

Archetypal Heroic Matrix: From Epic Doer to the “Postmodern Wanderer” (A Comparative Study of H. Ismailov’s Mbobbo And V. Pelevin’s Chapaev And Pustota)

 Jamila Alievna Buranova

Doctoral Student, Department of Uzbek Literary Studies, National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek, Uzbekistan

Received: 31 January 2026; **Accepted:** 28 February 2026; **Published:** 21 March 2026

Abstract: This article explores the radical transformation of the heroic archetype in contemporary literature, specifically tracing the evolutionary shift from the classical "Epic Doer" to the fragmented "Postmodern Wanderer." Through a rigorous comparative analysis of Hamid Ismailov’s Mbobbo (*The Underground*) and Victor Pelevin’s Chapaev and Pustota (*Buddha's Little Finger*), the study examines the mechanisms by which the traditional hero’s journey – as defined by Joseph Campbell’s monomyth – is systematically subverted and deconstructed.

The research demonstrates a dual trajectory of this archetypal shift: while Ismailov’s protagonist embodies a rhizomatic wandering through the tangible physical and cultural debris of a collapsed Soviet empire, Pelevin’s hero represents an ontological wandering through the hallucinatory "void" of a fractured consciousness. By utilizing a transdisciplinary framework that incorporates post-structuralist theory, semiotics, and hauntology, the study reveals how both authors redefine the heroic matrix. Ultimately, the paper argues that the contemporary hero no longer seeks a definitive "boon" or a return to a stable social order, but instead exists in a state of permanent ontological transition, where the act of wandering itself becomes the only authentic response to a world of exhausted meta-narratives.

Keywords: Archetypal matrix, Epic Hero, Postmodern Wanderer, Hamid Ismailov, Victor Pelevin, Monomyth, Post-Soviet literature, Rhizome, Ontological void, Comparative literature.

Introduction: The classical archetype of the hero, historically rooted in the epic tradition through foundational figures such as Achilles, Odysseus, or Gilgamesh, is defined by absolute agency, a rigorous teleology, and a stable, objective world-order. In this traditional framework, the hero’s path is not merely a sequence of events but a moral and physical trajectory toward a pre-ordained destiny, where the individual serves as a microcosm of the cosmic order. Joseph Campbell’s seminal concept of the "Monomyth" established a universal tripartite cycle – departure, initiation, and return – positing that the hero’s trials lead to a definitive psychological transformation and a subsequent return to a "boon" for society (Campbell,

1949). This "Epic Doer" functions as a vital pillar of cultural and ontological stability, reinforcing the collective values of his civilization through conquest, boundary-crossing, and eventual enlightenment.

However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed a radical and irreversible dissolution of this "Epic Doer." In the postmodern landscape, the hero is no longer a conqueror of external frontiers or a master of his own fate, but a Wanderer – a de-centered, fragmented figure navigating a world where "truth" is no longer an objective reality but a volatile linguistic construct. This shift reflects a broader cultural condition that Jean-François Lyotard famously described as the "incredulity toward meta-narratives"

(Lyotard, 1979). As the "Grand Narratives" of progress, religion, and political utopia lose their legitimizing power, the hero loses his compass. He no longer seeks to conquer the labyrinth; he becomes an intrinsic part of its endless, winding corridors.

In the specific context of post-Soviet literature, this transition is significantly amplified by the traumatic collapse of the Soviet "Grand Narrative." The abrupt dissolution of a century-long ideological teleology created a semiotic vacuum—a "time out of joint" – that contemporary writers must populate with new, albeit inherently unstable, archetypes. The collapse of the Soviet Union was not merely a political event but an ontological catastrophe that rendered the traditional "Soviet Hero" (the Stakhanovite, the soldier, the builder of the future) obsolete.

This paper investigates how Hamid Ismailov and Victor Pelevin utilize the "Wanderer" archetype to reflect the fragmented, multi-layered reality of this post-Soviet space. Through a comparative analysis of Ismailov's Mbobo (*The Underground*) and Pelevin's Chapaev and Pustota (*Buddha's Little Finger*), we explore how the heroic matrix is reconfigured. While Ismailov's protagonist wanders through the literal and metaphorical ruins of an imperial history, Pelevin's hero navigates the hallucinatory voids of a fractured consciousness. Both authors move beyond the classical "Monomyth", proposing instead a "Nomadology" of the spirit, where the act of wandering becomes the only possible mode of existence in a world stripped of its foundational myths. By examining these two distinct yet overlapping literary paths, this study seeks to define the parameters of the postmodern heroic identity as it emerges from the shadows of a fallen empire.

METHODS

The research utilizes a comprehensive transdisciplinary approach, strategically blending archetypal criticism with post-structuralist theory. This hybrid methodology is essential to account for both the deep-seated mythic roots of the characters and the subsequent postmodern subversion of those very foundations. By moving beyond a single-lens analysis, the study captures the complexity of characters who exist simultaneously as echoes of ancient myths and as symptoms of contemporary fragmentation. The following methodological tools are applied: Structural-Semiotic Analysis: This method is employed to decode the dense, multi-layered symbolic architecture within the novels. Drawing on the semiotic traditions of the Tartu-Moscow School, we analyze the "Underground" in Ismailov's work not merely as a functional subway system, but as a semiotic labyrinth – a vertical map representing the buried, repressed layers of imperial

and Soviet history. Similarly, we examine "The Void" in Pelevin's prose as a radical signifier that deconstructs the traditional Western binary of being and non-being, transforming it into a space of potentiality and ontological play.

Comparative-Typological Analysis: A rigorous contrast is drawn between Ismailov's socio-cultural "wandering" and Pelevin's metaphysical "wandering". While both protagonists share the fundamental trait of displacement (both physical and psychic), their trajectories are typologically distinct: Ismailov's hero is rooted in the trauma of post-colonial identity and the search for a lost ethnic and cultural center, while Pelevin's hero engages in an exercise of Buddhist-inflected ontological nihilism, where the goal is not to find a center, but to realize that no center exists.

Intertextual Mapping and Deconstruction: Following the seminal theories of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, this study identifies how both authors engage in "palimpsestic" writing – where new narratives are written over the partially erased traces of older ones. We analyze how they deconstruct entrenched historical myths – such as the romanticized, teleological heroism of the Russian Revolution in Pelevin or the utopian "Palace of the People" (the Soviet Metro) in Ismailov. These stable historical markers are stripped of their ideological weight and turned into fluid, ironic sites of postmodern pastiche and play.

Phenomenological Approach: To understand the "Wanderer" not just as a literary trope but as a state of being, we employ a phenomenological lens. This allows us to explore the protagonists' subjective experiences of distorted space and non-linear time. By shifting the critical focus from "what the hero does" (the epic deed) to "how the hero perceives" a disintegrating reality, we can map the transition from an objective heroic journey to a subjective, fragmented experience of the world.

Rhizomatic Mapping: Utilizing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "rhizome," the study tracks the non-hierarchical and non-linear paths taken by the protagonists. This allows for an analysis of the "Wanderer" as a nomadic entity that resists the "striated" spaces of the state and the traditional narrative, opting instead for a "smooth" space of constant, unpredictable movement.

RESULTS

In Hamid Ismailov's Mbobo, the protagonist – ametis boy of African and Russian descent – functions as a living deconstruction of the idealized Soviet "friendship of nations" (дружба народов) myth. He represents the archetypal "outsider", not by choice or ideological rebellion, but by the ontological fact of his existence within a collapsing, monochromatic society that can no

longer find a place for his hybrid identity. His journey through the Moscow Metro is far more than a mere physical transit; it is a literal and figurative descent into the collective subconscious of a dying empire. The Metro, once celebrated as a shining "Palace of the People" and a symbol of socialist progress, is transformed in Ismailov's narrative into a dark, visceral organ of a decaying body politic – a site of trauma where the grand narrative of the past has curdled into a nightmare of the present.

Unlike the classical epic hero who masters his environment through external "deeds" (подвиг), Mboho is increasingly consumed by the shadows he inhabits. Ismailov constructs what can be termed a rhizomatic hero – a figure whose movement follows the non-linear, unpredictable, and subterranean logic of the tunnels rather than the goal-oriented, teleological path of the surface world. This character does not move toward a resolution; rather, his trajectory is a series of frantic escapes and temporary refuges with no definitive destination.

"I was a stain on the white sheet of their Moscow, a mistake in the text of their history that they tried to erase with every glance" (Ismailov, 89). The traditional "Heroic Matrix" is completely inverted here. The hero's "boon" is not a treasure, a weapon, or a new social order, but the painful, existential realization of his own ontological invisibility. The Metro serves as a labyrinth where traditional mythic roles are blurred: the Minotaur and the Hero are one and the same, wandering through a historical "non-place" where the past is a phantom haunting the corridors and the future is an inescapable dead end. Ismailov Contextual Analysis

If Ismailov's hero is trapped within the physical and historical debris of a fallen empire, Victor Pelevin's Pyotr Pustota (whose surname significantly translates to "Emptiness") represents the final, metaphysical stage of the archetype's evolution. In this seminal postmodern novel, the "Epic Doer" of the past – the legendary Red Army commander Vasily Chapaev – is radically re-imagined. He is stripped of his status as a hero of revolutionary action and reconfigured as a Zen-like spiritual guide. Chapaev's primary function is to systematically dismantle Pustota's belief in the objective material world and the linear nature of history.

Pelevin utilizes a complex structure of dual realities – the 1919 Civil War and a 1990s psychiatric hospital – to subvert the very concept of historical progress. The heroic matrix is replaced by a process of radical subtraction. Instead of the traditional heroic accumulation of power, knowledge, or status, the

protagonist must engage in the systematic shedding of his identity, his memories, and his cultural attachments. The goal is the emergence of the "Wanderer" who navigates not physical space, but the "Inner Mongolia" of the mind – a state of consciousness beyond linguistic and historical categorization.

"The only thing that truly exists is the Internal Absolute Observer... everything else is just a flicker of a nightmare in a madman's mind" (Pelevin, 142). In Pelevin's universe, the concept of "action" is exposed as a grand illusion – a simulacrum of purpose in a world of shadows. The hero's journey concludes not with a triumphant return to society, but with a final departure into the Absolute Void. By transforming Chapaev from a Soviet icon of "Doing" into a teacher of "Non-Being," Pelevin effectively terminates the classical heroic cycle, replacing it with a postmodern state of permanent, enlightened wandering within the emptiness of existence. Pelevin Scholarly Review

DISCUSSION

The transition from the "Epic Doer" to the "Postmodern Wanderer" represents a fundamental and irreversible rupture in the literary representation of the self. This study identifies three primary ontological and structural shifts that define this new, fragmented heroic matrix:

Spatial Disorientation and the Rise of "Non-Places": The classical epic hero moves through a mapped, meaningful, and historically grounded world where every landscape serves as a stage for moral action and territorial conquest. In stark contrast, the Postmodern Wanderer inhabits what Marc Augé (1995) famously terms "non-places" (non-lieux) – transit zones such as airports, hotel chains, and transit hubs that are devoid of historical identity, organic social relation, or a sense of "home". In Ismailov's Mboho, the Moscow Metro is elevated to the status of the ultimate non-place: a subterranean, circular labyrinth that is neither "home" nor "abroad", but a permanent, claustrophobic state of transit. Similarly, Pelevin's psychiatric ward and the shifting, dreamlike frontlines of the 1919 Civil War function as "heterotopias" (Foucault, 1967) – othered spaces where the hero's physical location becomes irrelevant compared to his profound mental and spiritual displacement.

Temporal Fragmentation and the Recursive Nightmare: Postmodernism rejects the linear, "progressive," and teleological time characteristic of the epic and the Soviet "Master Narrative". In Chapaev and Pustota, Pelevin employs a radical "folding" of time, where the brutal reality of the Russian Civil War and the chaotic, predatory capitalism of the 1990s occur simultaneously within the protagonist's fractured consciousness. This

structural device suggests that history is not a sequence of meaningful events leading toward a utopian goal, but rather a recursive, hallucinatory nightmare from which the hero must awaken. In Mbobo, time is experienced as a hauntology (Derrida, 1993); the Soviet past is never truly dead or buried but remains a spectral, "haunting" presence in the tunnels of the Metro, preventing the hero from moving into a coherent or autonomous future.

The Failure of the Return (The End of Nostos): In the classical heroic matrix, the "Nostos" (the return home) is the crowning moment of the journey, signifying the hero's successful reintegration into the social and moral order. For the Postmodern Wanderer, however, "home" is revealed to be a fragile linguistic construct or a cynical political fiction. The journey ends not in arrival, but in the realization of displacement. "Where can one return to, if the very ground of the 'home' was made of words that have lost their meaning?" (Pelevin, 1996, p. 310).

Ultimately, while Ismailov's wanderer can be viewed as a victim of history – a person literally and figuratively crushed by the tangible, heavy remains of a failed and decaying empire – Pelevin's wanderer emerges as a refugee from reality itself. Both protagonists reflect a desperate, "heroic" struggle to maintain even a semblance of individual consciousness in an era defined by Jean Baudrillard's simulacra. In this hyper-real environment, the mediated image of the "hero" has completely replaced the substance of the man, leaving the Wanderer to seek truth in the only place left: the gaps, the silences, and the voids between the signs.

CONCLUSION

The archetypal matrix in contemporary literature has undergone a profound and seismic shift, signaling the end of the classical heroic era. This evolution can be best understood as a transition from the Solar Hero – the bringer of light, order, and revolutionary change, whose actions are anchored in a stable moral universe – to the Lunar Wanderer, a figure who merely reflects the fragmented and borrowed light of a broken, post-ideological world. This new archetype does not illuminate the path for others; rather, it wanders through the shadows of its own displacement.

Through the comparative analysis of Hamid Ismailov's Mbobo and Victor Pelevin's Chapaev and Pustota, we see two distinct yet parallel paths within this reconfigured matrix. Ismailov's protagonist represents the struggle for a reconstituted self within the physical and socio-cultural ruins of a post-colonial urban underground – a hero who finds meaning not in victory, but in the persistence of his own existence amidst

invisibility. Conversely, Pelevin's protagonist seeks a radical dissolution of the self, moving away from the "nightmare of history" and into the metaphysical "Inner Mongolia" of pure consciousness. These novels serve as crucial markers of a cultural evolution where the "Grand Narratives" of heroism, progress, and historical destiny have been thoroughly exhausted and deconstructed.

Ultimately, these texts suggest that in the postmodern and post-Soviet age, the hero's task is no longer to conquer the external world, to build empires, or even to change the social order. Instead, the new heroism lies in the existential ability to survive the total collapse of the myths that once gave human life a coherent meaning. To be a hero today is to navigate the resulting ontological void with a tragic, yet enlightened, awareness – accepting the role of the Wanderer as the only authentic response to a world where the centers no longer hold and the old maps have been burned.

REFERENCES

1. Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton University Press. [Электронный ресурс: Archive.org]
2. Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press. [Электронный ресурс: University of Minnesota Press]
3. Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. University of Nebraska Press. [Электронный ресурс: JSTOR]
4. Ismailov, H. (2011). *Mbobo* [Мбобо]. Moscow: Corpus. [Электронный ресурс: Corpus Publishing]
5. Ismailov, H. (2014). *The Underground*. Translated by Carol Ermakova. Restless Books. [Электронный ресурс: Restless Books]
6. Lipovetsky, M. (1999). *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos*. M.E. Sharpe. [Электронный ресурс: Routledge]
7. Pelevin, V. (1996). *Chapaev i Pustota* [Чапаев и Пустота]. Moscow: Vagrius. [Электронный ресурс: Pelevin Official Archive]
8. Pelevin, V. (1999). *Buddha's Little Finger* (Chapaev and Pustota). Translated by Andrew Bromfield. Viking. [Электронный ресурс: Penguin Random House]
9. Buranova J. A. MIFOPOETIK TIMSOLLAR VA ULARNING ZAMONAVIY ROMANDAGI TALQINI //International Online Multidisciplinary Conference. – 2026. – С. 398-400.<http://tezislar.uz/index.php/iomc/article/view/390>