreover, Tatarskii's use of the planchette (for spiritualist activities) is diametrically opposed to the spirit's message and he understands it: "As he was putting his hands back on the planchette, Tatarskii was almost certain that nothing else was going to happen, and that the spirit would not forgive betrayal" (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 113).[6] Thus, not only does Tatarskii forfeit the chance to produce social change (to stop the dehumanization of his peers through consumption), he uses his newly gained understanding of wow-factors in order to facilitate this process. Tatarskii's subservience to the system and the complete absence of even a possibility of dissent in his mind then signifies the decline of the intelligentsia. In Tatarskii's own words, there instead appears a "middle class in Russia … formed directly from the intelligentsia, which has ceased thinking nationally and begun thinking about where it can get money (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 208).

Tatarskii, of course, belongs to this new class. His pursuit of wealth has not only driven him to compliance with the system, but also further and further from what is traditionally considered to be good literature – he thus doubly fails to remain a member of the intelligentsia. On the one hand, his writing does manifest the process of the degradation of the word. On the other hand, Tatarskii's claim to authorship is questionable and one could, in fact, suggest that his work is the work of a dead Barthesian author. In the former sense, the quality of Tatarskii's output (i.e. literary quality, for he still does produce commercially successful ads) begins to drop as he focuses on writing as a source of profit. The first step in this direction is when Tatarskii moves on from poetry to advertising jingles seduced by the promise of financial bliss. Then: Tatarskii's slogans gradually become less and less literary. Consider one of his first rhymes for "Parliament" cigarettes:

The slogan is a quotation from the nineteenth-century poet Griboedov:

[6] Interestingly enough, Andrew Bromfield's translation chooses to omit this section of text. In his translation, Che's speech runs uninterrupted and Tatarskii's ideas for the commercials for Ray-ban and Sony Black Trinitron are simply skipped.

Sweet and dear
Is the smoke of our Motherland. (42)

Later in the novel, a more experienced Tatarskii realizes that another tactic might sell even better:

> In general, it was hard to believe that not so very long ago he had been wont to spend so much time searching for meaningless rhymes that had long since been abandoned by the poetry[7] of the market democracies. It seemed simply inconceivable that only a few short years ago life had been so gentle and undemanding that he could waste entire kilowatts of mental energy in dead-end circuits of his brain that never paid back the investment.[8] (102)

His later advertising slogans are therefore less profound and more market-oriented: they contain profanities and their rhyme and meter are simplified to the point where they sound like limericks (*chastushki*[9]):

НА ВОСЬМОЕ МАРТА МАНЕ
ПОДАРЮ КОЛЬЕ ДЕ БИРС
И СЕРЕЖКИ ОТ АРМАНИ –
ТО-ТО БУДЕТ ЗАЕБИСЬ! (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 137)

On the eighth of March[10] to Mania
I'll give a necklace from De Beers

[7] Note the degradation of the word 'poetry' itself used in a collocation together with 'market democracies.' The protagonist of Pelevin's other novel *t* laments the fate of the author and of poetry (here more as a concept) in more explicit terms as he watches a ventriloquist entertain the public: "If even a ventriloquist at a public house has to resort to this kind of tricks in order to sustain the audience's interest, then what fate awaits poetry? There'll be no place for it in the new world – or, more precisely, there will be a place for it, but poetry will only be interesting if it becomes known that its author has two d…cks or that he, at least, can read his poems with his ass. (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 347)

[8] Interestingly enough, Pelevin seems to tie the image of Tatarskii to that of Maiakovskii (also a poet who turned to advertising): both are intellectuals who sell themselves to an ideology (capitalist and communist, respectively). This particular quote from *Generation «П»* precedes a discussion of the similarities between Soviet propagandists (agitators) and Tatarskii and Khanin (Tatarskii's new boss at *Tainyi Sovetchik* advertising agency). This connection is perhaps reiterated in the title of one of the chapters of the novel: "*Oblako v shtanakh*" ("Cloud in Trousers") – a transparent allusion to Maiakovskii's early poem (1914-1915). Similar connections and hints are made in *Chapaev and Void* where Petr Pustota (the one living in the first quarter of the twentieth century) begins to work for the state even though his own worldview does not seem to align with that of the party. For instance: "Having discerned the clearly hellish character of the new authorities, many decadents such as Maiakovskii took the opportunity to offer their services to them" (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 14).

[9] It is perhaps their distinctly Russian character that has rendered them untranslatable – Andrew Bromfield's translation omits them completely.

[10] The eighth of March, International Women's Day, widely celebrated in Russia.

> And earrings from Armani –
> That'll be fucking amazing!

In fact, when Tatarskii is promoted to editor and supervisor of commercials, his criticisms invariably contain something of the following sort:

> Литературщина. Сколько раз повторять: нам тут нужны не творцы, а криэйторы.[11] (208)

> Too literary. How many times do I have to tell you: we don't need writers here, we need creatives. (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 159)

In her analysis of this passage, Parts notes that unlike young and inexperienced commercial writers, Tatarskii "knows that within the new discourse these [literary] symbols have lost their power" (447). In other words, the degradation of the word and of Russian culture (which has been invaded by English words and such as *krieitor*), has rendered canonical literature irrelevant. The intelligentsia has been downgraded from creators (*tvortsy*, artists-as-demiurges) to creatives (*krieitory*).

While the literary quality of Tatarskii's product is obviously in gradual decline, there are also reasons to have reservations about his claims to authorship. Mark Lipovetsky suggests that Russian postmodernism must criticize the Russian literaturocentric paradigm, because its poetics rejects the "transcendental signified," and instead postulates indeterminacy, chaos, and non-teleological order (*Paralogii* 38). Therefore, this decline of quality is, perhaps, necessitated by the realities of postmodernity. At the same time, this decline is what grants Tatarskii a greater claim to authorship in the Barthesian sense: Vavilen gradually rejects references to literature or the use of literary symbols, allegories and metaphors in his commercials (and the commercials he reviews). In this way, he strives to

[11] The word *krieitor* is based on the English 'creator,' yet it is used to mean something quite different from its original meaning in the English language. While in English 'creator' can refer to a creator of something (including the author of a literary work), in Russian, *krieitor* refers specifically to "a specialist in an advertising firm, who develops original projects and new creative solutions" ("Krieitor").

produce a text that is not "a tissue of quotations" (Barthes 146). In fact, his texts are devoid of any linguistic markers that are easily assignable to famous discourses: the only recognizable linguistic units in his rhymes are the names of the brands he is advertising. In other words, Tatarskii has substituted commercial competence for literary competence and memes for literary allusions. Moreover, Tatarskii makes sure that his ads do issue a "single 'theological' meaning" that Barthes rejects (146) for the consumer to swallow without question: the product is worth buying. Of course, the contemporary global legal system also exalts Tatarskii as the author. Attesting to this, Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi playfully note: "Barthes' call in 'The Death of the Author' for a reversal of the conventional relation of author and reader has gone unheard by intellectual property lawyers" (qtd. in Logie 494).

Yet there are also reasons to suggest that Tatarskii is designed to conform to Barthes's definition of the dead author. In *The Death and Return of the Author*, John M. Burke provides a concise outline of the debate to which Barthes was responding with his seminal essay. One of the arguments in that debate is that the author is not responsible for his creation because he is "the point *de passage* through which other forces articulate themselves" (Burke 4). Further, in the works of Mallarmé and Baudelaire, this notion developed into the following: "[t]he sublime origin of literature which the romantics sought alternately in imagination, or in the Muse, is now discovered within language itself, freed from its author" (5). Thus, "[t]he explanation of a work is [not to be] sought in the man or woman who produced it" (Barthes 143) because the author is simply a conduit for inspiration, language, and, additionally in the case of Tatarskii, hallucinogenic stimulants.

Thus, Tatarskii writes an ad for "Parliament" cigarettes under the influence of fly-agaric (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 59); his ad for Hugo Boss is inspired by cocaine (73-5), ads for Ray Ban and Sony Black Trinitron are written after he consumes a combination of whisky and wine (101) and this list is not nearly exhaustive. When hallucinogens are not available,

Tatarskii's writing process is stimulated by random and decidedly unpoetic inspiration. For instance, he writes an ad for shopping tours to Istanbul after seeing a large selection of sneakers in a shop window (93-4) and an ad for condoms upon noticing a well-written slogan on their packaging (95-6). In fact, Tatarskii carries a small notebook precisely for such moments of inspiration and he does not hesitate to take it out in the middle of a conversation, street, or shop. Moreover, consider the words that the narrator uses in order to describe these moments of inspiration: "[a] sudden idea entered Tatarskii's head" (112), or: "[e]ventually the phrase he was looking for lit up in his head" (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 72). Indeed, even despite the fact that Tatarskii mostly writes under stimulants, such a description of his creative process makes him seem more of a conduit for than an actual owner of ideas or texts resulting from these ideas. Furthermore, Tatarskii can hardly be credited for his creations, for he scarcely works on or re-works his products. Thus, almost all of his slogans or commercials are written down immediately upon entering his mind and it is incredibly rare that Tatarskii should take "several minutes"[12] to think about a slogan before opening his notebook (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 96). Therefore, not only does Tatarskii write only when inspiration suddenly hits him, he does not return to his projects in order to apply final and more deliberate touches. Finally, even Tatarskii's personality can be seen as irrelevant to his creative product because of the primacy of language over authorial intent. As such, Tatarskii's last piece of poetry (written before he became a *krieitor*) is, in Barthes' words, "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146) – the narrator even provides his audience with the exact sources: a song by DDT[13] and allusions to Dostoevskii (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 10-4). Further, as Tatarskii becomes an advertising professional, his language does indeed begin to speak instead of him (as Barthes would have it): after having composed the ad for

[12] While the analysis of Bromfield's translation is not at all the focus of this thesis, it is very curious that Pelevin's "several minutes" should turn into "several seconds" in Bromfield's English-language version of the novel (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 72).
[13] DDT is a famous Soviet/Russian rock-band created in 1980.

Armani and De Beers quoted above, Tatarskii idly wonders if it was the "Mania" from his very last poem that suddenly surfaced as the character of this new ad.[14] Thus, this allusion is presented as unintentional: language gains agency beyond the author's control or even conscious knowledge and in this way Tatarskii becomes the proverbial dead author.

The nature of the advertising business also, paradoxically, makes Tatarskii an unreliable source of authorial intent or explanation of his works. On the one hand, as mentioned above, Tatarskii is credited as the author according to intellectual property laws and because he is the one who receives remuneration for his work. On the other hand, the question of authorial intent becomes irrelevant with regard to Tatarskii because he is only acting on the orders of the companies who pay for the creation of the commercials in question. Consider, for instance, Tatarskii's meeting with the customer from the Lefortovo Confectionery Combine in the process of which Vavilen correctly guesses what his nameless client wants (25-7).[15] In fact, the anonymity of the client (who is, of course, always the boss) becomes a constant in Tatarskii's life. For example, when Tatarskii asks Morkovin who it is that they are working for, "what's holding the whole lot up," Morkovin tells him to never ask this question again and to pinch himself when he wants to think about it (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 175). Therefore, not only is Tatarskii working on someone else's orders, he is also

[14] Tatarskii's method of composition in this particular instance is perhaps reminiscent of Eliot Borenstein's meme theory summarized in the introduction. In fact, he does mention this novel in passing: "The memetic power of advertising is one of the main themes of Viktor Pelevin's hit novel of 1999, *Generation P*" (Borenstein 470). This statement can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, Tatarskii's work is to come up with memes – with catch phrases that will stick to customers' minds; on the other hand, Tatarskii seems to have fallen victim to a similar phenomenon – Russian literary classics have become so entrenched in his mind that they have turned into memes which he now reproduces unconsciously (in this case, a mysterious Mania made her way into the ad for Armani and De Beers).

[15] Tatarskii's vulnerability as an author is demonstrated when his work is stolen by his customers and he can do nothing to find justice: "Gradually a very unpleasant tendency began to emerge: a client would be presented with a project conceived and developed by Tatarsky, politely explain that it was not exactly what was required, and then a month or two later Tatarsky would come across a clip that was quite clearly based on his idea. Trying to discover the truth in such cases was a waste of time" (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 17). In this manner, again, the issue of copyright reduces the notion of authorship (in the sense of recognition for an original act of genius) to a commercially defined and thus commercially "infringeable" concept of ownership/property.

clueless as to who it is who is ordering him around. Not only is Tatarskii's intention irrelevant, the intention of those in charge is unknowable and thus futile to try to discern.

Nevertheless, the actual author of the novel makes his intentions known in (or provides guidance through) paratextual elements. According to Gérard Genette, paratext is

> "a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that … is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)." (2)

One of such elements is the epigraph. In this particular case, it is an excerpt from a song called "Democracy" released in 1992 and performed by Leonard Cohen. Genette suggests that the function of the epigraph often "consists of commenting on the text, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes" (157). In addition, it produces a certain "epigraph-effect": "[t]he epigraph in itself is a signal (intended as a sign) of culture, a password of intellectuality" (Genette 160). Yet the source of Pelevin's epigraph seems to contradict this purpose and in this way, it constitutes the author's commentary on the theme of the novel and, at the same time, foreshadows and emphasizes the message sent in it: the demise of the intelligentsia is suggested in the choice of a pop-song as an epigraph to a novel, a work of literature. Similarly, the author manifests himself in the dedication – "To the Memory of the Middle Class" (n.p.) the division of the novel into chapters[16] as well as in the note from the author which follows the dedication. Curiously, this note contains a disclaimer about property rights to names and brands mentioned in the text: apparently, they are to be taken as "projections of elements of the politico-commercial informational field that have been forcibly induced as perceptual objects of the individual mind" (n.p.). Moreover, the author

[16] As well as the choice of titles for said chapters – some of them indicate the person or the place that is at the center of Tatarskii's experiences within the chapter (for instance, the title of Chapter Two is "Draft Podium" and it is also the name of the firm that Tatarskii starts to work in in this chapter, while Chapter Ten is titled "Vovchik Maloi" in reference to the character that Tatarskii meets in it) and some, like "Poor Folk" seem to be more meaningful in that they are allusions to classical literary texts.

addresses his audience directly and further nuances its understanding of his intentions by continuing as follows:

> The author requests that they [names of goods and politicians] be understood exclusively in this sense. Any other coincidences are purely accidental. The author's opinions do not necessarily coincide with his point of view. (n.p.)

The "point of view" of the author mentioned in the dedication is Tatarskii's point of view – or one based on Tatarskii's biography and what is more or less his stream of consciousness. The inclusion of this note serves to establish, from the very first pages of the book, the presence of an author and to suggest to the reader that he needs to work out from textual evidence what V.V. Vinogradov calls *obraz avtora*, the image of the author.[17]

According to Vinogradov, this image "is assembled or created from the key characteristics of a poet's creative work. It sometimes also embodies and reflects creatively embellished elements of his biography" (113). An integral part of it is "the author's own attitude to the subject," even though "'the image of the author' is a much wider, deeper, and diverse concept" that just that. The attitude of the author of *Generation «П»* towards his protagonist and his chosen vocation is that of disagreement. Traces of his point of view are abundant in the text. For instance, the author's mindset seems to be represented by Sirruf, a mythological character who comes to warn Tatarskii about the consequences of his actions for humanity. Alternatively, the author's opinion might show through in the mythical creature that he invents – the five-legged dog called *Pizdets* (Phukkup in the English version of the novel) whose name might just be implied in the title of the novel itself, for, according to an article that Tatarskii stumbles upon: "In the ancient chronicles he [the dog] was indicated by a large letter 'P' with two commas" (238). While the definitions of this vulgarism vary, the word's most common meaning, according to Wiktionary, is "imminent end of or to

[17] Yet, Pelevin's focus seems to be not on the image of the author, but on another figure, a purposeful conflation of author and writer. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three of this thesis.

something"; another meaning offered by the same source is "an evaluative characteristic for something extremely bad, difficult, or insurmountable." It follows then, that this choice of expansion of the title's initial condemns Tatarskii's generation, the *pizdets* generation, it is a judgmental statement.[18] If one chooses to apply old-fashioned biographical criticism, he would most likely reach the same conclusion: Pelevin's intention must have been to expose the new intelligentsia and its market ideology as completely degraded, seeing as he himself practices the moral teachings and ritual practices of Buddhism (Kropiwyansky 79). According to Genette's system, Pelevin's affiliation with Buddhism (if known to the readers) also constitutes a variety of paratext, i.e. factual paratext: "the paratext that consists not of an explicit message (verbal or other) but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received" (7).

Finally, to continue with biographical criticism, authorial intention and the importance of an author's biography seem to be purposefully pushed to the forefront in the first chapter of the novel where the reader is provided with a brief introduction to Tatarskii's life – a life that is very similar to that of Pelevin. On the one hand, the narrator thus suggests that Vavilen's choices are rooted in his childhood and personality. On the other hand, by making Vavilen's biography similar to his own, Pelevin blurs the border between text and life and thus establishes his own presence in his text. As such, Tatarskii is approximately of the same age as Pelevin ("Tatarskii was born long before this victory of red over red"), and their histories of education are also uncannily alike: just like Pelevin, Vavilen first graduates from

[18] Textual analysis of several of Pelevin's novels and short stories has led Sofya Khagi to draw a similar conclusion about the author's own point of view: "The narratives highlight the deindividualized status of the individual in modern society and buttress the author's diagnosis of the collapse of spirituality, rampant consumerism, and covert but nonetheless efficient modes of social control in modern life" ("Towards Biopolitics" 456).

a technical institute and then decides to change his profession and begins to study literature at the Litinstitute[19] (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 9-11).

Perhaps it is this external similarity that allows and at the same time makes it necessary for Pelevin to draw a contrast between himself and his character and, indeed, it is the reason why the author needs to include a prefatory note saying that "The author's opinions do not necessarily coincide with his point of view" (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* n.p.). Despite these biographical coincidences, the two writers' approach to the word is very different: instead of becoming a conduit for language like Tatarskii, Pelevin takes charge over language and empties it of meaning. On the one hand, on multiple occasions, Pelevin uses intertextual references in an absurd way, i.e. in places where they do not produce an effect beyond recognition or do not create additional layers of meaning. Alternatively, he modifies quotes until they sound absurd. For instance, in a conversation with Tatarskii, Morkovin lightheartedly quotes Raskol'nikov from Dostoevskii's *Crime and Punishment* (1866): "Am I a timid cowering creature or have I got moral rights?"[20] (Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens* 11) and a customer at the occult store quotes from a Japanese poet Ishikawa Takuboku: "leave off, leave off this vain dispute" (75). In both instances, the quotes are meant to be taken at face value, i.e. literally – they have become not references to their original sources and contexts but simply popular expressions or even memes in Eliot Borenstein's understanding of the term – they are almost sayings used by regular people without allegiance to or investment in

[19] In his criticism of Barthes's "The Death of the Author," Burke points out contradictions with Barthes's other texts. In particular, he offers one example of how Barthes takes the statement he made in "The Death" (1967) back in "From Work to Text" (1971): "It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest.' If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary); it is the work of Proust, of Genet which allows their lives to be read as text. The word 'bio-graphy' re-acquires a strong, etymological sense, at the same time as the sincerity of the enunciation - veritable 'cross' borne by literary morality - becomes a false problem: the I which writes the text, it too, is never more than a paper I" (qtd. in Burke 23). In a similar way, ironically, Pelevin seems to have inscribed himself in the text as one of the characters.

[20] In the original, "Тварь ли я дрожащая или право имею" (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 20) – a direct quote from Dostoevskii (*Crime and Punishment* 354).

their original source. Further, intertextual references are sometimes used to ease, omit, or shorten visual descriptions.[21] For example, it is not a regular customer whom Tatarskii meets briefly at the occult store, but rather it is a "customer of a Mephistophelean appearance," where the reference to Mephistopheles (initially a folkloric figure, but most famous as the character of Goethe's *Faust*) is purely visual (ibid). Not only is it explicitly used as such, but there is also no reason to suspect a deeper link – the customer appears only once, and utters only this one phrase which has no influence on the plot or on other characters. It is interesting that Pelevin should use this device mostly whenever he has to introduce an unimportant character, an extra, so to speak. For instance, consider Sergei, the leader of Draft Podium (the first advertising company Tatarskii works in) "who looked like Dracula in his younger days" (11). Even in these extraneous moments, he refers to, and thus undermines, the intertextual apparatus on which this novel and by extension his entire oeuvre rests.

Another device that Pelevin uses in order to divest intertextual references of meaning is disappointment of readers' expectations. Here, a perceptive reader will notice a obvious reference to Dostoevskii (1846) in the title of the fifth chapter – "Poor Folk" – and will expect that this recognition will help him decode an additional layer of meaning hidden in it. Yet the reader will soon be disappointed, for the title of this chapter refers to the pub that Tatarskii finds himself in when he meets the LSD dealer: "he was drinking away a small fee in the Poor Folk bar" (51).[22] A similar technique is used in Chapter Twelve, "A Cloud in Pants" whose title has nothing to do with Maiakovskii's famous poem and everything to do with digital clouds: in this chapter, Morkovin reveals the nature of cloud politics to Tatarskii.

[21] See Mattias Ågren's "In Pursuit of Neo: The Matrix in Contemporary Russian Novels" for an analysis of how *The Matrix* is used in selected contemporary Russian novels. In particular, Ågren also notes that Pelevin uses references to *The Matrix* in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (*The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*, 2004) in order to provide instant visual images and thus shorten descriptive sections of the novel (256).

[22] While alternative interpretations of the meaning behind this reference to Dostoevskii are possible, it seems that Pelevin is intentionally playing with the reader – as soon as the reader sees that "Poor Folk" is simply the name of the bar, he will likely stop looking for meaning behind this allusion. In other words, this elusive allusion produces a certain affect (to return to Stanley Fish's affective stylistics) on the reader (doubled, perhaps for the critic whose job description includes the exploration of literary allusions).

It turns out that most of the politicians one sees on their TV screen are constructed from digital clouds: "First you need a source figure — a wax model or a human being. You use it to model the corporeal cloud" (166). These literary devices are not exclusive to *Generation «П»* and are used throughout Pelevin's works. For instance, readers' expectations are similarly disappointed in *t*: the novel is populated by characters named Dostoevskii and Count T. who are both supposedly based on the canonical Russian writers. Yet the reader soon finds out that "this Dostoevskii is as much 'the' Dostoevskii as you [Count T., the protagonist] are 'the' Tolstoi" (Pelevin, *t* 155). Similarly, in "*Zheltaia strela*" (The Yellow Arrow, 1998), one of the characters' names is *Авель* (279) which is transcribed as Avel' – the Russian version of the name Abel, the murdered brother from the Bible (book of Genesis 4:1-18). The erudite reader, of course, suspects that Avel' will be killed by his brother[23] or that something to that effect will happen, but his expectations are mocked in the penultimate chapter where the author reveals that this character's name is actually *Авэль* (Pelevin, "Zheltaia strela" 325) which is, sadly, also transcribed as Avel': it was the protagonist's mispronunciation which created this 'accidental' intertextual link.

Finally, another one of Pelevin's favorite devices is the defamiliarization or questioning of idioms, sayings, and popular expressions. This device allows Pelevin to take charge of language, to empty it of its previous meaning and to renew it. The list of possible examples seems almost inexhaustible. For example, the protagonist of Pelevin's *t* thoughtfully wonders: "'And where they'll take Solov'ev – God alone knows…' This phrasing immediately felt strange to him. 'God and God alone? Maybe all five Gods?'" (347).[24] Similarly, in "Problema vervolka v srednei polose" ("A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia," 2013), the protagonist defamiliarizes another saying: "The surroundings

[23] Funnily enough, he does have one, yet the reader does not learn his name.
[24] In the original: "'А куда Соловьева повезут, одному Богу известно…' Эта формулировка сразу же показалась сомнительной. 'Одному Богу? А может и всем пяти'."

were weirdly unpleasant, heavy and deserted, as though they had been prepped to be swept off the face of the earth – although, thought Sasha, if the earth does have a face, it is clearly located elsewhere" (162). Finally, to provide one last example, the protagonist of "The Yellow Arrow" defamiliarizes a colloquial expression by re-interpreting it using slang:

> - Эй, - сказал один из ассистентов, поднимая голову, - ты чего дымишь? Тут и так воздух спертый.
>
> Андрей не ответил. Можно письмо в газету написать, подумал он, - мол, братья и сестры, слышал я, у нас и воздух сперли. (Pelevin, "Zheltaia strela" 279)

> - Hey, - said one of the assistants raising his head, - don't smoke here! The air is dead in here as it is.
>
> Andrei didn't reply. I could send a letter to the newspapers, thought he, - something like: brothers and sisters, I hear they've killed our air, too.[25]

Thus, defamiliarization and the automatic or literal use of intertext-memes become two sides of the same coin for Pelevin. Both are used in order to gain mastery of language and to empty it of meaning. Instead of letting the discourses of others run free, Pelevin subjugates them to his own will. Sverdlov argues that these devices are Pelevin's method of defending his work from critics who have often failed to appreciate his literary skill (34). Sverdlov suggests that Pelevin attempts to "liquidate the word," to create a zone of emptiness in which it, naturally, does not matter whether the author's literary style is lacking in quality, for words are only foils or simulacra hiding the absence of reality. Sverdlov's key example comes from *Generation «П»*:

> The process of liquidation of the word as such is demonstrated in the central section of *Generation П* – in Che Guevara's lecture. A simple, three-part combination is played out: first, the "commercial interjection 'wow!'" is erected to the status of a term, then it expands metaphorically and, finally, it captures the word of its choosing. And thus the famous saying "homo homini lupus est" ends up sounding like "Wow wow wow!"; barking instead of articulate speech, a hole instead of meaning. (35)

[25] Playing on *spertyi vozdukh* (dead air) and the verb *speret'* (a highly colloquial variant of 'to steal').

In this manner, even though Pelevin's author-character Tatarskii is presented more or less unambiguously as a former member of the declining intelligentsia, as a dead author who can hardly be said to be in charge of his own creation, and as a *krieitor* subservient to language, Pelevin himself continuously reestablishes his claims to authorship. Even though the content of his novel is in agreement with Barthes's thesis of the death of the author, its form and the literary devices it employs demonstrate the opposite.

CHARACTER-AUTHORS

Tatarskii is by no means Pelevin's only author-character, but his other author-characters are more complicated in that they are simultaneously character-authors. Interestingly enough, where Barthes offers only one alternative to the author in his essay – the reader – Pelevin offers two: the reader (as discussed in Chapter One of the present thesis) and the character. Sally Dalton-Brown touches upon this phenomenon in her "Looking For The Creator: Pelevin And The Impotent Writer In *T* (2009) and *Ananasnaia voda dlia prekrasnoi damy* (2011)." In particular, Dalton-Brown suggests that Pelevin successfully reverses the author-character hierarchy and demonstrates the following:

> The character might be able to embody some form of potency unattainable to the author, to 'live beyond the text' in which the author himself is trapped. The problem, however, is that the character might in fact wish to destroy his or her author, indeed, perhaps must do so in order to attain power. ("Looking For The Creator" 206)

She continues: "Playing with the hierarchy of conventional author–character relationship – suggesting characters as authors – is of course not new" ("Looking For The Creator" 205-6). Examples include Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series, Jasper Fforde's detective novels, and Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. However, unlike these works of fiction which seem to earnestly suggest the character as the new author, Pelevin's novels tend

to undermine or ironize their own premises: the author toys with the reader (and, funnily enough, with the character of the novel *t*) by making him believe that a character is the actual author only to establish his own primacy.

One example of a character-author is Petr Pustota, the protagonist of *Chapaev and Void*. Throughout the novel, Petr inhabits two alternative realities without being able to decide which is the real one: in one of them, he is a patient in a psychiatric hospital in what seems to be Russia of the 1990s, in another, he is a poet and a political commissar in the Red Army in, approximately, the late 1910s. However, Vasilii Chapaev, whom Petr meets in the latter reality, tries to persuade Petr that both of these worlds are unreal and that he, Petr, is the one who creates them and makes their existence possible. For example, in Chapter Five, Chapaev states: "Everything we see, Pet'ka, is located in our consciousness" (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 185); he expresses a similar sentiment in Chapter Nine: "how can you not be yourself when you are absolutely everything that can ever be?" (385). Furthermore, Chapaev asks Iungern fon Shternberg (the defender of Inner Mongolia) to enlighten Petr about his role as the creator of his own reality. Iungern – in words quite similar to those of Sartrik in *Helmet of Horror* – states: "There is nothing there that exists, as they say, in reality. Everything depends on who is looking at it" and "actually, each of us only sees the reflection of his own spirit in life" (296-97). This philosophy makes Petr the demiurge of the reality that he lives in. Alternatively, these passages suggest that any of the characters inhabiting that reality could potentially be its actual creator – in fact, towards the end of the novel Petr decides that he is now in a universe created by another character named Grigorii Kotovskii (392).

Even more interestingly, Petr is not only the creator of his own reality – reality here being a possible allegory for the text at hand – but also the actual author of the novel *Chapaev i Pustota*. The first hint to this effect is Chapaev's suggestion (which repeats that

of Petr's doctor in the other timeline) that Petr should write down his dreams or even make notes while he is dreaming:

> - … Yesterday I was really dreaming about a psychiatric ward and do you know what happened? That butcher who's in charge there asked me to write down, in details, everything that happens to me here. He said he needed it for work. Can you imagine?
>
> - I can, - said Chapaev. – And why won't you listen to him? … I can't think of anything better than taking notes in your dreams.[26] (259)

Thus, it becomes possible that all sections of the novel are written by Petr – half of them for his psychiatrist and another half for himself and for Chapaev. There are multiple instances in the novel which further hint that Petr is the author of the novel. For example, during the same conversation quoted above, Chapaev exclaims:

> - … What does it matter what you call me in the notes you make in your dreams? … You can call me anything, - said Chapaev. – You can even call me Chapaev … you can even write that I had a moustache and that I straightened it after saying these words.
>
> Chapaev carefully straightened his moustache. (259-60)

Similarly, while having intercourse with Anna (in a dream he has in the 1910s timeline), Petr says: "You know, if I were to write a really powerful erotic scene, I would drop a few hints and fill everything else with unintelligible conversation, something like… Oh God, Anna… Something like the conversation we are having right now" (359). Indeed, the way in which their intercourse is described in the novel is taunting in that it offers no actual description beyond a few interjections, ellipses and exclamations – the space is instead taken up by an abstract conversation between the two characters as they are having sex. This coincidence of Petr's words with the author's method suggests that Petr might be this scene's actual author. Finally, one other way in which Petr is established as the author of

[26] Funnily enough, at some point Petr will start to doubt whether he is writing down his dreams as they appear to him or is making them up: "in the end I couldn't understand if I was just writing down my dream or beginning to improvise it" (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota*, 300).

the novel in the reader's mind is the curious transition between Chapters Eight and Nine. Up to this point in the text, cursive was used in order to denote the content of group therapy sessions in the psychiatric ward – in particular, the patients' hallucinogen-induced experiences. Furthermore, the action of odd-numbered chapters is set in the 1910s, while that of the chapters with even numbers takes place in the 1990s. However, the transition between Chapters Eight and Nine initially seems to break this pattern: the description of the hallucination from Chapter Eight continues in Chapter Nine, formatted in cursive in both cases. Suddenly, at the end of the paragraph, the surprised reader sees a closing quotation mark (though none had been supplied at the start of the chapter!). It is then revealed that Petr has, in fact, returned to the 1910s, and that the paragraph that described the hallucination was a quote from the notes that Petr has started to take which are now being read by Chapaev (336-37).

Manipulations of the author-character hierarchy are not restricted to the text of the novel itself. They are reiterated in the preface to the novel (in a manner resembling that of Pushkin's "Tales of Belkin," 1831) where the author of the preface offers multiple hints as to the real author of the manuscript, presently published under the title *Chapaev and Void*, hints which – as the reader will discover in the course of reading the novel – all point to Petr. For instance, the author of the preface claims that the author of the original manuscript defined its genre as a "special take-off [*vzlet*] of free thought" (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 7). In the novel itself, when Petr gets into his doctor's office in order to read his own medical file, he finds the following note made by the doctor: "On the other hand, according to his own words, he possesses 'a special take-off of free thought' which 'raises him above all the other laypeople" (136). Similarly, the author of the preface warns us that a section of the manuscript's author's notes titled "Petersburg Period" was edited out and, sure enough, Petr finds an entire folder with that same title in his personal file in

Timur Timurovich's office (137). Finally, the author of the preface claims that the novel in question is historically accurate, unlike Dmitrii Furmanov's novel *Chapaev* (1923):

> All this mix-up was caused by that book called *Chapaev* … Let us not waste time proving its inauthenticity. Anyone who is willing to do so, will easily find in it a great amount of discrepancies and contradictions, and its whole spirit is the best testimony to the fact that its author (or authors) were in no way related to the events they are endeavoring to describe. (9)

Chapaev and Void, however, is supposed to be much more authentic, insofar as it claims to be a truthful account by one of the participants of the events described and a person who actually did know Chapaev. Therefore not only is Petr suggested as the author of his own novel – he is also made out to be a real historical persona who left behind a manuscript (all of the abovementioned 'clues' point the reader to this conclusion). The position that this novel chooses to take with respect to the official account of historical events is similar to what Elisabeth Wesseling defines as "uchronian fiction" (204). The term "uchronie" refers to "the type of counterfactual fantasy which devises alternatives within the confines of documented history" (ibid). Wesseling also suggests that uchronie is a postmodern genre, for its relation to history is more subversive than that of traditional literature. Where traditional literature works to fill in the gaps without contradicting the official record, postmodern literature, while confining itself to official timelines, often fills in the gaps in such a way that, for instance, a completely different group of people emerges responsible for a particular historical achievement (Wesseling 208). This genre definition would further work to empower Petr as the creator of his own universe, for not only is he the author of the novel, he is suddenly also the author of history.

However, even though the protagonist is given a fair amount of autonomy and even presented as a demiurge, the way in which the novel is framed in many ways dismantles Petr's position of power. The very same foreword that helps extol Petr is instrumental in this interpretation. The foreword is signed (and, supposedly, written) by Urgan Dzhambon

Tulku VII, "The Chairman of the Buddhist Front of Full and Final Liberation (FFL(b))"[27] (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 10). Urgan Dzhambon, presented here as a 'real' historical figure is, in fact, a character who reappears in Pelevin's later novel *Generation «П».* Himself an intermediary between the author and the reader of the manuscript, Urgan Dzhambon also introduces the editor, presumably, Pelevin himself, for "the novel is being published under the name of the editor who prepared it for publication" (7). Even more hilariously, the framing of the novel suggests that there are two separate Pelevins: Pelevin-as-editor (mentioned by Urgan Dzhambon) and Pelevin-as-author. The latter is the one collecting the royalties, the one whose short biography is printed on the back cover, the one who is quoted on that very cover ("The author characterizes his work as 'the first work of world literature the action of which occurs in absolute emptiness'"), and, more importantly, the one who writes the epigraph and signs it as Chingiz-khan. The question of whether the quote from the epigraph can be truly attributed to this historical figure seems to have not been resolved by Pelevin's readers(6).[28]

While the epigraph by Chingiz-khan works to undermine Petr completely and to re-inscribe the Pelevin himself as the author of the text, the manipulations of Pelevin-as-editor produce the same effect even within the preface. First, this editor is said to have changed the title of the original manuscript:

> We changed the title of the original text (it is titled *Vasilii*[29] *Chapaev*) specifically to avoid confusion with the popular fabrication. The title *Chapaev and Void* was chosen as the most simple and non-suggestive, even though the editor proposed two other options. (10)

[27] In the original, "Председатель Буддистского Фронта Полного и Окончательного Освобождения (ПОО(б))."

[28] The advantage of being a writer in the age of the Internet is that whatever one writes may, indeed, become the truth for some people: the quote from Pelevin's epigraph has been attributed to Chingiz-khan on numerous websites even though *Chapaev and Void* is the only source where it appears ("Chingiskhan," "8 brutal'nykh," "Mudrye vyskazyvaniia").

[29] Perhaps in an attempt to disrupt expectations yet again, Pelevin strays from the original title of Furmanov's novel which is titled simply *Chapaev*.

Furthermore, the editor drops the original author's genre definition of the novel and forces upon the readers his own interpretation of it as a joke: "Genre definition given to the manuscript by its author – 'a special take-off of free thought' was omitted; it should, apparently, be interpreted as a joke" (7). Editorial manipulations within the text are still more pervasive: he supposedly edited out certain sections of the manuscript: "Descriptions of a number of magical procedures were deleted from the original, so were the narrator's voluminous recollections of his life in pre-revolutionary Petersburg" (ibid). Finally, Urgan Dzhambon and the editor publish the manuscript for their own private reasons thereby stealing Petr's words from under his pen and themselves becoming their authors, endowing them with a new authorial intention. As such, they want to shed light on the actual figure of Chapaev and to dismantle the Soviet myth (9). In this way, the content of the novel contradicts its foreword (ironically, the foreword contradicts itself). In fact, the foreword – a section of no interest to an ordinary reader – is almost meant to be forgotten, except, of course, for the hints that recur in the course of the novel and directly contradict everything that the foreword stands for in general.

Pelevin's later novel, *t*, is much more straightforward in suggesting its character as the author of his own novel: the mystery of whether Count T.[30] is the author of his own textual universe or only a character in it is central to the plot. This central theme is revealed gradually both to T. and to the reader. A detailed summary of the plot will demonstrate the complicated relationship that Pelevin creates between authors and characters even within the novel. First, T. comes to realize that he is not in charge of his own thoughts: in fact, he cannot remember anything about himself prior to the beginning of the novel (the scene on the train) – everything he knows comes from his conversation with Knopf (Pelevin*, t* 16). Second, T. meets Ariel' who claims to be his creator: "the

[30] The protagonist's name is always abbreviated in the novel – or, perhaps, his name really is just the one letter and a punctuation mark.

source of all your thoughts, worries and impulses is not located in you … I have already told you that this source is me" (20). Next, Ariel' tells T. that he is not exactly a god, but he is a demiurge of sorts – a writer, which means that count T. is his character (73). T. later learns that Ariel' is actually an editor, part of a group of writers who are collaborating on the novel at hand (99). Suddenly, Ariel' informs T. that he must start a new project about Dostoevskii and therefore has to quit working on the novel of which T. is a character. Abandoned by his creator and terrified of ceasing to exist, T. attempts to imitate Ariel's process of creation: he imagines a table and a pen and begins to write himself into existence (174-5). From this point on, T. is able to visit Ariel' in his world, he takes charge of his own fate and competes with Ariel for power. Moreover, he proclaims himself to be better than his former author: "he [the author] is a criminal, really. He is ashamed of facing his suffering creatures because their very life is his crime" (222).

Gradually, T. begins to suspect that he is still being 'written' by Ariel' and his colleagues and this suspicion is proven right when Ariel' reappears (264). In addition, throughout the text, Ariel' sends other characters in T.'s path in order to mislead him: both Knopf and Olsuf'ev offer alternative interpretations of everything that happens to T. and suggest that Ariel' is a hallucination or a mystical being whose task is to derail T. and to prevent him from getting to the *Optina pustyn'* (Optina Monastery; where *pustyn'* shares the root *pust-* of *pustota*, 'emptiness'): Olsuf'ev claims that whoever reaches this legendary place meets god or becomes god himself[31] (284-7). These interpretations are eventually also revealed to be false.

Yet there is one character in *t* who, at least initially, seems to have agency and to be able to defy his author. This character is Solov'ev: "The thing is, I have Ariel' all figured

[31] Outside of Pelevin's novel, Optina Monastery is a very real place (although Pelevin uses it in the same way he does Inner Mongolia in *Chapaev and Void*). Lev Tolstoy did visit the monastery on multiple occasions.

out. I have understood something that destroys his whole plot" (363). Solov'ev then continues:

> You really are a character of a novel. But that novel is not about you. It is about Ariel' Edmundovich Brakhman and his minions who are ordering around a golem named Count T. and trying, persistently but gently, to lead him away from the search for eternal truth and towards soul-sucking in a console shooter game, all the while motivating it with market demands or with the crisis. The novel is the description of this process in all its entirety. (364)

Thus, Solov'ev exposes the fact that Ariel' is not the author or the creator of T.'s reality – he is just another character in the novel (365). When T. asks Solov'ev why the real, "true and final" author (the author whose personality is a mystery even to Solov'ev) would make up someone like Ariel', Solov'ev replies: "I think, it was done solely for the sake of ridiculing the very idea that such a world could actually exist" (372). The ridicule continues in Chapter Twenty-Six where the reader meets Tolstoy[32] – the nineteenth-century writer who, as it turns out, has dreamt the novel and its characters, including T., Knopf, Ariel' and others, while wearing a Buddhist amulet which is supposed to give its wearer prophetic dreams (375-82). Tolstoy recounts his dream to his guests (Knopf, secretary Chertkov, an Indian visitor and his translator; his wife Sofia is also in the room) and decides to try to fall asleep again so as to see the end of his peculiar dream. The dream (and the novel) ends with T.'s complete defeat of Ariel': T. has a sudden epiphany, he realizes that he needs to search for the author within himself (396). Once this becomes clear to him, he no longer doubts his ability to destroy Ariel' once and for all. Having done so (to Ariel's great surprise), T. finds himself in that very emptiness (or void) that keeps resurfacing throughout Pelevin's novels – this time, it is called *Optina pustyn'*. The

[32] Supposedly, this is Lev Tolstoy himself – i.e. it seems to be suggested that the present novel is another uchronie (to use Wesseling's terminology): the novel presents an alternative account of a day from Tolstoy's life without contradicting the official historical record.

novel's last paragraph is the distracted ramblings of the narrator inspired by a small insect that falls off of T.'s glove (411).

Thus overall, the author-character relationship in the novel is complex, to say the least. When T. finally destroys Ariel' and emerges as his own creator, he does not realize that he is a character in a novel dreamt by Tolstoy. Even more ironically, Tolstoy himself thinks that he is the author of the novel about T. when the reader, of course, knows that Tolstoy is also a character of a novel written by Viktor Pelevin. The manifestation of authorial power in *t* therefore operates on multiple levels: not only can the author enlighten his character about the latter's position in the world of the novel, he can also manipulate him into thinking that he is the author of the novel itself. Pelevin creates a mind-boggling hierarchy of authors and characters which, precisely because of the deliberate confusion it seeks, can hardly be anything but an elaborate joke: Pelevin creates Tolstoy who creates Ariel' and his team of writers who create T. who conquers Ariel' and becomes the creator himself. Still, this complex mind-game ends in Pelevin's victory: no matter how many levels of author-character relationships exist in his texts, he is the ultimate demiurge of all of these worlds. Even within the novel, Pelevin does not grant authorship to Tolstoy: the writer's Indian guest explains that the magic amulet's prophetic dreams will be inevitably "contaminated" by the wearer's personal experience but their actual source is located elsewhere (382). Overall, it is Pelevin, and not the reader or the character, who is creating meaning and manipulating his readers' (and his characters') expectations and interpretations.

Chapter 3: Pelevin as Author: Branding, Marketing, Auteurism

"На самом деле, я ведь управляю всем этим миром."
(Viktor Pelevin)

Despite the fact that Pelevin suggests that the reader and the character can serve as alternative authors of his texts, the ways in which his novels are structured and the techniques that he uses in them work to subvert these suggestions. Theorists of postmodernism most often refer to this structural technique as "play" – be it play with historical allusions, intertexts, word play, or play with readers' expectations (Calinescu; Wesseling; Sverdlov; Lipovetsky, *Paralogii*). In this manner, Petr's once very distinct realities in *Chapaev and Void* eventually merge and the mystery of which one of them is 'real' becomes irrelevant; the power struggle between Ariel' and count T. in *t* is similarly undercut by the introduction of Tolstoi in whose mind they both supposedly came to existence; in *Helmet of Horror*, the suspense created by the characters' sense of claustrophobia and their fear of the Minotaur is destroyed once the characters reveal themselves to be the prison and not the prisoners. In addition, all of Pelevin's works (both novels and short stories) engage in intertextual and historical play to distract the reader. Finally, Pelevin uses epigraphs, prefaces, and in-text-essays (what Genette calls "original paratext," i.e. paratext which appears at the same time as the literary work; 7) in order to reassert his authority within the text and to manipulate the reader. The author's inability or unwillingness to 'die' is further manifested in Pelevin's public and media image which is suggested though epitextual elements: for Genette, these are interviews, conversations and private communications (5). In fact, it seems plausible that despite Barthes's proclaiming the author dead, the nature of the market as well as the attitude of the reading public is such that today the author is more alive than ever. This state of events becomes a theme in Pelevin's work and is also evidenced by the author's presence in (which can, paradoxically, best be described as absence from) the media. Pelevin purposefully

conflates the images of the author with that of the writer. Unlike both Foucault and Vinogradov, who carefully distinguish between authorial persona and "the author-function" (for the former) or "the image of the author" (for the latter), Pelevin – often deliberately but also unavoidably (because of the nature of the market) – blurs the boundary between author and writer and establishes himself as the demiurge, the primary source of meaning, and the ultimate paratext for his works.

Foucault's definition of the author-function is quite similar to that of Vinogradov's image of the author. Both scholars suggest that an author's biography, point of view, stylistic and thematic uniformity across his oeuvre as well as textual signs which point to the author are the key elements of the author-image/function (Foucault 128-9, Vinogradov 113). This part of their theories is clearly borne out in Pelevin's work. However, Foucault makes a forceful distinction between the writer, the author and the narrator which is rejected in Pelevin:

> It is well known that in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing; rather, they stand for a 'second self' whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the 'author-function' arises out of their scission – in the division and distance of the two. (Foucault 129)

Similarly, Vinogradov notes that the author is not to be confused with the writer, even though the image of the author "is constructed from the key characteristics of a poet's creative work" which sometimes also reflects some elements of his biography (113). Furthermore, "[the] correlation between the image of the narrator and that of the author is dynamic or variable even within one [text]" (Vinogradov 118). Yet Pelevin, as will be discussed below, continuously insists on conflating the image of the author with that of the writer and thus engaging with a strategy which has become indispensable in the postmodern capitalist world.

It is also somewhat interesting to note that both Foucault and Vinogradov emphasize the importance of the audience's subjectivity in the construction of the author-image/function:

> Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice. (Foucault 127)

> A thoughtful artist researching a writer … creates his image – wholesome and unique. This image is simultaneously a reflection of the researcher's or the devotee's [*poklonnik*] artistic mind and also that of the objective characteristics of that writer's style and personality. (Vinogradov 156)

The importance of the personality of the reader (researcher, devotee) in these excerpts is reminiscent of the premises of reader-response theory. More importantly, it suggests that not only is the author unable to control the interpretation of his texts, he is also unable to control his own image in them, both as writer and as author. Nevertheless, this premise is also refuted by Pelevin whose media as well as textual presence issue a single image of an author-writer strictly enforced in an almost authoritarian manner by virtue of epitexts and in-text literary strategies.

PELEVIN'S PUBLIC AND MEDIA IMAGE

In his 2000 interview with Viktor Pelevin, Jason Cowley remarks that Pelevin writes "about low life in a high style." Yet what is peculiar about Pelevin is that he often also writes about high life in a low style: consider the numerous philosophical conversations of his characters, dreams of reaching the moon in *Omon Ra* (1992), as well as Petr Pustota and count T.'s journeys to enlightenment. Thus, Eliot Borenstein is perhaps much more insightful when he suggests that "Pelevin refuses to draw boundaries between high and low" (474). Indeed, the

writer skillfully appeals to a wide range of readers by incorporating references to the key texts and symbols of both high and low culture as well as by mixing academic and popular genres. This strategy has become Pelevin's trademark (part of his image as a writer) as well as part of his image as an author.

The writer associates himself with high culture in three ways in particular: first, he has released several collections of works in which his short stories are published alongside his essays, his novels similarly often incorporate excerpts of essays; second, Pelevin's intertextual play offers references to elements of high culture; and third, his books are normally republished with alternative book covers one variant of which, as adopted by more prestigious publishers such as Vagrius, is always more reserved, minimalist, or 'serious.'

There are several editions of Pelevin's collected works which include both his essays and his novellas. One of them is *Viktor Pelevin. Vse povesti i esse* (All Novellas and Essays), first published in 2005 and republished twice since then – in 2009 and 2010. This collection is divided into two sections, one titled "Novellas," and the other titled "Essays." The first section includes such novellas as "Zatvornik i Shestipalyi" (Hermit and Sixfinger, 1990), "Prints Gosplana" (Prince of Stateplan, 1991), "Zheltaia strela" (Yellow Arrow, 1993), and "Makedonskaia kritika frantsuzskoi mysli" (Macedonian Criticism of French Thought, 2003). The second section includes but is not limited to the following of Pelevin's essays: "GKChP kak tetragrammaton" (SCSE[1] as a Tetragrammaton, 1993), "Zombifikatsiia. Opyt sravnitel'noi antropologii" (Zombification. An Experiment in Comparative Anthropology, 1994), "Dzhon Faulz i tragediia russkogo liberalizma" (John Fowles and The Tragedy of Russian Liberalism, 1993), "Most, kotoryi ia khotel pereiti" (The Bridge I Wanted to Cross, 2001). A similar collection is published in 2015 under the title *Pelevin V.: Povesti, esse i psikhicheskie ataki* (V. Pelevin: Novellas, Essays and Psychic Attacks). The only difference

[1] GKChP is an abbreviation for *Gosudarstvennyi komitet po chrezvychainomy polozheniiu* which translates as State Committee on the State of Emergency (SCSE). The reference is to the failed August Coup of 1991.

between the two collections seems to be the name of the publisher, the slightly changed name of the collection and the addition of one more essay titled "Psikhicheskaia ataka. Sonet" (Psychic Attack: A Sonnet, 2005) – which apparently justifies the change of the collection's title.

At the same time, Pelevin's novels themselves frequently incorporate essays. Interestingly enough, these essays are often similar to the essays mentioned above in terms of their message. Thus, the topic of "Zombification" relates quite well to the teachings of Che and Sirruf (fictional essays and speeches by fictional and fictionalized characters) in *Generation «П»*: both discuss contemporary mass dehumanization and degradation, the disappearance of culture, and the circular nature of history; in addition, some of the examples of totalitarian language mentioned in "GKChP" are repeated in the text of *Chapaev and Void* along with the general tendency of the essay to deconstruct party language and politics. Even though (as discussed in chapter two) Pelevin's character, Tatarsky, is incapable of dissent, Pelevin himself has been called a satirist[2] (Mozur 66, Gomel, "Viktor Pelevin" 345, Khagi, "From Homo Sovieticus" 560), thus, possibly admitting his belonging to the remnants of the intelligentsia – this factor might also contribute to his ability to appeal to the more demanding and sophisticated reader of 'high' literature.

This insistence on publishing essays alongside novellas or within novels demonstrates the author's desire to become affiliated with high culture or to interest the more intellectual strata of society and is complemented by Pelevin's wide array of intertextual references. Consider, for instance, *Helmet of Horror* which is truly a labyrinth of intertexts. Even the very title of the book is a reference to a homonymous Icelandic magical stave (runic sign) which was historically used in order to "induce fear and protect against abuse of power" ("Icelandic Magical Staves"). In addition, this symbol is said to be drawn in an imaginary

[2] Satire being one of the traditional tools for dissent by means of literature for the Russian intelligentsia.

space representing various levels of reality ("Shlem uzhasa"). At the center of this imaginary space is the inner "I" of a human being and therefore the helmet of horror contains within it the multilevel perception of a human (ibid). This reference, recognized or pursued only by the intellectually-engaged reader, has obvious relevance to the events described in the novel[3] and therefore cannot have been unintended by the author. For a less erudite reader on the other hand, the title will perhaps serve only as an indication of the genre or the mood of the text, i.e. it will signify that the text contains an element of horror. In *Helmet of Horror*, there are also (sometimes convoluted) references to such important theorists as Sigmund Freud (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 36), Jean Baudrillard (204), and Michel Foucault (202-3). Another example is IsoldA's labyrinth copied from the labyrinth of Versailles – a labyrinth-park with thirty-nine fountains, each of which depicts one of Aesop's fables. Just like any ordinary reader, IsoldA is able to vaguely recall the fables themselves but she has no idea what the words "plan du labirinthe de Versailles" mean: "[a]nd written on it in this strange oblique typeface was: plan du labirinthe de Versailles. What could that mean? Is it from the word 'verse'? Because there are characters from fables in the fountains?" (63). In general, Pelevin's novels include numerous references to the Russian classics – arguably, also units of high culture.[4] To avoid repeating the intertexts from *Generation «П»*, consider examples from *Chapaev and Void*: first of all and most obviously, the title of the novel is a reference to Dmitrii Furmanov's novel *Chapaev* (1923); its foreword mentions Aleksandr Pushkin (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 8); within the text itself, there are mentions of or references to

[3] The occurrence of themes such as abuse of power, imaginary spaces, virtual realities, and human perception – everything that the Icelandic stave represents – in *Helmet of Horror* have been discussed elsewhere in this thesis. In particular, see Chapter One.

[4] It is hard to say whether Russian classics are still to be considered elements of high culture: they are taught in schools, adapted into Hollywood movies and Broadway plays. Still, given the much discussed decline of the education system in Russia and post-Soviet countries, it seems that the knowledge of classics of the general public has been reduced to the knowledge of selected memes (to refer to Eliot Borenstein's theory yet again) from those classical works: a number of quotes or character names without a deeper understanding of the works as a whole. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that this is the effect of the contemporary culture industry: "Countless people use works and expressions which they either have ceased to understand at all or use only according to their behavioral functions" (1030).

Aleksandr Blok (28, 35), Valerii Briusov (31), Aleksei Tolstoi (34), Fedor Dostoevskii (32-8) and many others.

Finally, there are special editions of Pelevin's novels intended to attract the attention of the more sophisticated reader. On the one hand, the covers of Pelevin's collected works (editions including both essays and novellas) tend to be done in more reserved colors. For example, the cover of the edition published by Azbuka in 2015 is all black, with a single yellow arrow in the middle of it and the author's name in a white font of a modest medium size (Pelevin, *Povesti, esse i psikhicheskie ataki*). Similarly, the cover of the 1996 collector's edition published by Terra is a soft turquoise color with a gold ornament and a minimalist ink drawing (Pelevin, *Viktor Pelevin. Sochineniia*). Collector's editions published by Vagrius in 2003 (Pelevin, *Pesni tsarstva "Ia"*) and Eksmo in 2009 (Pelevin, *t*) are both black with minimal ornamentation. In contrast to this, pop-editions of Pelevin's books are always provocatively garish either in terms of their color, the size of the author's name on the front cover, or the illustration placed on it. For example, the cover of Pelevin's latest novel, *Lampa Mafusaila, ili krainiaia bitva chekistov s masonami* (The Lamp of Mafusail, or The Last Battle Between Chekists and Masons, 2016) is bright yellow with the author's name printed in red on top, a framed caricature of Dzerzhinskii in the background, and the title of the novel in an unconventional font. Pelevin's strategy to attract the attention of more intellectual readers (mostly critics and scholars) has been successful – even though Russian critics' responses to his work are mixed, they are nevertheless numerous, as are articles published on Pelevin in academic circles.

Pelevin appeals to the general public by using essentially the same strategies. While his essays are written in pseudo-academic language, the style and vocabulary that he employs in his novels have often been found lacking or overly simplistic (Ul'ianov, Novikov qtd. in Sverdlov). At the same time, the reading public is so impressed by Pelevin's mastery of

criminal argot and slang that at one time, there was a rumor that Pelevin was actually involved with the Russian mafia and was in control of a network of commercial kiosks – no other explanation could be found for his professional deployment of criminal vocabulary (Kuznetsov). Furthermore, Pelevin's novels famously do not shun curse words. In fact, most of his book covers include a warning that the book is rated as "18+" or "contains obscene language" (for instance, *Chapaev i Pustota*). Pelevin also targets a wider audience by writing in or referring to popular genres. As mentioned above, *Helmet of Horror* promises a horror story (and, in a way, delivers one that is combined with a detective novel). Another example is *Chapaev and Void* which starts out as a detective novel (the mystery being which reality is the 'real' one) and incorporates the Chapaev-series joke (*anekdot*).

Pelevin's novel *t* is a special case in point because one of its characters, Ariel', reveals the techniques which all contemporary writers employ in order to attract as many readers as possible or, to put it more bluntly, to sell the largest possible number of copies. These techniques, often employed by Pelevin himself, include pop-culture references, the use of experimental or pop genres (consider, for instance, Pelevin's cyber-novella "Prince of Stateplan"), emphasis on action over message, and the inclusion or non-inclusion of erotic content based on the minimum age of the target audience. Examples of Pelevin's use of pop-culture as intertext include Japanese pornographic manga in *Helmet of Horror* (21), Hollywood's *True Lies* (1994) with Arnold Schwarzenegger in his *Chapaev and Void* (*Chapaev i Pustota* 60-82), or the song by a contemporary band called *Piatnitsa* (Friday) in the epigraph to *t*. One of the funniest, most obvious and awkward pop-culture references is made when count T. introduces himself to Tarakanova.[5] The very way he phrases it is strongly reminiscent of how James Bond famously introduced himself in homonymous films and novels: "T., – replied T. – Count T." is an exact replica of the famous: "Bond. James

[5] While not as immediately relevant, it is worth noting that Tarakanova in *t* is herself a reference to an historical figure, Princess Tarakanova (1745-1775), a famous pretender to the Russian throne.

Bond" (Pelevin, *t* 23). The novel itself is said to be an aggregate of pop genres composed by a team of writers, each responsible for his own section: Miten'ka works on sex scenes, Grisha authors action, Gosha – psychedelic scenes recounting the protagonist's drug-induced perceptions and experiences; another writer who remains nameless is responsible for streams of consciousness, metaphysical discussions and inner monologues (99-102). The use of a variety of popular genres allows the author(s) to appeal to a wider audience. Moreover, Ariel' confesses that he has no respect for one of his peers, the nameless 'metaphysicist': this author thinks that his component of the novel is the most important, but Ariel' as the editor knows that these sections need to be edited out so as not to bore the reader:

> I have stopped reading him altogether, I'll sift through his stuff during my last edit. I'll throw most of it out … He thinks too much of himself: '… All meaning is contained in my sections, and you are just the frame…' But this quintessence is exactly what the reader skips. What's interesting to a regular person? The plot and how it all ends. (101-2).

Finally, count T. suggests that the author constantly keeps his target audience in mind when writing a literary text. As T. flirts with Aksin'ia (a young girl whom he meets by accident and who goes on to acquire wealth writing several books about her short fling with T.), he notes to himself: "Apparently, Ariel' doesn't want to lose the part of the target audience that is younger than fifteen. That's why she's hiding her tits" (310). These methods of appealing to a wider audience are employed by Pelevin himself – as opposed to his fictional authors – in *Generation «П»*, *Chapaev and Void*, and *Helmet of Horror*.

This strategy has allowed Pelevin to gain command of a large share of the market – he sold 100 000 copies of his first short story collection *Sinii Fonar'* (Blue Lantern, 1992) and later, "over 200,000 copies of *Generatsion* [sic] *'P'* were sold in the first weeks following its publication in Russia" (Mozur 61). Since then, Pelevin has been singled out by various critics and scholars as one of the most (if not the most) popular contemporary Russian writers in

Russia and abroad[6] (Kuznetsov, Laird 178, Litovchenko, Mozur 60). Sally Laird in particular notes that Pelevin's texts have even been "translated into Japanese and several European languages" (178). Pelevin has been repeatedly nominated for various literary awards and has won quite a few. A Russian website titled *Laboratoriia fantastiki* lists 106 nominations between 1990 and 2016. Sixteen of these nominations resulted in awards (their list is also documented in Dmitrii Shamanskii's "Pustota (Snova o Viktore Pelevine)").

Part of this success stems from Pelevin's self-branding. Dmitrii Shamanskii summarizes its strategies as follows:

> V. Pelevin's very appearance in the world of literature was stage-managed [*srezhissirovano*] in the best traditions of postmodernism. Pelevin doesn't like to communicate with journalists and photographers, he rarely shares any facts of his biography with the public and prefers not to tell them anything about his personality.

This self-seclusion and secretiveness has proved to be most successful in attracting readers' attention. Indeed, quite a few newspapers write about Pelevin on a regular basis[7] even though many journalists lament Pelevin's refusal to give interviews (Kuznetsov, "Playboy," Cowley). In 2013, *Rossiiskaia gazeta* even called Pelevin "the most mysterious writer in Russia" (Bolotin). At the same time, the writer has been more generous in unmediated communication with fans: he participated in a virtual conference with some of his devoted readers in 1997. This choice of media, of course, only increased the sense of mystery about him:[8] not only was there no opportunity for the fans to see their idol in person (there were no

[6] This, apparently, is not just the opinion of critics: according to *Forbes*, Pelevin's latest novel – *The Lamp of Mafusail* – was one of ten bestselling books in Russia in 2016 (Batalina). This level of success is even more surprising (for an author who has been on the market for more than twenty years) if one takes into consideration the fact that the novel had only been released in September of 2016 and *Forbes*'s rating covered only books which came out between November of 2015 and December 15, 2016.

[7] In the last six months of completing this dissertation there were at least five articles published on the website of *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, a similar number published in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*; Pelevin's name was mentioned in fifteen articles published by *Vesti.Ru* in 2016 – the list goes on and on.

[8] *Zhurnal.Ru*'s advertisement for the virtual conference in still available online. This ad also uses Pelevin's image in order to attract the attention of potential participants: it praises the organizers for providing an opportunity to pick the brain of "[t]he writer who does not give interviews and does not sanction the publication of his photographs" ("Viktor Pelevin v Kiberprostranstve"). The conference is presented as "a unique meeting

photographs of Pelevin available to the public at the time), but there was also no way to ascertain whether it was truly Pelevin who was answering their questions.[9] In general, whenever Pelevin does give interviews – their number has increased since the 1990s – his answers are invariably evasive or sarcastic. Consider, for instance, the following exchange that took place in the virtual conference:

> <fiz_i_len> Pelevin: you have this literary device --- you omit the description of the process of transformation (bug <> human) – did you get that from Gogol's "Nose"???
>
> <Pelevin> fiz_i_len: No, I pulled that out of my own nose. ("Viktor Pelevin v Kiberprostranstve: Virtual'naia konferentsiia")

Not only are intertexts and literary influences off-limit for Pelevin's fans, so is his personal life:

> <malinka> Pelevin: So what about love? And just in general – are you married? Kids? Grandkids? Mistresses?
>
> <Pelevin> malinka: Come by my place someday, after dark, I'll answer all of your questions and show you everything. The only thing I can say is: I'm not married to my kids and grandkids. (ibid)

Pelevin thus practically reinvents the very concept of the interview. While the Cambridge dictionary defines an interview as "a meeting in which someone answers questions about himself or herself for a newspaper article, television show, etc." ("Interview"), many of Pelevin's interviews read like his short stories – they are full of puns and jokes, yet provide little information pertaining to the author's personal life.

This marketing strategy – tantalizing the public by withholding information – based on complete secrecy nevertheless needs to find other ways to sustain public interest over the long term. Therefore, photographs of Pelevin slowly became available on the internet. To his

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with [a] mysterious man," as a "chance to meet in virtual reality the least accessible (in 'real life') contemporary prose writer" (ibid).

[9] Pelevin plays with this idea in an interview with *Playboy*. When the interviewer asks him: "Are you the one who gave us the interview?" Pelevin does not reply and the interviewer concludes his article thus: "No answer (editor)" ("Playboy").

readers' annoyance, in them Pelevin was invariably seen to be wearing dark glasses or covering his face with his hands. Cowley perceptively states that "[e]ven his [Pelevin's] dark glasses simultaneously deflect and command attention." Thus, the amount of information circulating about Pelevin both in the media and on the web was just enough to continue to feed public interest and yet retain an air of mystery. The success of this advertising campaign and 'hermit' media image became evident when Pelevin's audience started to fabricate myths about him. For example, in an interview he gave in 2005, Pelevin said that he had recently read "a fairly persuasive article" which proved that he was a woman (Orlova). In another interview back in 1996, Sergei Kuznetsov asked Pelevin about the veracity of a different rumor, that of Pelevin's affiliation with Moscow gangs and his ownership of a network of kiosks in the city. Shamanskii adds two more rumors to the list: internet fans used to entertain the possibility that first, Pelevin was the collective pseudonym of a group of writers and alternatively, that his texts were actually authored by a software program. The most recent myth supposedly created by Pelevin's readers is that of his death during a séance in September of 2016 (Gornostaeva). This event was mentioned in most Russian newspapers. Still, some journalists doubted that the timing of the rumor was accidental: Pelevin's new novel had just come out a week earlier (Levin, Zimniaia). Finally, perhaps the ultimate testament to the writer's ability to grab and hold on to public interest is the fact that he has become a character of jokes, of *anekdoty* (Orlova). And if that still seems insufficient, Cowley states that "Pelevin has become such an icon for Russian youth that the country's new Green Party tried to enlist him this past fall as its candidate for prime minister in 2000," while Mikhail Vizel' calls him a "cult writer" and says that "a whole generation compared their lives to and re-modelled them on the basis of his novels."

The author's media image seems to be mirrored in his texts. In fact, the border between life and text is almost obliterated. The writer's persona has become the extension of

that of the author or narrator – and vice-versa. This relationship is established in Pelevin's responses to his interviewers, in his fiction (recall, for instance, Tatarsky – Pelevin's textual double), as well as his essays. Pelevin has repeatedly stated that his novels are deeply personal. In an interview he gave to Sally Laird (1999), Pelevin confesses:

> You know, a writer from Armenia once said to me that there are basically two kinds of writers: those who write about themselves and those who write about other people. I belong to those who write about themselves. I know that I'm using the contents of my own psyche, and that if you do that you have to be honest. (186)

He makes a similar statement in an interview with Leo Kropywiansky (2002): "[l]ike every other writer on this planet, I can only write about my mind" (80). Some of his novels are inspired by or reminiscent of his own personal experiences. Of his *Life of Insects*, Pelevin has said: "it's something very personal; it's connected in my mind with the place I describe in the novel and the summer I spent there" (Laird 187). Furthermore, Pelevin has claimed that he has been a character of his own novels for years, thereby strengthening the link between the author's life and his texts (Kochetkova). Moreover, Pelevin has even used his texts in order to settle personal scores: Russian critic P. Basinskii appears as the character of an ad in *Generation «П»* – "literary critic Pavel Bisinskii" – who drowns in excrement as he reads a history lecture (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 208). In the 1997 virtual conference, Pelevin makes the following revelation: "literature programs life to a significant degree – at least, the life of the person writing ("Viktor Pelevin v Kiberprostranstve: Virtual'naia konferentsiia"). The author thus becomes inseparable from his fiction – perhaps this is the reason why readers and interviewers have been so intent on asking Pelevin questions about the meaning of his own works,[10] unable and unwilling to let the author 'die.'

[10] Multiple inquiries to this effect are made by Pelevin's fans during the 1997 virtual conference, Laird asks Pelevin if various insects in *The Life of Insects* are meant to be metaphors for various kinds of people, whether Pelevin ever intentionally writes satirical texts, and how one should interpret the train in "Yellow Arrow," while Kropywiansky asks whether references to Buddhism are to be taken seriously.

Pelevin's essays work to produce the same effect: they reinforce the notion that the explanation of the author's writing should be sought in his personality. All of these strategies combined, essentially, produce a cult of this particular author. Mikhail Epstein defines the essay as "a road without an end, because its end coincides with its beginning, individuality emanates from itself and returns to itself" (*Paradoksy novizny* 336). The process of writing an essay, then, is simultaneously self-definition and self-expression. Moreover, it is the "conception of a man" which "gives coherent unity to all of the external characteristics of the genre which are usually listed in encyclopedias and dictionaries: small volume, a concrete topic and its pronouncedly subjective treatment, tendency for paradoxes, orientation to colloquial speech" (334). Therefore, according to Epstein's definition of the genre, it can be safely assumed that the unavoidably subjective treatment of the topic of the essay does "correspond with the author's point of view" (Pelevin, *Generation «П»* 5). Thus, on the one hand, Pelevin's choice to publish his essays alongside his novellas is a way to influence the reception of his works – this way, the readers will not get lost in the multiple layers of Pelevin's irony. Similarities between the topics of Pelevin's essays and novels have been briefly discussed above and perhaps they demonstrate the ways in which Pelevin's essays can be interpreted as 'keys' to his larger works, the ways in which they reassert the importance of his persona in understanding his fiction.

In fact, the writer repeatedly suggests in his interviews that his ultimate aim is the enlightenment of his readers. Pelevin carefully cultivates a public persona that is superior to his readers – a position which makes it necessary and possible for him to become a kind of a preacher. Thus, in his conversation with a correspondent from *Izvestiia* (2006), Pelevin states:

> People do not understand, even vaguely, the powers that control their lives. They do not understand the meaning of their evolution. That which they call "progress" has made humans much worse off than animals who live freely. The animals' way of life – eating ecologically clean food, living in climates most suitable for the body, moving around a lot, and never having to worry

> about anything – is available nowadays only to a retired millionaire. Whereas a regular person works his whole life panting from exhaustion and then dies from stress having just made the last payment for his den in an anthill made of concrete. The only thing he can do is bring children into this treadmill. (Kochetkova)

He makes several similar statements when interviewed by Laird. On one occasion, Pelevin suggests that everyone is lonely, yet not everyone understands this – the fact that he, Pelevin, does, makes him qualified to instruct others. Pelevin later repeats the same idea: "We're all trapped; the difference again is just that some people understand this and some don't. I've had this feeling ever since I was 14" (Laird 191). Pelevin discusses his novel *Omon Ra* with Kropywiansky in a similar spirit:

> The evil magic of any totalitarian regime is based on its presumed capability to embrace and explain all phenomena because explanation is control. Hence the term totalitarian. So if there's a book that takes you out of this totality of things explained and understood, it liberates you because it breaks the continuity of explanation and thus dispels the charms. (77)

Indeed, several critics have similarly claimed that Pelevin writes in order to change the status quo and to make the contemporary reader more aware of the world around him (Cowley, Nechepurenko, Paramonov, Mozur 63, Kornev, Murikov). Sergei Kornev even suggests that "Pelevin is actually – in terms of his ideas and content – not a postmodernist at all, he is in fact a truly Russian classical writer-ideologist, like Tolstoi or Chernyshevskii." His ideology has been understood differently by different critics. Gennadii Murikov claims that it is a religious reformation that Pelevin is after, D.V. Nechepurenko states that Pelevin's work exemplifies "the search for The way … and self-correction as well as a different conception of the proper way to organize life and the world as a whole." Boris Paramonov thinks that Pelevin's "messedzh" (message) is Buddhism – and it is precisely the writer's affiliation with this religion (in both the texts of his novels and real life) that is partially responsible for Pelevin's fame. Even though Pelevin has often expressed reservations about being called a

Buddhist[11] (the writer is famous for wanting to escape any and all classifications),[12] his taste for and references to the premises of this particular religion have earned him the image of an esoteric or even exotic writer; it has also granted his works "a certain pretentiousness" (Mozur 62). It is this deliberate pretentiousness which sets him apart from the canonical authors: Pelevin meticulously conflates the image of the author with that of the writer using contemporary media as well as well-thought out branding and marketing strategies.

Perhaps this desire to enlighten readers is the reason why there is a steady and discernible flow from fiction to essayistics (*esseistika*, to use Epstein's term) in Pelevin's collected works. What points to the intentionality of it all is the unchangeable order in which his novellas and essays are published (even when similar collections are published by different companies). The last novella (*povest'*) in the homonymous section of any collection which includes both essays and fiction is always "Macedonian Criticism of French Thought" – a novella which hints, subtly but repeatedly, that it is, in fact, an essay written by its main character. The novella begins with a description of its protagonist's childhood. There is an easily discernible narrator who speaks in a fairly academic style. This narrator refers to his protagonist in the third person, makes occasional remarks on his own behalf (using first-person plural forms and pronouns)[13] and sometimes refers directly to the reader attempting to predict his reactions. The use of academic style is, of course, already suspicious in a novella,

[11] For instance, in the Kropywiansky interview: "First of all, I can't really say I study Buddhism. I'm not a Buddhologist. I can't even say I'm a Buddhist in the sense of rigidly belonging to a confession or a sect, following rituals, et cetera. I only study and practice my mind for which the Dharma of Buddha is the best tool I know: and it is exactly what the word Buddhism means to me. And I also totally accept the moral teaching of Buddhism because it is the necessary condition of being able to practice your mind. But it is not too different from the moral teachings of other traditions" (79).

[12] In his virtual conference in 1997, Pelevin refuses to categorize his own literature as pop, saying: "I have terminated the classifier of reality in me a long time ago" ("Viktor Pelevin v Kiberprostranstve: Virtual'naia konferentsiia"). On other occasions, Pelevin has made it clear that he does not define himself as a postmodernist and even confessed that he does not care for postmodernism at all: "But I'm not interested in most of the younger writers. We share the same world, but we see it differently. I don't like postmodernism; it's like eating the flesh of a dead culture" (Laird 184).

[13] This form is common for Russian academic writing and essays. Following is an example from the novella itself: "We apologize if some of the concepts employed by Kika will seem too specific" (Pelevin, "Makedonskaia" 341).

yet it becomes somewhat justified in the process of reading. Five pages into the story, the narrator begins to describe his protagonist Kika's essay:

> The title of Kika's most famous work is "Macedonian Criticism of French Thought" … This composition which becomes, in turns, a memoir about childhood, a private diary, a philosophical treatise, and a technical description, is a strange mixture of various layers of text which, at first glance, are not related in any way and yet flow into each other. (Pelevin, "Makedonskaia" 334)

After reading the first sentence of this paragraph, the reader is offered two possibilities: either the present novella is an essay about an essay written by Kika, or it is the essay itself – the title of Kika's essay is conspicuously identical to the title of the novella. The reader is perhaps pushed to accept the second possibility as true when he continues reading and realizes that the description of Kika's essay offered above also fits the novella in front of him. In this way, the novella follows closely the outline of the protagonist's essay. First, it begins with a description of Kika's childhood ("a memoir about childhood"): the reader is offered a summary of his education, character traits and job descriptions of his parents, as well as his worldview (Pelevin, "Makedonskaia" 329-31). The novella then proceeds to mention Kika's sexual adventures in university ("a private diary") – the narrator transparently hints that Kika was sexually involved with his professor, although it is unclear whether or not he was coerced (332-33). It is at this point that the narrator begins to describe Kika's essays and this description is followed by a philosophical component ("a philosophical treatise"): the narrator discusses Kika's attitude towards French philosophy and quotes long passages from the essay (333-37). It should not come as a surprise that the novella also contains a section with descriptions of Kika's business schemes (this constitutes the "technical description" component of the essay) as well as the organization of and the mechanisms employed at Kika's factory (340-42, 349-59). A further coincidence between the novella and Kika's essay is the inclusion of formulas. Thus, the narrator states: "At the same time, Kika aims to make

his squib [*paskvil'*] as (pseudo)scientific and precise as possible by enhancing it with quotes and even formulas" (334). Surely enough, the reader encounters a formula in a quote from Kika's essay several pages later (341). Even more humorously, in his descriptions of Kika's business, narrator says once again: "It was the coefficient from the formula for the computation of the sulfur factor multiplied by two – a formula that appears twice in 'Macedonian Criticism'" (357). As though to fulfill the requirement he just stated, the narrator provides the formula once again – for the second (and the last) time in the novella (ibid). Finally, the novella-essay ambiguity repeats itself in the way the text ends. The narrator's statement: "It's all about the intonation which gives him away every time – like, for instance, the passage which concludes 'Macedonian Criticism of French Thought'" is followed by a paragraph-long quotation which concludes Kika's essay and now also concludes the novella, for it is not followed by anything but a full stop (361).

This mysterious blend of essay and novella is a perfect transition between the two homonymous sections of Pelevin's collections of works. It helps establish the fact that the two sections need not be strictly separated because they both serve the same purpose: to enlighten the reader. Adding the essays to novellas serves to conflate the author and writer figures. The writer's personality put forward in the essays affects the way his image is constructed by the reader and therefore superimposes on him a particular image of the author. In addition, an external distinction between sections of fiction and essays is necessary precisely in order to demonstrate Pelevin's serious intention with his fiction. There is also a possibility that the worldview of the protagonist of "Macedonian Criticism" is purposefully similar to Pelevin's – after all, he has claimed that he can only write about himself (Laird 186). For instance, Pelevin seems to share Kika's aversion to philosophy (and even to a few specific philosophers) as opposed to metaphysical speculation. The narrator of "Macedonian Criticism" mentions Kika's hatred of Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida and even quotes

passages in which Kika mocks these philosophers (Pelevin, "Makedonskaia" 333-5). Pelevin does the same using his characters as mouthpieces in *Helmet of Horror*: this text ridicules such philosophers as Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard (Pelevin, *Helmet of Horror* 199-298). Moreover, Pelevin confirms his distaste for philosophy in real life. Consider the following excerpt from the Kropywiansky interview:

> I don't take professional philosophers seriously even when I understand what they say. Philosophy is a self-propelled thinking, and thinking, no matter how refined, only leads to further thinking. Uncoerced thinking gives us the best it can when it subsides down and halts, because it is the source of nearly all our problems. (78)

Both Pelevin's public image (a deliberate construct) and his self-positioning with respect to his work have garnered him a lot of public attention and have made his public persona inseparable from his writing. Furthermore, Pelevin has a very specific mission which accords him the status of an author-God[14] or, at least, an author-teacher.[15] It is no coincidence that the prototype for the character of his novel *t* is Lev Tolstoi – a writer whose philosophy is also discussed alongside his fiction. In one of his interviews, Pelevin has even recounted (perhaps with a certain sense of pride) a call he received from an Orthodox patriarch: "Why, the patriarch demanded to know, had Pelevin -- unlike the great Alexander Solzhenitsyn, or the even greater Leo Tolstoy – neglected his Christianity?" (Cowley). In his novels, Pelevin skillfully weaves together entertainment and enlightenment, he offers the reader freedom of

[14] Curiously, Pelevin has once almost called himself an author-God in the interview he gave to Laird (see below, p. 93).

[15] Pelevin's epitextual strategies make him radically different from the traditional author-ideologists. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the predominant strategy has always been that of "ideological monologism" when an author offers his own ideology as the only correct one and rejects all other opinions. Bakhtin notes that Dostoevskii found a way to avoid doing so: "In his work Dostoevsky did not, however, make monologic use of such a basically idealistic evaluation of consciousness. The cognizant and judging 'I,' and the world as its object, are present there not in the singular but in the plural. Dostoevsky overcame solipsism. He reserved idealistic consciousness not for himself but for his characters, and not only for one of them but for them all. At the center of Dostoevsky's creative work there stands, in place of the relationship of a single cognizant and judging 'I' to the world, the problem of the interrelationship of all these cognizant and judging 'I's' to one another" (99-100). Pelevin's strategy is reminiscent of that of Dostoevkii (his characters often argue about the most important issues, his characters' points of view are often diametrically opposed to his own), yet Pelevin's image of the author as well as the image of the writer he creates through the media help establish ideological monologism after all by pointing to the correct point of view.

interpretation which he then suddenly takes back by disappointing all expectations or even exposing and mocking them. His mercurial persona commands the attention of the public thereby granting him 'life' both inside and outside of his texts. The purposeful construction of a media image, the publication of essays alongside novels, use of paratextual and epitextual elements combine with and reinforce the image of the author created by Pelevin by virtue of in-text literary strategies. Writer-as-brand is therefore inseparable from and equated with the author in the sense of the term employed by Vinogradov and Foucault.

AUTEURISM AND CONSUMERISM VS. THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

It is curious that auteur theory in film should develop at approximately the same time that Barthes announced the death of the author. While the term had been coined in the 1950s, the theory itself was still being formulated and revisited by Peter Wollen in 1969 ("The Auteur Theory") and Andrew Sarris in 1977 ("Auteur Theory Revisited"). The concept of the auteur is commonly used to talk about directors or filmmakers, yet is applies perfectly well to contemporary writers. In fact, it seems that the notion of auteurism has spread all across contemporary culture – or, as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer call it, the "culture industry." In fact, "the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" – the key characteristic of postmodern art according to Fredric Jameson – and the subsequent conversion of literature into nothing more than a consumer good, has made auteurism in literature almost unavoidable. The writer must become a brand so as to be able to procure a readership. More interestingly, Pelevin's work in particular complies with many premises of auteur theory; the vision of the author that he puts forth in his interviews and novels corresponds to the image of the auteur.

Auteur in film theory refers to a singular artist who is in complete control over all aspects of a collaborative creative work. The term was first coined by François Truffaut in

1954 in his "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" (A Certain Tendency of French Cinema, Staples 1). Truffaut was primarily concerned with the quality of contemporary cinema and its excessive reliance on literature – quite a few artists and critics were looking to develop cinema as an independent art form, to find a way for self-expression through medium-specific means as opposed to simply filming theater or acting out novels on camera (Staples 2). In order to further his argument, Truffaut offered the names of several auteurs whose example was worth following. A critical theory developed on the basis of Truffaut's article. This theory seeks to analyze individual directors' works by identifying their signature themes and stylistic devices. Peter Wollen defines the theory thus: "the auteur theory enables us to reveal a whole complex of meanings in films" by requiring that a critic compare and contrast all works of a particular director and search for unifying themes that are presented in different ways in all of these works (373). Therefore, auteur theory inevitably concerns itself with the analysis of an author's complete oeuvre: "it is only the analysis of the whole corpus which permits the moment of synthesis when the critic returns to the individual film" (Wollen 374). Andrew Sarris's definition is strikingly similar: he claims that auteurist critics "describe the stylistic and thematic epiphanies of their favorite auteurs" (361) and that this is only possible to achieve via an evaluation of these auteurs "in terms of the total context of their careers" (356). This analysis of an auteur's talent and style has led to a certain "aesthetic cult of personality" – a danger predicted by André Bazin whereby an author's name becomes an indication of quality, and denotes a set of expectations that an audience can bring to bear on a film directed by a particular auteur (qtd. in Staples 4). Indeed, the director's name has become a brand: it appears on movie posters, in trailers and teasers for new films. Recent examples of auterist criticism reflect this cult: there is a pointed unwillingness of the critic to bury the author. For instance, Judith Mayne's 1990 article on Dorothy Arzner considers the

female director's media image as an integral part of her work, as a meaning-producing element (390).

This personality cult seems to have evolved in all spheres of culture. Despite the fact that a version of auterist criticism is precisely what Barthes was responding to, the level of reverence for the author has in many ways increased since the pronunciation of the death of the author in the 1970s. This is particularly evident in the case of Pelevin, who intentionally builds the image of an auteur about himself. First of all, as has been demonstrated above, Pelevin has definitely become a brand with a very particular public image. His name is, indeed, an indicator of quality (granted that this quality is considered poor by some critics and readers). In fact, Pelevin has become associated with a certain attitude toward the world and specifically, to politics. For instance, Leonid Radzikhovskii unexpectedly mentions Pelevin in his recent article on Donald Trump (Jan. 2017):

> Но вообще-то разговоры про "импичмент" еще до вступления президента в должность - это правда крутой постмодернизм. Слышал фразу "Пелевина на них нет."
>
> Really, this talk about 'impeachment' even before the president has entered office is some truly amazing postmodernism. I've heard the phrase: "There's no Pelevin to hold them back."

Secondly, Pelevin has, in one interview, suggested himself as an auteur in the sense implied by film critics. Ironically, he used the film industry as a contrasting example in order to assert his greater claim to and opportunity for creativity in and complete control over his product:

> What I like about writing is that it's private, and you don't need anything to do it. It's not like shooting a film when you need a crew, lights, cameras, loads of money. As soon as you need money and people you're not free, whereas here, in literature, you're absolutely free. You're—not exactly God, but you can create something out of nothing, you can create a whole other reality and transform it into anything you want. (Laird 185)

Furthermore, Pelevin has been very purposeful in building a unified oeuvre: his works have recurring characters, themes, and even lines (with only slight revision). Thus, for example, Urgan Dzhambon Tulku and Chapaev appear both in *t* and in *Chapaev and Void*, Kika is the protagonist of "Macedonian Criticism" who recurs in *Chisla* (Numbers, 2003), and Babaiasin is the character of *Chapaev and Void* also mentioned in "Den' bul'dozerista" (Bulldozer Driver's Day, 2003). The list of recurring characters is so extensive that Pelevin's *Wikipedia* page contains a fan-made scheme of his self-references ("Pelevin"). Furthermore, the epigraph to the first chapter of the present thesis lists three nearly identical quotes from three different novels by Pelevin – a testament to the author's purposeful attempt to link them thematically and to construct a body of works that is to be considered as a whole. This aim seems to have been achieved successfully: Sally Dalton-Brown, for instance, is able to trace the key themes that transpire throughout Pelevin's writing:

> [A]ll Pelevin's work, very broadly speaking, can be defined as focused on issues of consciousness, from the theme of manipulated perceptions in *Generation 'P'* (1999), or of fragmented self-awareness in *Chisla* (*Numbers*, 2004), of illusion in *Sviashchennaia kniga oborotnia* (*The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*, 2004), to that of self-referentially in his 2005 *Shlem uzhasa* (*The Helmet of Horror*). ("Illusion-Money-Illusion" 32)

Sofya Khagi in turn claims that "Pelevin explores the theme of the individual caught in a social deadlock" ("The Legacy" 278). The writer himself confirms in an interview that he has a key theme which he develops throughout his work: "the primacy of the mind" (Kropywiansky 78). In this context, it seems that Pelevin wants his work to be considered as a unified oeuvre. This persistence in exploring the same themes throughout his writing is perhaps explained by his desire to enlighten the reader.

Finally, Pelevin has a very recognizable style and a particular set of literary devices which he uses in all of his works. These have been pointed out in this thesis as well as in the body of criticism of Pelevin that exists to date. For instance, Dalton-Brown offers "Pelevinian

circularity" as a recurring device ("Looking for the Creator" 212). Khagi suggests that "one of Pelevin's favorite devices [is] that of realized metaphor" ("The Monstrous Aggregate" 456). Viacheslav Kuritsyn points out the strategy of making reality indistinguishable from fantasy (187). Lev Danilkin envisions a certain "Pelevinian" kind of a speech (what is meant, it seems, are a particular content and style) when discussing *Helmet of Horror*. M. Sverdlov and D.V. Nechepurenko list a number of Pelevin's favorite devices in their respective works and claim that these devices make his style different and recognizable. Finally, Ol'ga Bodganova, Sergei Kibal'nik and L. Safronova have even published a book titled *Literaturnye strategii Viktora Pelevina* (Viktor Pelevin's Literary Strategies, 2008).

There are two conclusions to be drawn from this overview of the author's media presence. First, Pelevin's self-marketing strategy is similar to the image of the author that he creates in his novels. For instance, the author conceals his own existence in *Helmet of Horror*, offers characters as authors in *Chapaev and Void* and *t*, yet reasserts his power in prefaces, epigraphs, unexpected endings, or humorous inscriptions on book covers. Pelevin as writer similarly hides his personality by avoiding interviews or providing elusive answers when he does agree to be interviewed, and wearing his favorite sunglasses in photographs. Yet this very strategy is aimed at attracting attention. His rare interviews mystify his figure even more and therefore easily suggest the image of an author-God, a mysterious (Buddhist) preacher. Second, the public demonstrates a strong reluctance to let the author go – caused, in part, by the author's successful self-branding (when a writer offers himself as an enlightener, the public has no choice but to look to him for the interpretation of his works) as well as by the nature of today's market for literature. John Trimbur suggests that in the contemporary capitalist world,

> … we need a notion of the author all the more - as a vital point to organize around, in writers' guilds, unions, congresses, cooperatives, and other associations for self-management. In late capitalist societies, the author still

> figures as a key site of self-defense within market relations, a self-formed position of struggle to control the conditions and products of work. (296)

What makes Pelevin special, perhaps, is that his writing, while conforming to the demands of the contemporary market for literature, also works to subvert it. The metaliterariness of his novels – discussions of authorship and the realities of the business[16] – allow him to sell well and, at the same time, to expose the literary world for what it is. Pelevin's novel *t* reveals the mechanisms of today's authorship on various occasions. In this manner, Ariel' teaches Count T. that "God is just a brand on the cover of a book" (Pelevin, *t* 99). Similarly, Petr in *Chapaev and Void* considers the fate of the author in the contemporary world:

> If even a ventriloquist at a public house has to resort to this kind of trick in order to sustain the audience's interest, then what fate awaits poetry? There won't be a place left for it at all in the new world – or, more precisely, there will be a place for it, but poetry will only be interesting if it becomes known that its author has two d…cks or that he, at least, can read it with his ass. (Pelevin, *Chapaev i Pustota* 347)

While the ventriloquist in the novel had to demean himself in order to attract the attention of the public to his work, Pelevin has found a much more dignified way of achieving the same goal. Both Pelevin's work and his media image of a writer-hermit demonstrate the realities of the contemporary market for literature: the author remains an ever-present force in it, whether he intends to or not.

[16] An excerpt from *t* hilariously combines Pelevin's mocking treatment of both authorship and literature as a consumer commodity: "Solov'ev explains to other characters that there is a reader inside each of them. Writers are mortal (*smertny*), but the reader is eternal, or maybe it is the other way around, I don't remember anymore. I didn't fully understand it myself. And the marketers understood even less. But as soon as they heard it, they started spitting … The reader, they said, had been made a character of world literature many times before – and always with negative consequences for book sales" (275-76).

Conclusion

Pelevin's status as a postmodern writer has remained unquestioned over the years. Even Sergei Kornev, who critically re-examines Pelevin's status as a postmodernist, ultimately concludes that, with certain qualifications, he is.[17] This thesis aimed to assess Pelevin's portrayal of the author as well as his assimilation of Barthes's theory of the death of the author and its implications–in order to re-assess Pelevin's place in the postmodernist canon as well as to expose and reconcile possible conflicts/discrepancies within postmodernist thought. The answer to the latter issue, as suggested by Pelevin's case at least, can be found in the shift of focus from the 'author' (as conceived by Vinogradov and perhaps assumed by Barthes), as sole / final arbiter in the question of who dictates the meaning of the text and the 'writer' (as the focal point of branding, perhaps anticipated by Jameson). This thesis concludes that both Pelevin's works of fiction and his self-marketing strategy demonstrate the writer's departure from 'traditional' postmodernist poetics in his rejection of the death of the author as one of as one of its core premises. Moreover, recognizing the pseudo-death (or feint-death) of the author has much to say about the actual strain of postmodernism in Pelevin's work. Even though many of his literary techniques are the same as those characterizing the postmodernist movement in literature, Pelevin departs from postmodernism in one significant way: he does not believe in the death of the author (the topic of his novels and the object of his postmodernist play) and in fact challenges it in his work and in his life. The concept of authorship suggested by Pelevin is that of an author-god or at least an author-pedagogue. According to various theorists, postmodernism entails indefinite oscillation or never-ending indeterminacy and therefore, a complete rejection of stable or unassailable meaning and an aversion to truth

[17] Kornev analyses elements of postmodern play and the use of intertextuality in Pelevin and assesses the seriousness with which he offers ideological content to the reader (asking, for example, whether there is any postmodern indeterminacy and mockery – *steb* – in his works).

claims.[18] Yet Pelevin's notion of author/writer-preacher directly contradicts this component of postmodernist poetics. Finally, Pelevin's oeuvre as a whole (including public image and marketing) suggests that the author cannot / must not be allowed to die in the postmodern capitalist world.

As discussed in the introduction, Barthes's death of the author is a broad concept the definitions of which have varied greatly among critics. Nevertheless, Pelevin finds a way to reject all of them. First and foremost, the death of the author is understood as the inability to write without referring to the discourses of others (intertextuality takes control over interpretation and the construction of meaning away from the author). Pelevin's strategies to counter this loss of power are multiple: he empties language of its connotative properties via realized metaphors and intertextual play (using words in ways which strip them of their meaning); stylistic experimentation – Pelevin often writes in a variety of jargons or uses slang which also allows him to block unwanted intertextuality; mockery of classic authors and texts – Pelevin's almost blasphemous treatment of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers reaffirms his unwillingness to construct meaningful (serious) intertextual links to these authors. Alastair Hird's re-reading of Barthes's "The Death of the Author" summarizes the implications in Pelevin's use of intertext in order to wield authorial power instead of losing it:

> [T]he article's author is wielding a significant directive influence over the multiplicity delivered to the reader, by packing additional, submerged intertext into the article. Examining Barthes's essay in the light of an awareness of Beckett's techniques reveals the still-present author, attempting to create the illusion of his own demise. (297)

[18] For instance, Hans Bertens claims that postmodernists question "the essentialist character of truth (or at least some truths)" (5), Douwe W. Fokkema similarly states: "postmodernist writers have completely relinquished the search for essences, including the search for existential truth" ("The Semiotics" 21), David Lodge suggests that "[t]he difficulty, for the reader, of postmodernist writing, is not so much a matter of obscurity (which might be cleared up) as of uncertainty, which is endemic, and manifests itself on the level of narrative rather than style" (226). See also Sergei Kornev's "Stolknovenie pustot" and Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (6).

Second, the death of the author has been understood as the emancipation of the reader. Barthes's suggestion that the source of meaning is to be found in the reader and not in the author's personality is often taken as key to understanding his theory. Chapter One of this thesis utilized reader-response theory in order to demonstrate how the reader is constructed as the creator of the text in the absence of the author, while Chapter Two explored the ways in which Pelevin alternatively suggests a character as the actual creator of meaning. To this end, the author is concealed (for instance, in *Helmet of Horror*) – yet this suggestion is repeatedly rescinded by the author himself. In this way, the death of the author becomes part of the author's play, an object of manipulation, an expectation to be upset. Moreover, the primacy of the reader as the creator of his own text is incompatible with the author's mission to enlighten the reader: the reader cannot be trusted to have the right answers or to interpret a text on his own, he needs to be constantly awakened to reality, shocked, disappointed, manipulated and instructed. It is most likely for this reason that Kornev calls Pelevin an outright brainwasher: "In terms of brainwashing, when compared to him [Pelevin], all contemporary Russian writers are just little naïve kids who can only convince those who are already convinced."

Third, Barthes's essay persuasively suggests that readers should refrain from biographical criticism: a piece of writing should ideally be considered separately from its writer. Yet the contemporary capitalist system does not exactly allow them to do so. The writer has come to be considered as part of his work, a brand, and branding (constructing and distributing a public persona) is a construct no less than the image of the author (to use Vinogradov's term once again) of a classic literary text. Both select, organize and frame the details or traits which will best promote their agenda or message. Today's writers hold book readings, press-conferences and interview sessions. Pelevin in particular exploits this system and purposefully constructs the image of a hermit-writer in order, paradoxically, to

attract as much attention to him as possible. He rarely gives interviews and when he does, his answers are painfully cryptic; he holds virtual conferences for direct contact with his readers; he reaffirms the importance of his personality to the understanding of his texts by creating biographical characters and attaching essays to his novellas. In this way, Pelevin erases the line between life and fiction. It is no coincidence that there are pointed similarities between the content of his works and his public image: Pelevin is as mysterious and unreachable as the men who control politics in *Generation «П»* yet as simple to find as the Minotaur in *The Helmet of Horror* – he is under the readers' noses the whole time. In addition, while suggesting conspiracies in his texts,[19] Pelevin himself has been the center of multiple conspiracy theories (for instance, his readers have claimed at different times that Pelevin is a woman, a robot, and a group of writers). It seems that, at least for the general reading public, "it matters more than ever who has authored, or who controls, any given representation" (Bertens 6).

It is in these ways that the death of the author as a theory becomes a core theme in Pelevin's works as well as a significant part of his textual play. His intertexts refer the reader not only to other works of literature or pop-culture: they also engage with theory and weave it into this game. It has been mentioned several times throughout this thesis that Pelevin has repeatedly expressed contempt for theorists and philosophers either in person during his interviews, or using his narrators and characters as mouthpieces. To offer one last example, Pelevin plays with Nietzsche in *t* by making him the signatory of a graffiti on a random wall:

> God is dead. Nietzsche.
> Nietzsche is dead. God.

[19] For instance, consider the following excerpts from Pelevin's *t*: "They used to at least launch a world war in cases like this – out of respect for the public. And now there are no backing dancers at all" (105) and "I personally think that this was orchestrated by the world government" (106).

You are both faggots. Vassya Pupkin.[20] (229)

The death of the author is, of course, already tied to Nietzsche's death of god in Barthes. With this quote – given the theme and content of the novel – Pelevin openly mocks both theories. Not only does he accomplish this in the content of the passage quoted above, but also by means of the last signatory: Vassya Pupkin is an anachronism. According to the plot of the novel, the text in the reader's hands is supposedly written by Tolstoi, yet this is not possible, for Tolstoy could not have predicted the appearance of an internet-meme named Vassya Pupkin. Therefore, the anachronism works to expose the writer/author behind the fiction and to remind the reader of his god-like power and presence within his own work. The theory of the death of the author itself is mentioned within the same novel by Ariel' – who considers is so insignificant that he cannot even remember it clearly (Pelevin, *t* 275). Furthermore, Barthes is mentioned again in "Macedonian Criticism," yet this mention is also hardly flattering:

Как-то раз восьмого марта
Бодрияр Соссюр у Барта. (Pelevin, "Makedonskaia Kritika" 353)

Once on the eighth of March,
Baudrillard Sauckssured off Barthes.

The narrator emphasizes Barthes's insignificance by commenting: "It is interesting that this is the only mention of Barthes in all of Kika's body of theory" (ibid).

Therefore, Pelevin does not fit neatly into the postmodern movement: his disbelief in the death of the author which collides with his mission to enlighten has rendered his writing much less ambiguous (undecided) than is proper for a postmodern work of

[20] According to Wikipedia (there is hardly a better source for tracing the origins and meaning of internet memes), "Vasia Pupkin is an internet-meme, a phenomenon of virtual discourse and a common noun, a name-*ekzemplifikant* used as an example (exemplification) in order to designate an unknown, anonymous, or random individual, an abstract user of a computer or the web" ("Vasia Pupkin").

literature. Perhaps further research on the fate of the author in other postmodernist works (be they Russian or international) would demonstrate that the death of the author has become no more than a theme or an object of play beyond Pelevin's oeuvre. Indeed, it is possible that postmodern metanarratives will instead reflect the cult of the individual (auteurism) that is shaping in the contemporary capitalist world. Pelevin's case remains a very special one. Pelevin's taste for ideological content makes a significant break with postmodern indeterminacy and indecision. Moreover, Pelevin approaches intertexts – a key part of the death of the author – in a unique way. Instead of using intertextual references in order to engage in a meaningful discussion with earlier texts and thinkers, Pelevin uses quotations or misquotations and more subtle references in order, it seems, to deconstruct them and to strip them of their previous meaning. All this demonstrates a desire to make words his own, to declare his authorship of these words re-written or written anew with a completely new meaning and with only a superficial relation to their previous context.

A potential topic for future research this thesis suggests is that the propensity for conspiracy theories characteristic of postmodern literature contradicts to the notion of the death of the author in postmodern thought. Conspiracy theories are another way in which the author is resurrected, for, according to Hans Bertens, "[d]rawing on Foucault, and especially on the later Foucault's return to the vexing problem of the subject, this [deconstructionist[21]] postmodernism recognizes that in the absence of representation it matters more than ever who has authored, or who controls, any given representation" (6). This attention to authorship and to the sources of power over representation has resulted in

[21] Bertens distinguishes between sociological postmodernism and deconstructionist postmodernism. For him, "The various impulses that constituted … postmodern culture and that in its early stages were virtually indistinguishable began in the course of the 1970s to disentangle themselves from each other" (Bertens 5) until eventually the former ended up portraying "a life style based on consumption and on a relentless aestheticization of experience" and the latter "took a very dim view of such liberal humanist mainstays as the integrity and autonomy of the subject, the transparency of language – and its concomitant capacity to represent reality – and the essentialist character of truth (or at least some truths)" (ibid).

various types of the "postmodern conspiracy story" (Ribbat 560). Keith Livers explicitly ties conspiracy narratives to postmodern thought: "conspiracy as genre modulates between a nostalgic desire to reactivate metanarratives and a core sense of postmodern disbelief that undermines any possibility of arriving at a final conspiratorial Truth" (480). This search for an all-powerful figure embodied in the author of representation rejects the notion of the death of author in both the actual and the meaning of the phrase. On the one hand, it denies the idea that an author is incapable of writing something new: in fact, he has authored the whole world in accordance with his own agenda, i.e. even if he was using the words and discourses of others, he has re-written and combined them in such a way as to promote his own interests. Moreover, the existence of this mysterious demiurge denies the reader (or, in more general terms, the consumer) the power of interpretation or creation. On the other hand, the interest in conspiracy theories[22] resurrects the interest in the figure (and personality) of the author – it fuels the search for the person in power and aims to expose his/her manipulative ways.

[22] Pelevin's *Generation «П»* is a possible example of a conspiracy story: not only is it continuously suggested that powers beyond Tatarskii's understanding control the world, but he himself becomes part of the ruling elite towards the end of the novel.

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