

AUDINGA PELURITYTĖ-TIKUIŠIENĖ

**The semantics of the void in two novels:
Gone with the dreams by Jurga Ivanauskaitė
and *Chapaev and Void* by Victor Pelevin:
from the perspective of contemporary Lithuanian literature**

Семантика пустоты в двух романах:
Унесенные снами Юрги Иванаускайте
и *Чапаяев и Пустота* Виктора Пелевина
в перспективе современной литовской литературы

Abstract. The purpose of this article is to understand the reason for the popularity of books by the writer Victor Pelevin (b. 1962) in Lithuania. Pelevin's internationally popular novel, *Chapaev and Void* (aka *The clay machine-gun; Buddha's little finger*) (Russian, 1996; Lithuanian 1998, 2007; English, 2000) focusing on Buddhist issues, was published in Lithuanian twice; both editions were sold out. In this article, it will be compared with the novel *Gone with the dreams* (2000, 2007) by one of the most popular authors of contemporary Lithuanian literature, Jurga Ivanauskaitė (1961–2007). Both Pelevin and Ivanauskaitė are authors of the same generation who have experienced a similar atmosphere of the late Soviet period and reflected on the sensibilities of their generation in the contemporary world after the collapse of the Soviet Union; they both studied Tibetan Buddhism. The two novels chosen for comparative analysis are marked by the similarly emphasised Buddhist philosophical idea of void. The article reviews the development of the Oriental discourse in contemporary Lithuanian culture and literature before Jurga Ivanauskaitė started writing. The goal of this short analysis of novels by Ivanauskaitė and Pelevin is, first, to underscore the shared and relevant contents of this discourse. Secondly, it is to support the hypothesis that the Lithuanian orientalist discourse, next to other advantages of Pelevin's work that are beyond the scope of this article, has become particularly relevant to Lithuanian readers precisely because of the most important Buddhist idea formulated especially attractively in the novel.

Keywords: Buddhism, Lithuanian literature, Ivanauskaitė, Pelevin, void

Audinga Peluritytė-Tikuišienė, Vilnius University, Vilnius – Lithuania, audinga.tikuisiene@flf.vu.lt,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1750-3301>

Void as an argument in Lithuanian literature

The novel of multi-layered structures by Victor Pelevin, *Chapaev and Void* (*Чанаев и Пычмома*, 1996), was published in Lithuanian as *Čiapajevas ir Pustota* in 1998 and 2007 and sold out immediately. After Lithuania regained independence¹, not many Russian authors were widely read in the original language by Lithuanians. The huge interest in the novel by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (translated into Lithuanian as *Gulago archipelagas* in 2009), was not surprising at the beginning of independence, because in this book the story of gulags was told by a Russian prisoner and this story is relevant to the people of the entire gulag generation as well as their children due to their shared experience. Meanwhile, the level of readership of works by Victor Pelevin is quite surprising. In independent Lithuania, no other Russian author of the younger generation is read on such a mass scale.

One could look for the reasons of Pelevin's popularity in the conception of the novel. It exposes the Russian Revolution as a horrible story of violence, told with irony, even with disgust, which has been uncharacteristic until now. This reflects the corresponding relationship that Lithuanians have had with repressive violence accompanied by political military propaganda for five decades. Yet the novel's ideas and aesthetic impact reach deeper layers of history and human understanding. They rest on the foundation of ontological questions: What is time? What is place? What is existence? What is the word? What is a human being?

We have to propose here, however, that Lithuanian readers have been particularly receptive to the attitude towards history and time, towards the world and place, reality and illusion, truth and play, dream and awakening, ignorance and knowledge, offered in Pelevin's novel. We shall find many diverse references to this and other novels of Pelevin in comments by famous journalists and critics, in essays by philosophers, in blogs and comments in social media. There are no surveys that would deal with the way Lithuanian or Russian readers in Lithuania react to Pelevin. But while observing the phenomenon of interest, it is worth noting that even Lithuanian literature has prepared the Lithuanian readership of Pelevin for similar questions; it took a long period to establish this tradition, not just a single decade.

During the first decades of totalitarianism, Lithuanian literature had experienced a collapse. It lacked artistry, aesthetics, and any somewhat more interesting ideas, particularly philosophical ones; it was working into the world of Literature and art very slowly, constantly struggling against censorship. The multi-perspec-

¹ Lithuanian independence was restored in 1990, five decades after the Soviet occupation and annexation in 1940.

tive horizons of the Oriental worldview fed deeper philosophical thinking; the classical forms of Oriental literature (Japanese haiku, Persian Rubaiyats) inspired the Aesopian language. The Aesopian language formed more noticeably in Lithuanian literature during the period of The Khrushchev Thaw, but due to various circumstances of the barely changed regime and censorship encompassing all stages of life, the process was slow; it developed by constantly testing the limits of public speech and the possibilities of aesthetic risk.

Due to various circumstances, all this would require separate time and attention. In the Soviet Lithuanian literature, it was poetry and particularly meditational lyricism that preserved the trust and dignity in the society up until the 1970s. After being plunged into the coma of socialist realism in 1946, Lithuanian prose lost significant authors for a long period because the best ones were emigrating to the West or were deported to Siberia. Those who remained were also searching for the possibilities of Aesopian language and found some ways out in the form of poetic prose at the beginning of the 1970s. With time, this poetic prose gradually acquired additional ways of expression: mythological or archetypal, and magical realist with a bit of surrealism.

While looking for the answer to the question why, during the Soviet period, Lithuania started to perceive the Orient, so distant politically and geographically, not as a place inhabited by the *other*, but as a phenomenon close to itself, we shall have to address not only the chronology of historical events, but also their contents. Forced atheisation was bulldozing Christianity out in the occupied country and left only the cogs of the communist factory in the field of the utopian ideas of socialist realism, without any collective memory or personal goals. The European nation, to which the high collectivist spirit had been an alien concept, started feeling the lack of existential truth in the face of militant atheism and tried to compensate for that lack by looking for new worldview systems.

At the end of the 1960s, Vilnius University started considering the idea of international Baltic studies aroused by the similarity between the Lithuanian and Sanskrit languages. Among artists, it became popular to discuss the mentality of Lithuanians as people with Indo-European Oriental roots. In their poetry, discussions and essays, Lithuanian poets of the older generation, Vytautas Bložė (1930–2016) and Sigitas Geda (1943–2008), encoded several religious systems they had studied privately, Buddhism, Hinduism, Krishnaism at first, and then expanded this field. During the late Soviet period, the reflection on the Baltic substrate, ethnos, the ancient religion and myths became much stronger in the humanities, among intellectuals and artists, which gradually turned into a cultural movement that currently fights for the right to be called a religion.

While looking for deeper and more convincing examples of such a worldview, common to Lithuanians and all Balts, Lithuanian artists, particularly the

middle generation of the Soviet period², plunged into quite a wide intellectually conceived field of the Orient, easily jumping from one system to another: from Hinduism to Buddhism, from Buddhism to Zen Buddhism, from Zen to Cabala, from Cabala to Christian texts, then to Greek myths, then to the Baltic religious system, then to the readings of the Quran, then to the experiences to Siberian shamans etc. (Gražina Cieškaitė, Onė Baliukonytė, Kornelijus Platelis, Donaldas Kajokas, Eugenijus Ališanka, Aidas Marčėnas and others).

And these are not some exotic margins of Lithuanian literature, but the very nucleus of Lithuanian poetry that has been honoured with the most significant national and state prizes in Lithuania today. Approximately since the mid-1960s, Lithuanian culture has been diving increasingly deeper into the matrix of the Baltic mentality, which has been supported by the entire environment of the humanities. Lithuanian orientalism is exceptionally existential, philosophical and philological, and it is related to the Indian roots of the proto-Indo-European mother-tongue, meanwhile leaving other Egyptian, Far Eastern religious and philosophical systems aside (Tamošaitis, Regimantas 6).

Lacking the idea of conquering or domination, the elite, which means intellectually capable and creative Lithuanian culture, looked at the Orient as if at its own reflection, through the prism of the same sources, semantic contents, thinking and imagination. Only the artist, writer and poet Jurga Ivanauskaitė set out to receive the authentic experience of Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism.

The dreams of the Orient in novels by Jurga Ivanauskaitė

From her pilgrim travels and studies of Tibetan Buddhism in India, the writer Jurga Ivanauskaitė³ brought three documentary stories about Tibet, its religion and customs,⁴ and wrote a novel on the motives of Tibetan Buddhism, *Gone with the dreams* (*Sapnų nublokšti*, 2000) in the 1990s. Due to a similar understanding of time, dreams and consciousness, reality and illusions, we can compare this novel by Ivanauskaitė to Pelevin's novel *Chapaev and Void*. The novels are very different, however: Ivanauskaitė is interested neither in war nor in totalitarian violence.

In this novel, the author does not retreat from the topics of her previous works, from the drama of love between man and woman central to her, from the woman's

² The generation born in the 1940s–1960s.

³ Jurga Ivanauskaitė is one of the most popular writers of Lithuanian literature; books by this writer are sold out and republished in huge print runs; 13 books of the writer's short stories, novels and poetry have been published in total.

⁴ *Tibet in exile* (*Ištremtas Tibetas*, 1996), *Journey to Shambhala* (*Kelionė į Šambalą*, 1997), *Lost promised land* (*Prarasta pažadėtoji žemė*, 1999).

hopeless failings in love, the theme of misunderstandings between woman and man, but particularly in this novel, she brings a radically more profound perspective into these issues. The main illusion of the world, its most colourful dream, is passions, the manifestation of the shackles of love in human self-consciousness, and it is most difficult to wake up from this illusion because one is not willing to do that, but love on the higher spiritual level of passion⁵ would be one of the motives of awakening.

The world of dreams represented in Ivanauskaitė's novel *Gone with the dreams* is similar to the world of dreams in *Chapaev and Void* in Pelevin's novel: sucked into the whirlwind of the events of his own life, a human being sinks increasingly deeper into new sufferings, and it is impossible to get out of those sufferings in any practically accessible way, unless to wake up from illusions and experience enlightenment in a moment of a special state of mind⁶. Both authors are analytics, critics and, in a way, satirists of the social, cultural and spiritual present life. They both long for moral, ethical and essential metaphysical values, but use Buddhism not only as a worldview, philosophical and religious system, important to them, but also as a knowledge model explaining the structure of the world as a developed parabola of man and the world surrounding it.

Twelve characters act in Ivanauskaitė's novel *Gone with the dreams*. They are brought together by their life decisions in a small Himalayan village Neten, so-called Shambhala Minor⁷. In Neten, all the characters of the book meet kouros Tenvar Oshar, a spiritual guru who is close to reaching enlightenment and lives in harmony with the environment, with his loving wife Uma. Tenvar Oshar engages himself in spiritual practice which should finally lead one to the Great Shambhala, a certain Buddhist paradise.

All the characters, taken by their most diverse life stories to the same place, the Neten Village, are treated in this novel as coming to look for spiritual consolation, the unexperienced love, and the undiscovered meaning of life. Everyone hopes to find that meaning in the teachings of spiritual Buddhism, as if from a certain source of happiness, which they naively think is situated in a secret place in

⁵ The writer brings this concept from the Himalayas; it means the inner side of love, the spiritual level.

⁶ According to Jūratė Baranova, the author of a comprehensive monograph about the writer's work, dream and illusion in Jurga Ivanauskaitė's work are not only images from Tibetan Buddhism, very important and strong in her books, but her work includes quite a lot of experience of Western European art (the writer was a professional artist), particularly surrealism (Baranova, Jūratė 47).

⁷ Viktorija Daujotytė sees the structure of the novel as a geometrical circle, a mandala, which consists of the destinies of six men and six women; those destinies touch each other with their edges forming the structure of the mandala; they are the essence of mandala; the geometry of destinies is revealed only in the interaction between men and women; in the novel, this interaction is treated also ironically (Daujotytė, Viktorija 741).

the Himalayas, like a supermarket of the contemporary world. This is such a paradise of tourist spirituality for an individual tired of Western civilisation, in which one can take the products of meaning and satisfaction as well as the sensations of love for one's own life, as if from a shelf in a shopping centre. If someone manages to meet an enlightened spiritual guru, then such a person already hopes for the grace of the Himalayan gods.

Ivanauskaitė approaches the spiritual mission of Shambhalians, which is to protect the mystery of the Secret Doctrine, by using widespread categories and concepts of the Baltic religion. In this novel, the semantics of the Lithuanian language, the wordplay and words' meanings, help to illustrate the nucleus common both to Buddhism and the old Lithuanian religion. The structure of the novel is organised according to the principles of a game using the semantics of words, their meanings and arising associations: "Down below in the world of everydayness, rumours were spreading that Shambhalians still spoke the Sanskrit language" (Ivanauskaitė, Jurga 12). The concept of *Harmony (Darna)*, important to the old Lithuanian religion and often mentioned in the novel⁸, is treated as the foundation of the Secret Doctrine of Shambhalians, and the main form of Harmony in this world is the rainbow in Ivanauskaitė's novel. The rainbow follows Tenvar Oshar during his passionless passion and his selfless love for Lithuanians who have strayed from the road of honour.

By the author's decision, the name of Tenvar Oshar encodes the following play of Lithuanian-Shambhalian words: the "O", "oshara", is both related to the Buddhist "Om", and to the name of the first heroine in the story, Ashara (Tear), which refers to the clash between the divine and degrading, the metaphysical and physical, in the personality of Oshar; meanwhile, in the name "Tenvar", we find both the aforementioned direction "Ten" (There) of the Great Shambhala and the word with the root "vara" (drive) laden with many meanings: to drive, to lead, to control (Ivanauskaitė, Jurga 275). In this novel, Tenvar Oshar embodies the border where Shambhala Minor and the Great Shambhala meet, because Oshar can bring people from Shambhala Minor to the Great Shambhala only after having woken them up.

All the awakenings in the novel are swift, unexpected and essentially more similar to the experience of death, but it is not easy to decide whether these awakenings really reflect the conception of Buddhism. First of all, one wakes up because Tenvar Oshar, and not the heroes themselves, wants that; secondly, the awakening is similar to the Christian descent into Hell or ascension to Paradise. A chapter of the book is dedicated to each of the twelve heroes of Ivanauskaitė's novel. Each chapter tells a certain story of unrequited love, business and the search for spirit-

⁸ The word *darna* (Lithuanian for "harmony") has also the meaning of the Hinduist concept of *dharma*, which defines the self-contained order of the world.

uality. In the situation of the New Year and the New Millennium, when all the characters gather in one place, the Neten Village, Himalayan gods and goddesses decide for some reason to play with Tenvar Oshar's life by making him become entangled deeper and deeper with earthly desires, expectations and cares.

The Great Being that lives There, beyond the Great Shambhala, decides to exploit this game because the Great Being has its own motives: goodness and truth are vanishing from this world, and with them, the Great Shambhala. Thus, it is necessary to bring its members who have lost the meaning of life, and the Lithuanians who have lost the way of honour, back to the Great Shambhala. The novel describes the way each of the twelve characters gets transformed during fateful meetings with Tenvar Oshar: some get to the Great Shambhala, others do not. The end of the novel does not give a logical answer to what and how and why one would have to understand, and has quite a significant similarity to the wrath of deities – such as that of Erinias – appearing in Greek mythology, because the spiritual guru Tenvar Oshar is finally torn to pieces at the threshold to There.

A short chapter after Tenvar Oshar's epilogue chapter, "He Himself and the Great Being", provides us with a certain theoretical framework towards the entire action in the novel: everything that exists is only a dream, in which those who are dreamed about, unfortunately, cannot choose anything, because the dreamer chooses, or perhaps even he does not choose because he is Beyond our dreams. This fatalist and pessimistic attitude may be and is the quintessence of Ivanauskaitė's novel, which one can dispute, unless one would have to understand the disappearance of Tenvar Oshar at the end of the novel as a quite unexpected suggestion for those dreamed about in the dreams of others – to dare and descend to the bottom of those dreams, to refuse oneself and, thus, having relinquished everything, reach the Buddhist void. Yet the Buddhist rainbow forecasting an optimistic prognosis during the disappearance of Tenvar Oshar, unfortunately, does not appear, and this means that this character reaches neither the void nor Shambhala at the end.

Nevertheless, the greatest obstacle to finding an appropriate interpretational solution to reach such conclusions is the particularly illustrative character of the chosen way of storytelling. We could compare it only to the examples of a theoretical explanation: it does not matter that quite independent and varied characters act in the novel; they are all presented by the voice of the omniscient narrator. Such a story is similar to the events, states of mind and sensations, that have happened to somebody, but not to you. Due to this reason, the swift converting of Lithuanians into the Secret Doctrine of Shambhala is not fully motivated because the heroes are not fully motivated⁹.

⁹ Professional criticism reacted rapidly to the novel when it appeared, although the edition of the novel was reprinted on demand from the mass reader. Having discussed the critique of Jurga

Regimantas Tamošaitis summarises Ivanauskaitė's dialectics of orientalism very precisely by naming the writer's work as a manifestation of pseudomorphism: exotic decorativeness and the sensational effect could not defeat the strong westernism inside the author; a certain profound irony did not allow the author to identify with the hallucinogenic paradise of hippies and beatniks. While following the Oriental way, she recovered her European experience (Tamošaitis, Regimantas 73). As an artist, Ivanauskaitė followed a complicated path towards self-discovery. But if we look for the Orient in this author's work, according to Tamošaitis, we shall find the metaphoric Shambhala, which marks the author's parabolic movement towards the discovery in cultural distances of what has been residing in the writer's imagination before reaching those distances (Tamošaitis 75).

Awakening in Pelevin's novel

The characters of the novel *Chapaev and Void* and their stories are divided into two periods: the post-revolutionary and the post-soviet, and those periods connect only in the mind of the main character, Pyotr Pustota (whose surname literally means "void"). On the one hand, the revolutionary time is dreams in the present; on the other hand, the present time is dreams in the past, and Pelevin's main character cannot separate these two dreams. He is forced to live constantly in two realities simultaneously, but he is not guaranteed whether this is his life or only a dream in any of these periods.

In his dreams, Pyotr Pustota meets his chief from the Russian Civil War (1917–1922), Chapaev, the author Furmanov who wrote the first propaganda work on Chapaev, and the analogue of Robin Hood in Russia during the years of revolution, Kotovsky. The latter two are particularly significant figures in the history of the 20th century Russia. During the post-Soviet decade (1993–1994), unfortunately, everything is far more boring because the society seems to consist of patients of a psychiatric hospital, ordinary mortals, and doctors who observe those patients, take care of them and treat them. The patients are treated so that their split consciousness could acquire the sense of unity. The fact that this is quite difficult for doctors shows the chronic social schizophrenia that overcame humanity during the post-revolutionary period, which is also the time of the beginning of modernism with its characteristic faith in the future of man and the world.

The methods of the psychiatric doctor Kanashnikov are creepy enough, more similar to the treatment applied by the totalitarian regime to those who did not

Ivanauskaitė's work, Solveiga Daugirdaitė states that the novel *Gone with the wind* is the peak of Ivanauskaitė's fiction; the author herself valued this novel most as well (Daugirdaitė, Solveiga 181).

agree with the Soviet system. The patients, tied, plunged into cold water, filled with tranquilizers and unable to resist, are similar to the prisoners described in Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Perhaps only psychotherapy sessions relate these patients to the present time when they have fun telling jokes about the heroes of the revolutionary time: Chapaev and Petka (Pyotr Semyonovich Isaev, Chapaev's assistant), and discuss the motives of their crazily daring actions.

The seven decades of history separating Pyotr Pustota's dreams about the events of revolution have covered them with the mist of myths, misunderstandings and laughter. But Pyotr Pustota remembers most of the events and can explain them because of his paradoxical situation: he participates in two temporal dimensions. What the memory of the history of seven decades turned has into funny stories about courage at war, acquires additional contents, particularly against the background of physical and psychological repressions experienced by Pyotr Pustota; Chapaev's mad courage, it comes out, follows from his Buddhist wisdom, from the state of his quiet mind and from his ability not to get immersed in suffering.

For the patients of the present, laughter is a necessary personal psychotherapy treating the illusions of collective heroism, which were imposed by the total violence of war, and the traumas created by that illusion (they, one might assume, have split their consciousness). Meanwhile, in the novel, this laughter is a form of paradoxical philosophising, which we could compare even with koans in the Zen Buddhist meditation practice. In this novel, Pyotr Pustota also embodies a patient treated for schizophrenia whose consciousness keeps jumping from the uninteresting and grey post-Soviet period to the colourful revolutionary period. Despite the historical temporal differences, he experiences the same aspects of perverse violence characteristic to the totalitarian culture during both periods.

In this novel, the schizophrenic hallucination of Pyotr Pustota, according to Leonarda Jekentaitė, helps the author not only to reveal the situation of the Russian *bespredel*¹⁰ both in the post-revolutionary and in the post-Soviet period, but also to understand the more complex phenomenon of limits and boundaries (Jekentaitė, Leonarda 193–201). Culture as a system of agreements and order is a structure of many boundaries whose integrity is preserved by a taboo, and humans of the 20th century modernism tend to cross those boundaries increasingly more often. The movement of crossing a boundary contains paradoxical experiences: from the horror of mystery to catharsis. But only in this way does culture resume. And only in this way do new cultural heroes emerge. The sublimated dark energy of culture reveals itself in the factor of risk, which has freed this dark energy of creation at

¹⁰ According to urbandictionary.com, "*bespredel* (from Russian «беспредел» – «boundlessness», «no-limit-ness») is a situation when someone in power – be it political, financial, or criminal – does whatever he wants while enjoying complete impunity and getting away with murder (often literally)".

the dawn of modernism, and threatens us with washed out moral norms in the post-modern epoch.

In fact, Pyotr Pustota crosses boundaries constantly, and not only temporal ones, but also moral ones (he has to lie, deceive, and kill), those of social norms (he has to hide from the society and act against his own will), and those of his own psychological structure (he is shy, but has to give public speeches; he is in the grip of his own doubts, but acts decisively). The world in which he exists is also the world of constantly changing limits where, it seems, all structures of order, all norms and agreements, have disappeared. Thus, Pyotr Pustota does not even have another choice how to constantly act in the environment of the crumbling boundaries, and his risk, it seems, is hopeless because nothing is happening in this hero's experience, except for suffering.

The suffering experienced by Pyotr Pustota, particularly in the Moscow psychiatric clinic in the 1990s, is hopeless. In his dreams of the Civil War, he at least runs, attacks and defends himself, while in the hospital ward, in the laboratory or the doctor's office, he is not only imprisoned, but is most often tied up. Neither in one, nor in the other period, does the hero find a point where his identity could acquire the position of a *status quo* and with it, its integrity, he would recognise his own limits.

The boundary and its paradoxical crossing lie at the foundation of this novel's structure; this is its main axis, and all levels of the story, from the idea to the poetics of language, hold onto it. In this work, there is a lot of play with words and meanings whose sound encodes important interpretational messages important to this novel: Kanashnikov rhymes with Kalashnikov; Timur Timurovich, with a novella for youth of a similar title by Arkady Gaidar; Jungern, with Jung. Every association arising from the similarity of words and the dissonance of meaning participates in the understanding of Pyotr Pustota's split consciousness and in the plot of the Russian historical reality and the present.

The essence of play in the novel is the doubling, but not coinciding, structures of meanings. Kanashnikov's work methods are as unpalatable as the rounds from the Kalashnikov submachine-gun. Timur Timurovich has his own squad of orderlies in the hospital, perhaps, not so agreeable as in the novella *Timur and his squad*¹¹, but the squad of orderlies works in the same hard-line way as the pioneers described by Arkady Gaidar. Jungern helps Pyotr Pustota to understand what would be impossible without special self-analysis. In Victor Pelevin's novel, play covers all levels of the story with paradoxes and creates a certain strategy of duality justifying the poetic structure: everything is only an association, an illusion, a dream, and if one does not wake up, one would understand nothing.

¹¹ During the Soviet period, Arkady Gaidar's novella *Timur and his squad* (*Тимур и его команда*, 1940) became the ideological canon of children's literature.

Pyotr Pustota understands that while he is in one period, he dreams of another, and vice versa. He tries to overcome this paradoxical presence in two dreams simultaneously by consciously analysing his own perceptions. Chapaev suggests that Pyotr Pustota should write a diary of the dreams Pustota has, thus imposing a thought that the entire human life, the life of people and the life of the country is only dreams, and essentially it is irrelevant in which dream one wakes up. The motif of awakening emerges in the novel as the truth, which Pyotr Pustota must understand and understand suddenly, because there is no time for meditations. During the Civil War events drive events, and the environment of the post-Soviet hospital does not allow that physically: the main hero constantly experiences certain restrictions of treatment.

Blinding flashes become the sign of an enlightened consciousness. We see them at the beginning of the novel on the blade of Chapaev's sword and in the transitional place between life and death, which Jungern shows to Pyotr Pustota during their journey. While being in the place that does not exist, the hero starts understanding the link between light and void thanks to these flashes. The place of Inner Mongolia in the novel embodies a place analogous to the Great Shambhala in Ivanauskaitė's novel, and as in Ivanauskaitė's novel, Pelevin's place of Inner Mongolia is accessible only via consciousness, not by physical relocation, and can be achieved at once:

"And where is it, this place?"

"That's the point, it is nowhere. It is quite impossible to say that it is located anywhere in the geographical sense. Inner Mongolia is not called that because it is inside Mongolia. It is inside anyone who can see the void, although the word "inside" is quite inappropriate here. And it is not any kind of Mongolia either, that's merely a way of speaking. The most stupid thing possible would be to attempt to describe to you what it is. Take my word for this, at least – it is well worth striving all your life to reach it. And nothing in life is better than being there."

"And how does one come to see the void?"

"Look into yourself," said the baron. "I beg your pardon for the unintentional pun on your name" (Pelevin 2001: 228–229).

Igor Berchin notes an important argument of the story in the book's *motto* and the title introduction which turn a chaotic and, at first sight, contradictory story into a consistent and logical one (Berchin, electronic source): the theme of Mongolia ties the story to the book's *motto* and to the introduction to the book, which is signed by Urgan Jambon Tulku VII, Chairman of the Buddhist Front for Full and Final Liberation¹². The book's *motto* consists of the words of Ghengis Khan, the great khan of the united Mongolia, about the place of the human "I" in the flow of

¹² In this short review, we shall find a conceptual description of the novel's structure; the author of this text has found the version of doubled characters very interesting. It suggests understanding the version of Russian history presented in the novel as an evil-minded idea of the criminal

life, and the introduction to the book tells us that the entire story has been found in a monastery of Inner Mongolia.

By asking why Mongolia, we would find not only interesting links to the history of Russia, but also an important reference to the same paradoxical ambiguity of Inner Mongolia in the novel. In the novel, Inner Mongolia is the place of the void revealing itself, which does not exist in reality, yet the geographical Inner Mongolia, which it is, also exists. This is a territory in China, from where the stream of Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrayāna, has originated, and this Inner Mongolia has a border with Russia. Thus, a convincing quasi-historical premise of Chapaev – an awakened Buddhist – is created in the novel.

In this process, Pyotr Pustota finds it most difficult to understand the very phenomenon of the void, although the hero's name is precisely a significant reference. The cathartic recognition of an identity larger than oneself happens at the end of the novel when, having understood the idea of the void, Pyotr Pustota suddenly, in a leap, plunges into the flow of unconditional love (URAL¹³) that has the nature of the rainbow. The play with duality, associations and paradoxes, acquires the decisive role here, because Pyotr Pustota follows the example of his teacher, Chapaev; the biography of Chapaev's historical personality also ends with the death of Chapaev in the river of the same name.

If we see all paradoxes and games in the structure of the novel through the aforementioned prism of boundaries, then we would have to recognise that its end summarises this game. Thus, Pyotr Pustota is forced to transcend many boundaries of norms and taboos of personal and collective conviction, of knowledge and social ones, in the past and in the present; yet at the end of the novel, all these transgressed norms acquire a new qualitative argument. It comes out that while waking up from his sufferings and dreams, Pyotr Pustota wakes up into the level of the unconditional love that lies in this void. And this void is inside him. This is indicated also by the character's name.

Berchi observes that the name of Urgan Jambon Tulku VII, under which the writings of Pyotr Pustota are published, is distorted, and the real Mongolian version of his name should mean approximately *Love from the Land of Shambhala* (Berhin, electronic source). Doubtlessly, the Mongolian word indicates another, less familiar, name of the place¹⁴. And in this case, the concept of the story acquires perfection because it allows us to connect all links of the plot and of the play:

Kotovskyy dizzy with cocaine: it is Kotovskyy who rewrites and distorts the author of Furmanov's novella about Chapaev, foiling and distorting facts.

¹³ This is an acronym made of the following words: *Uslovnaja reka absolutnoj liubvi* (Russian) – the conditional river of unconditional love.

¹⁴ Olmolungring.

What I saw was something similar to a flowing stream which glowed with all the colours of the rainbow, a river broad beyond all measure that flowed from somewhere lost in infinity towards that same infinity. It extended around our island on all sides as far as the eye could see, and yet it was not an ocean, but precisely a river, a stream, because it had a clearly visible current. The light it cast on the three of us was extremely bright, but there was nothing blinding or frightening about it, because it was also at the same time grace, happiness and infinitely powerful love. However, those three words, so crudely devalued by literature and art, were quite incapable of conveying any real impression of it. Simply watching the constant emergence of new multicoloured sparks and glimmers of light in it was already enough, because everything that I could possibly think of or dream of was a part of that rainbow-hued stream. Or to be more precise, the rainbow-hued stream was everything that I could possibly think of or experience, everything that I could possibly be or not be, and I knew quite certainly that that it was not something separate from myself. It was me, and I was it. I had always been it, and nothing else. (Pelevin 2001: 308–309).

In Pelevin's novel, according to Rebeca Stakun, Chapaev appears in a completely new role: as a teacher of Buddhist enlightenment, a bodhisattva, and he teaches us to see in any extremities things that defy everydayness (Stacun, Rebeca 150). Chapaev is not affected either by horror or glory or alcohol or time because his mind is calm and his goal is to help us to overcome the limits of Pyotr Pustota's human sensations, the incessant paradoxicality of his sensations. Stakun notes the common origins of Zen and Vajrayāna (the Mahayana School) in Pelevin's work¹⁵ whose essence consists of the refusal even of that duality which underlies the understandable contradictions of the world (goodness/evil, masculinity/femininity, live/dead, hot/cold) in an attempt to intuitively give oneself up to understanding the void, which lies both in between and beyond such experiences (Stacun 123). In Pelevin's novel, it is contradictions that create the semantic play.

If we compared the contents of Pyotr Pustota's self-awareness before and after the awakening, we would see a huge difference. This is a subtle man, a recognised poet whose greatest goal is to experience "the golden joy" when "a peculiar flight of free thought makes it possible to see the beauty of life" (Pelevin 2001: 215). In the forbidding environment of the Civil War, however, he is bound to experience increasingly the abomination of life, and not beauty. The larger part of the novel consists of episodes in which Pyotr Pustota's search for beauty is unmercifully *chewed* by circumstances: poetic creation is turned into military propaganda; machine-gunner Anka does not respond to his feelings, and, in the constantly disintegrating world, there is no place where the hero could calm down. In each period, in each dream of reality, in the illusion of experiences, this hero is turning in his own dream and that of the collective karma created in the centrifuge of events and consequences that we call history.

¹⁵ We shall find the same branch of Tibetan Buddhism also in Jurga Ivanauskaitė's novel, in its artistic interpretation.

At the beginning of the story, the machinery of the violence of the Civil War has filled Pyotr Pustota with badly tolerable nihilism; at the end, it is the colours of the rainbow, light and love, which permeate the present time. In both periods, we shall find the void, yet their contents are incomparable. The first void poisons, and the second one transforms and cleanses. The story told in the first person turns this catharsis also into the reader's experience, and thanks to the masterfully made structure of the game, this catharsis is rather more than just the main character's good experience or a good end for the story. Victor Pelevin's novel achieves more.

First of all, it truly gives us complete satisfaction with the successfully played game because the novel of such a complicated structure finally reveals its main idea. The idea is of the truth surpassing human existence, sending the message of love that transgresses all boundaries: this message reaches us from our inner (Inner Mongolia) experience; and due to its overall character, the transcendental metaphysical contents reach everyone who is able to receive them; thus, it is living and can act. And in this place, the name of the main character, allowing us to observe the ever-emptying perspectives of his life at the beginning of the novel, fills up at its end.

It would be possible to debate whether Victor Pelevin wants to sell the Buddhist doctrine to us because the format of the game, through which the attitude of the author who has studied Buddhism in South Korean Buddhist monasteries is presented, does not purport to be religious. We could at least observe the drawn curve of hope, particularly in the last episode of the novel where we see Chapaev in the role of the little finger of Buddha. There, we understand that the creation of the universe never ceases; thus, Pyotr Pustota, having overcome the boundaries netted to him by his mind, can also create such a universe for himself, in the void, in his universe of beauty, love and truth.

Instead of conclusions

The motif of Shambhala chosen by Ivanauskaitė illustrates very precisely the arguments of the Oriental discourse that manifested in Lithuanian literature during the last Soviet decades: the outlines of the system of the Baltic and ancient Lithuanian religion; the semantic contents recorded in the common imagery of Lithuanian and Sanskrit languages; the solid foundation of metaphysical thinking about the world. Even the name of Shambhala chosen for the novel originates from Sanskrit (in the texts of Tibetan Buddhism, such a kingdom is called by a different name). The game, which the author offers to her reader, is the play with the fictively created similarity between the Lithuanian and the non-existent Shamb-

halian language, and with the Buddhist doctrine of the void. The idea is related illustratively; thus, it lacks aesthetic conviction and the ideological one dominates.

The common origins of Lithuanian and Sanskrit languages interest Lithuanian artists because those origins link the Lithuanian language to the oldest sacred texts: through the Vedas and Hinduist philosophy, the sources of the proto-Indo-European language are reflected in the Lithuanian language. During the last decades of the Soviet period, Lithuanian art exploited the Orient quite intensively, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, as the source of spiritual truth whose beginnings are found in language. In her novel, Ivanauskaitė suggests to us a philological version of enlightenment because the origins of the experience of sacredness are programmed in it. Unfortunately, an intermediary, a spiritual guru, or a translator, is necessary for the understanding of the spiritual void.

The Buddhist motif of awakening in Ivanauskaitė's novel coincides with the philological awakening. In this case, we could note that the conception has not been fully realised in the structure of the novel because the necessity of a sudden awakening seems to be illogical. The conclusions we could reach while reading and interpreting the novel are either fatalistically pessimistic or, at best, contradictory. The main idea of those conclusions is the following: the world is as it is, and the efforts of a separate human to change it are fruitless. The idea of Buddhist enlightenment is not emphasised in the novel as much as is the nature of illusion, dreams and the unending suffering that relate all humans to the world. The meaning created by awakening has not been fully formulated in the novel. The story of a separate character's awakening does not overcome the pessimism demonstrated by the cosmic organization of the world.

The game that Pelevin plays in *Chapaev and Void*, embodied by the entire structure of the novel, has also some philological character, but the game with words, quotations and intertexts is not a goal in itself. The game in this novel is the method of philosophising, the method of reasoning, the technique of training one's mind. The object of the void becomes a value-based landmark in this game also because without the value-based contents of love, it has the most paradoxical shape: this is neither the place, nor a real shape, nor a body, nor time, nor a fact; this is nothing. The experience of the paradox, which opens up in the process of enlightenment, draws us into a powerful game that contradicts a healthy mind. And we would find philological casuses in Pelevin's novel, particularly in conversations about the void, that demonstrate the dynamics of daily and philosophical reasoning.

In Pelevin's novel, philosophical wonder overcomes the paradoxes of the philological game; thus, the entire mechanism of the totalitarian impact, which the main character experiences in both dimensions of time and which seems to be invincible by any means of an external impact, becomes surmountable internally

at the moment of a sudden enlightenment. The void of fullness replaces the void of nothingness, overcomes it, and, instead of abomination, the void fills up with the powers of creation. The end of the novel is, doubtlessly, not only mysterious, but also optimistic. Presumably, precisely this optimism seemed to be more optimal to the Lithuanian reader than the ambiguity left by Ivanauskaitė: the chaos is overcome by recreating the moral boundaries of an individual and by taking responsibility for the creation of the world.

In the novels of Pelevin and Ivanauskaitė, we shall not find any propaganda of Buddhism, only interpretational projections that formulate very clear principles of a worldview with regard to people and the world. The moral motives of a person's decisions, thoughts and behaviour discussed by both authors are evaluated in these novels in the context of the Buddhist idea of the origin of the void filled with love. Both authors have chosen the same Buddhist attitude towards the method of understanding the void; they both discuss the variants of a sudden awakening, but choose different arguments for the results of the awakening: Victor Pelevin's awakening happens suddenly, but after having followed the entire path of personal mindfulness; Ivanauskaitė's awakening happens suddenly, but without reaching personal mindfulness.

Comparing the novels *Gone with the dreams* by Jurga Ivanauskaitė, and *Chapaev and Void* by Victor Pelevin, helps us to understand more conceptually the expectations in contemporary Lithuanian literature towards the Oriental discourse. Both authors have chosen Buddhism not by accident, and the main problems of Buddhist philosophy are relevant today, while the void is the most important among these problems. Both authors also found their discussion of hot sociological questions on Buddhist issues and are able to do that in a popular way, winning over the mass reader.

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