

## West – East: The semiotics of axiological convergences and divergences<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

*This study focuses on the verbal representation of life strategies in Vetala-panchavimshati, an old Indian collection of stories, which is part of Somadeva's Kathasaritsagara. On the basis of the aspect of gain ~ loss, two basic life strategies are identified. The first one, the lower strategy, is defined by an attempt to obtain material gain, which is attained at the cost of a spiritual loss. The second one, the higher strategy, negates the first one (spiritual gain attained at the cost of a material loss) and it is an internally diversified series of axiological models. The core of the study explains the combinatorial variants which, in their highest positions, even transcend the gain ~ loss opposition. The final part of the study demonstrates the intersections between the higher strategy and selected European cultural initiatives (gnosis).*

### 1. Problem definition, area of concern and material field

Our goal is to reflect on the differences and intersections in the iconization of gains and losses in life between the Western and Eastern civilizations and cultural spheres. This stems from the assumption that these differences and intersections will inevitably manifest (even) in what is portrayed as most valuable at the level of verbal image in the life-world, and in the implications on how to behave in the world evaluated in this way so that our residing in it makes sense. The *superficit – deficit*<sup>2</sup> opposition is a categorical focal point, to which the said considerations are reflected: what is valuable in the iconized life-world and how our living in it can be managed for us to be meaningful. The synoptic aim of our interpretation then lies in the contribution to the understanding of two systems of “ideological archetypes”

(Horálek, 1979, p. 20), which we will hereinafter refer to as the *archgrammar of the verbal portrayal of the life-world*.

So what field does the interpretation defined above belong to? It belongs to existential semiotics.<sup>3</sup> As a counterbalance response to ergo- or text-centric immanentism, existential semiotics clarifies the position of sign creations (such as literary texts) in the pragmatic links (within the meaning of the classical definition of pragmatics by C. Morris) with the life context, and/or the Dasein features and/or the existential problem situation (Heidegger, 1993; Mathauser, 1976; Miko, 1987; Čechová, 2012a, 2012b, 2014). This label was introduced by Bruno Tarasti (2000), an internationally acclaimed representative of existential semiotics. Regardless of his initiatives, and parallel to them, this concept (as labelled above) developed in the later works of František Miko and the author of the present paper (Miko, 1989, 1994; Plesník, 1998, 2001).

Traditional myths and fairy tales, whose iconization we are going to deal with in our interpretation, can be regarded as an archetypal and rudimentary verbal representation of gain and loss in life because they represent two synoptic parameters of the existential problem situation. Regarding the traditional (folk) tale, its European variant is receptionally ingrained in the expected readership of this interpretation. Although it plays an important contrastive role in our interpretation, we will not explicitly deal with it – with a few exceptions. We focus on one of the literary works of ancient Indian literature, which is virtually unknown in our cultural milieu. The work in question is Kathasaritsagara, a collection of “fairy tales” (Pertold, 2008, p. 8), which we chose because it is representative of this model in relation to the problem raised.

We prefer a more detailed interpretation of the content on a smaller sample text to a material extension. This sample text will be represented by Vetlapanchavimshati, a volume in this collection. The Vetlapanchavimshati volume (The Demon Stories) is an example of Sanskrit writing. It is a separate volume in the collection of ancient Indian poetic stories Kathasaritsagara (Ocean of the Streams of Stories), which was written in Sanskrit by a Kashmiri Brahmin Somadeva, an Indian court poet, in the second half of the 11th century. Somadeva adopted it from Brihatkatha (The Great Narrative), an older series of short stories by Gunadhya from before the sixth century BC. The individual stories in the volume, but also some partial compositional procedures, can also be found in considerably older works. Somadeva drew inspiration from the epic Mahabharata and Ramayana, from the Puranas (old stories about the origin, duration and end of all three worlds: the worlds of gods, humans and demons), from Panchatantra, a series of fables and fairy tales (e.g. Twenty-Five Vetlapanchavimshati Stories,

Seventy Parrot Stories), or from the Buddhist Jataka tales (a series of tales and legends about the previous births of Buddha). Therefore, Kathasaritsagara is a kind of blend of ancient Indian, mostly Hindu, narratives.

The original form or time of emergence of Vetala-panchavimshati – as is typical for older Indian writings – is not known (Zbavitel - Vacek, 1996). Otakar Pertold notes that the Demon Stories “seem to follow the old folk tales and *zázky*, which are not preserved exactly and literally, and probably not in the same language in which they were originally written and narrated. *But certainly they preserved the ancient folk narratives that the oldest artificial Indian literature failed to preserve*” (Pertold, 2008, pp. 10-11; emphasis by L. P.).<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Fabula and sujet in Vetala-panchavimshati**

The fabula of the framework story in Vetala-panchavimshati is as follows: The South Indian town of Pratiṣṭhāna was once ruled by king Trivikramasena. The king was confronted every day by a mendicant monk Kshantishila and gave him fruit. After some time he found that in each of the fruits there was a hidden gem. Trivikramasena asked Kshantishila to clarify his actions. Instead of a clear answer, the monk revealed that he intended to perform magic and it was necessary that the king be instrumental in it. He asked the king to go south to a place with an Indian rosewood tree and a corpse hanging on it, and bring the corpse to him. Trivikramasena embarked on a journey, found the tree with a corpse, took the corpse down and returned back to the monk. However, the corpse was inhabited by a Vetala demon.<sup>5</sup> The demon told a riddle-like story to the king on the way back and threatened that if he didn't solve it his head would disintegrate into a hundred pieces. The king, however, solved the riddle. The demon with the corpse then vanished from his shoulders and magically returned to its original place. The king went back, took down the corpse again and patiently walked with it back to the monk. The demon told him another riddle and made the same threats. This repeated until the king heard twenty-four stories and correctly solved twenty-four puzzles. The twenty-fifth story is a climax in the story framework: Vetala revealed to the king that the monk Kshantishila secretly intended to kill him upon bringing the demon as a sacrifice offering that would make the demon serve the monk. The king, having been advised of the above, killed the malicious Kshantishila as an offering to the demon, who in turn offered to make the king's wishes come true.

Vetala-panchavimshati consists of twenty-six short stories.<sup>6</sup> The first story is called “The Demon Stories” (a name identical to the whole collection) and the others are named by number in series: First Story, Second Story etc., all the way up to the Twenty-Fifth Story.

With the exception of the first and last one (and partly the penultimate one), the stories have a triadic arrangement: (1) recurrent introduction of the framework story (the king removes the corpse from the tree and takes it away on his shoulders); (2) singular framework story told by the demon; (3) recurrent climax of the framework story (the demon presents a riddle to the king, the king solves it, whereupon the demon moves back to the tree). This brings us to the narrative nature of *Vetalapanchavimshati*.

The individual stories in *Vetalapanchavimshati* are narrated in a simple chronological order. Their arrangement as a whole, however, is different: a framework principle is used. Altogether twenty-four different stories are told within the context of the story of King Trivikramasena, the Vetala demon and monk Kshantishila. The framework story has no cyclical nature, however: it is not a circular motion, which implies repetition of the same content. Every subsequent journey of the king with the corpse/demon on his shoulders differs from the previous one at least in the (actor's fictional and reader's real) knowledge that something similar has already happened. This arrangement of the plot can be visualized as a spiral.

The spiral-like narrative corresponds well with the concept of life-world as Samsara – the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Samsara is the spiral cycle of life, which is “suffered” by every human being until it reaches deliverance. Samsara itself is wrapped into the cycles of the universe, which are referred to as kalpa in Hinduism and Buddhism. This context is not directly projected to *Vetalapanchavimshati*, but it has its narratological analogy in *Kathasaritsagara*, which they are part of. In the context of *Kathasaritsagara*, the stories are intertwined with other stories in a branching and risomatic way (in accordance with the name of the collection, one could metaphorically talk about the branching of the main stream, and the tributaries merging into the main stream until dispersed into the ocean).<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Archgrammar of life-world in *Vetalapanchavimshati***

Our interpretation only focuses on the marked features of the world as observed in *Vetalapanchavimshati*.

#### **3.1. The cosmos and the world**

*Vetalapanchavimshati* does not contain cosmogonic motifs (references to the origin of the world or universe and its configuration). In the Ninth Story, however, the narrator notes that the story unravels “in the worst years” (p. 60)<sup>8</sup> which is an indirect reference to the ancient Indian idea in which the universe develops in gradually deteriorating periods – *jug*.

The Vetlapanchavimshati world is, just as in comparable European narratives, triadic. This triadic nature (p. 95, 105) is rendered as *heaven - earth - underworld* (p. 73), and/or *hell* (p. 57).

The upper, i.e. divine or heavenly world, is represented in the collection by the classic Indian and/or Hindu pantheon. In addition to Indra and Vishnu, Shiva (the divine destroyer of ignorance and attachment to this world, the incarnation of self-denial and ascetism) and Rudra (a formerly terrifying, roaring god of storms who later merged with the destructive aspect of Shiva; Liščák, 1996, p. 370), but most often the goddess mother Chandi, i.e. Shakti (Shiva's wife, a personification of primordial energy used by god to create, sustain and destroy the world; Liščák, 1996, p. 421), Durga, Kali, Parvati and Gauri (these are the other names or notions of the goddess mother, Shiva's wife).

In some Vetlapanchavimshati stories, the gods actively intervene in the earthly world. They reveal themselves to the humans in a dream, or speak to them as a voice from above (the *deus ex machina* principle; Všeticka, 1997, p. 34, 35). The Demon Stories also include the creatures from the dark underworld (Vetala demons, Yaksha, Kūṣmāṇḍa, Dakin, Rākṣasī etc.).

Each of these worlds, as we shall see later, uses a different grammar of gain and loss. In part, it is determined by the law of karma/the Karman rule. According to it, a bad deed, moral debt, deficit or succumbing to "low" motives must be symmetrically balanced by suffering, renunciation, a moral superfluous, i.e. ethical purity, good deeds or a selfless sacrifice. Accordingly, a rule applies that all transgressions revealed on earth are usually severely punished (mutilation, confiscation of property etc.).

In parallel with the Karman grammar, Vetlapanchavimshati also shows the concept of life in the reincarnation cycle. The characters in Vetlapanchavimshati take it for granted and see it as something that does not have to be justified or explained. For example, when Dharmavati (Fourth Story) decides to be burned alive before her husband on the bonfire with the burning corpses of her children, she exclaims: "May this spouse be my husband even in the future birth" (p. 38; see also the Sixth, Twelfth, Sixteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Story).

As can be seen, the parameters of the world we are dealing with are more or less a straightforward extension of the cultural environment (myths, religion, faith) in which the Vetlapanchavimshati collection was written.<sup>9</sup>

The world depicted in the Vetlapanchavimshati collection includes miracles and supernatural phenomena. As in the classical European fairy tales, it concerns the following: (1) miraculous powers and metamorphosis; (2) supernatural beings; (3) magical items.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.2. Realistic and/or non-fairy-tale storyline motifs and build-up

A classic fairy tale leads to non-residual ideality. The very word “fairy tale” and its derivatives as the qualifiers of the real world (“fabulously beautiful”, “it sounds like a fairy tale” etc.) refers to it phraseologically (but not etymologically). Ideality in a fairy tale is promoted in confrontation with a climax-based, and usually triadic, problem. This is done through a “plus-minus” symmetry: injustice is undone by a reward, evil deeds are punished, and undeserved, false or pretentious advantages are offset by a humiliating loss. The “golden” rule of the classic fairy tale grammar is as follows: a loss is balanced by a gain, and vice versa. This means that when an impeccable and irreproachable character suffers (suffering, humiliation and damage), they will be rewarded with a gain (a princess or prince, half of the kingdom, recognition), while a gain at its expense is offset by a loss (punishment, humiliation, suffering, sacrifice of the evildoer).

This principle is also used in the Demon Stories to some extent. However, a motivic structure prevails in this case, which corresponds to the “illegible” imponderability of the real or realistically depicted world.

For example, in the Seventh Story, ruler Candasena employs Kshatria Sattvashila as his servant. Kshatria serves his master faithfully and devotedly. The king, however, forgets to reward him, so Sattvashila goes about in rags and languishes from hunger. When the king realizes it in embarrassment, he gives the faithful servant property and land and sends him to the governor of Ceylon. During the voyage, however, the ship carrying Sattvashila is wrecked, and the hero finds himself in a magical underwater world. There he meets a beautiful girl and desperately falls in love with her. The beautiful girl, however, doggedly brings him back on shore to King Candasena. The king wants to repay his debt to the servant, so he decides to help him find the underwater girl again. The two eventually manage to find her; however, the girl falls in love with the king at first sight. He rejects her wily offers, but when the beauty tells the king in boundless devotion to take command over her instead of her late father, the king says: “If this is the case [...] you are my daughter, and I give you as wife to my dear companion and friend Sattvashila” (p. 55).

If the “golden rule” applied to this story, the honest, young, handsome Sattvashila who suffers from the neglect of his master, would not be mocked in secret and denied, and his love would be reciprocated (the final rejection in the classic fairy-tale logic would have to be justified by some deficiencies; however, Sattvashila had none). However, Sattvashila’s loss was not a prerequisite for the subsequent gain that would balance his unjust suffering. As if in self-humiliation, the underwater girl falls in love with the king who made a mistake (neglects

his servant) and should have been sanctioned according to the “golden rule”. Sattvashila eventually marries the girl, but she only marries him because she is boundlessly in love with the king and obeys him unconditionally (including his command to marry his servant). King Candasena, who repented his guilt many times (he gave the neglected servant property and land, he set out on a journey with him to fulfil his desires, he refused the enchanting and beautiful girl in his favour), does not fall in love with the girl even though he himself is handsome, young and already impeccable (the story does not indicate that he would suddenly have to overcome or deny himself in this context), but via deception, which is similar to the deception the girl used upon Sattvashila, he marries her off to his servant.

In this case, love is not rewarded by love, but rejection; rejection does not cause rejection, but love; innocent suffering is not balanced by punishment, but the evildoer is rewarded, and a loss is not offset by a gain, but by another loss etc. Compared to the symmetrical balancing of opposites, a “crossover/inverse” logic applies here in the literal and figurative sense.

And this grammar is no longer a fairy tale one, but rather realistic and existential.

#### **4. The archgrammar of gain and loss**

We have seen that the Vetala-panchavimshati collection uses a number of codes and subcodes (fairy-tale magic, realistic-existential motivation etc.). We will analyse these codes because they are essential and critical in terms of the outlined focus of this interpretation. However, we can shed some light on the arrangement of the individual (sub) grammars at this point. During a normal and linear first reading, it appears that the codes alternate in a confusing way (similar to the scholarly identification of literary speech – ranging from authorial, through indirect and semi-direct, to half-direct and direct speech – in prose).

A cross-sectional reconnaissance of this collection, however, corrects this impression (it has its parallel in the vertical division of text, or in Lévi-Strauss’ “music sheet” reading of myths, Lévi-Strauss, 2006). The grammars governing the narrative world of the Demon Stories are in fact stacked on top of each other. The relevant thematological codes apply all throughout the narrative. However, they are overlaid by a “superimposed” grammar in the same text. The encoding of the world portrayed in Vetala-panchavimshati is thus characterized by the deposits of a “subset” arrangement:

The life-world in Vetala-panchavimshati is introduced in such a way that it both contains and supersedes something. The superfluous-deficit polarity is presented in a

transcending way. What is assessed as a gain in one grammar, is viewed as a loss in the transcendent grammar, and vice versa.

#### **4.1. “Lower” archgrammar of gain and loss**

According to the first and “lowest” archgrammar, a lack (life loss) and abundance (life win) are perceived in a material, and thus in a physical, sense. The characters acting in this code pursue material and physical benefits regardless of other intangible, e.g. moral and spiritual, considerations. The attainment of these benefits even justifies the use of subterfuge, deceit and lies.

In the First Story, the prince takes advice from his best friend on how to win the heart of the beauty of his dreams, Padmavati: “Go to Padmavati at night and make her drunk so she loses consciousness and remains lying motionless. Then burn a sign into her side with a red-hot spike, take her jewellery, lower yourself out of the window on a rope, and come to me. I’ll then make other arrangements” (p. 22). This is a deception. The situation is rigged for the prince to win the heart of the beauty, and the prince’s friend, disguised as an ascetic, explains it to the officers as follows: at night, he witnessed a coven of the witches at the cemetery, he took jewellery from one of them and burned a sign on her body. Padmavati matches these clues. The rumour that Padmavati has a sign on her side and lost her precious necklace will spread immediately around the kingdom. It follows that she attended the Sabbath, and the witness confronted her by taking her jewellery and burning a sign on her body. When the king learns about it, he will expel Padmavati, convicted of witchcraft, from his empire into the wild forest. But this is exactly what the prince wants to achieve with the help of his friend, so he can marry her. He carries out the plan regardless of the consequences: “While they [the prince and the beauty - L. P.] lived happily in the prince’s house, the artist [the beauty’s father - L. P.] thought the daughter was eaten by wild beasts in the forest. He died in grief, followed by his wife” (p. 24).<sup>11</sup>

Dhanadatta, the protagonist in the Third Story, fell victim to “evil passions, games, fornication and other vices” (p. 29), and he squandered all his property: He therefore decided “to kill his virtuous wife. For a little bit of gold, he threw her into an abyss together with the old maid” (ibid.). The wife, however, survived the fall. Her love for her husband was so strong that she forgave him his murderous intrigues. But Dhanadatta, who in the meantime “lost everything in the game” killed the wife yet again “when [...] she fell asleep [...], he took all her jewellery and escaped unnoticed...” (p. 30).



Similar patterns of materially and physically acquisitive and predatory behaviour can also be found in other stories (Second, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Second and Twenty-Fourth Story). The rule of gain and loss is therefore formulated as follows in the “low” grammar: *The character seeks a gain and tries to avoid a loss of a material and physical nature. And all this happens even when the material and physical benefits are conditioned by the loss of immaterial, spiritual values: virtue, moral integrity and purity.*

#### **4.2. Protasis of the “upper” archgrammar of gain and loss**

The term *protasis* is used to denote the pre-sentence in a conditional sentence (compound sentence). We use it metaphorically. We use it to label the overlapping arrangement of archgrammars of gain and loss: just like a mountain range rises over the lowland from the foothills to the peaks, the “upper” grammar of gain and loss in Vetlapanchavimshati exceeds the first one from a gradual overlap to radical differences. Let us first discuss the concrete manifestations of the synoptic rules of this code.

The Tenth Story contains a sample interval from the low corporal and material motives all the way to their transcendence: the beautiful young Madanasena promises Dharmadatta, who passionately falls in love with her, to marry him before her fiancé although she is already engaged. During the wedding night, Madanasena discloses the promise she gave to Dharmadatta to her husband. Although she is more precious to him than his own life, he beseeches her to not blemish herself by breaking her promise (!), and sends her off to Dharmadatta. On the way, Madanasena is attacked by a thief. The thief wants her jewellery and body. When Madanasena tells him where she’s going and why, the thief lets her go to fulfil her promise. He frees her with no reservations and sends her back to her husband and Dharmadatta, whom she first promised her devotion to. The thief is content with her intention to keep her word. The husband, thief, Dharmadatta and even Madanasena promoted the solemn observance of a promise over personal gain (right of the first night, carnal pleasure, jewellery).

When king Surjaprabha from the Nineteenth Story became convinced that his son Chandraprabha was a loyal heir, “he went to Banaras (a sacred pilgrimage site on the Ganges, the seat of Sanskrit education) because he was old and already paid his dues in life. In the sacred city, the king dedicated himself to severe ascetism and soon died” (p. 117). Likewise, his son freed himself from the world of power although he was young and at the peak of his reign: “Because of my father, I have to visit the places of pilgrimage by myself while I’m young. Who knows what awaits me – the human body can pass away anytime” (p. 117, 118).

Therefore, the meaning of life in this story is not the fruit of worldly provenance. Rather, it is the dues we have to pay and then the renunciation of the world (see also the Twelfth Story).

The theme of asceticism, self-denial and renunciation is found in most of the Vetala-panchavimshati stories. And suicide is its escalated manifestation: a voluntary renunciation of life. Suicide is used as a leitmotif in several of the Demon Stories. The Twenty-First Story portrays the merchant's daughter "the Creator sent to earth to show people how the heavenly nymphs look" (p. 127), who falls in love with a married man, and "torn by shyness and passion, she decides to die" (p. 128) in the belief that "no greater well-being is in store for her than death because she cannot meet her beloved man" (p. 129). In contrast, the merchant's daughter from the Fourteenth Story "hated men so much that she would not even marry the King of the Gods" and "could not bear any mention of marriage, but was rather determined to die" (p. 84). However, she once accidentally saw a thief sentenced to death by impalement: "Although the criminal was littered with wounds and covered in dust, the girl was blinded by love at first sight" (p. 85). And so much so, she "decided to die with the thief. She took a cleansing bath, [...], had the thief's corpse removed from the stake, and walked up with it to the bonfire" (p. 86; see also the Twenty-Second Story).

Vetala-panchavimshati also includes stories where suicidal intent develops, so to say, in a serial fashion. Viravara (Fourth Story), who devotedly serves king Shudraka, learns from the Goddess of Earth that his master is going to die within three days. If, however, he sacrifices his son to the goddess Chandi, the king will live for a hundred years. Without hesitation, Viravara undertakes to sacrifice his son in favour of the king. When he conveys the news to his offspring, the son responds: "I'll be happy, father, if the king is saved by my life, and you can repay him like this for the food he gave us. Do not delay! Take me immediately and sacrifice me to save the monarch" (p. 37). After the sister, who witnessed her brother's death, dies of grief, the mother of the unfortunate siblings – Viravara's wife, decides to be burned on the burning stakes together with the corpses of her two children. Her husband supports her in this commitment: "Do so, good woman! It will be better for you. What joy would you have now. Your life would be filled with grief for the children" (p. 38). After the death of his children and wife, Viravara himself decides to voluntarily give up his life: "I have no desire to live now that I'm alone. I just cannot go on living after sacrificing my loving family. And I will honor mother Chandi with my sacrifice" (ibid.). Even King Shudraka, who observes all these sacrifices made for him from a hiding place, eventually opts for a voluntary departure from this world: "If I did not repay this good deed in an equal measure, I would not enjoy my reign and my life would be the life of an animal [...] I've always worshiped you,

exalted goddess, and today graciously receive my head as a sacrifice [...]” (p. 39; see the Sixth and Seventeenth Story).

Material loss is a common denominator of the rules determining the actions of the characters we have just introduced: renunciation of earthly or bodily pleasures, and in extreme cases, human lives (and therefore this world). In some of the cited stories the characters opted for suicide because they could not attain what they craved for and clung to on earth (Fourteenth, Sixteenth, Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Story, Viravara’s daughter and wife in the Fourth Story, Dhaval’s wife and his brother-in-law in the Sixth Story). These suicides were driven by despair, and are de facto an extreme form of agreement with this world. Something in the “earthly world” (for example, ownership of a loved one) is so important to them that if they lose it, they also lose their lives.

All the above themes confirm the rule that negates the basic rule of “low” grammar: *The gain the character acting according to the “upper” grammar aspires for, and the loss, which the character is trying to avoid, has a spiritual (intangible, supercorporeal, ethical) nature (and just because some of the protagonists we have introduced above did not explicitly pursue this goal, we label the encoding of their actions as a protasis).*

Or, in other words:

*The gain of spiritual values (honour, virtue, integrity, purity, keeping the word, welfare and lives of others etc.) is contingent upon the loss of tangible assets: body and its pleasures, but also the “earthly” world and life.*

#### **4.3. “Upper” archgrammar of gain and loss**

The Ninth Story has a classic fairy-tale composition: three pretenders want to win the heart of a royal princess. Each of them is to persuade the princess of his excellence and why she should choose him. The young Brahmin says: “Bring me a dead man, and I’ll revive him” (p. 61). In the framework section of the story, king Trivikramasena assesses the pretender with these powers as follows: “Although he comes from the clerical caste, what good is a cleric who degenerated and excluded himself from the caste with his actions [...]” (p. 62).

Let us note the following: the ability to revive the dead, which is usually viewed as an advantage not only in fairy tales but also in religious archtexts of our cultural provenience (first, because the return to earthly life is welcome, and second, because it is an expression of a higher, divine connection with this ability), is seen as a *perversion unworthy of a saint* in this story.

The king's (surprising, in our view) disrespect for the Brahmin's powers to bring a dead man back to life can be justified by two mutually non-exclusive eventualities. First, in the Indian spiritual systems (e.g. in yoga) the supernatural powers (siddhi) – only because they belong to the sansar phenomenal world (together with levitation, invisibility, clairvoyance etc.) – are considered as something non-conducive and non-instrumental to spiritual development. The self-serving efforts to acquire and cling to these powers, let alone the self-promoting “fakir” performances of the siddhi powers for gain (exactly what the Brahmin from the Ninth Story resorted to) is then considered to be an obstacle en route to a higher goal. The second eventuality is most likely not the reason for the king's judgment intended by the author. Rather, it is an assumption that makes such a judgment possible. The point is that the symptomatic characteristics of Indian spirituality (with Vetala-panchavimsati as its constitutive part) include the concept of samsara as a torturous yoke which we must be liberated from and not purposelessly restore it. The reincarnation cycle should then use the gift of life in human form to achieve a state that allows us to break away from this cycle.

A similar challenging of what we self-evidently evaluate as a gain can also be seen in the Sixteenth Story. In the introduction, the narrator introduces the burgeoning kingdom of the ruler Djimutaketu. In the royal garden there is a tree, Manorathadajaka, the Giver of Wishes (i.e. a kind of equivalent of the “goldfish” or “magic wand” from the fairy tales of our cultural and civilizational provenience). All envy the king for owning a tree like this. However, his son Jimutavahana considers the tree to be a misfortune: “Alas, [...] although my ancestors had a divine tree, they did not achieve anything particularly noble. Some of them asked for fortune only, and thus humiliated themselves and the noble tree” (p. 95). Therefore, he petitions his royal father to get rid of the tree: “Dear Father, [...] you know that everything in the sea of existence is unstable and volatile as the tide. In particular the aurora, lightning and happiness is short lasting – they disappear instantly. Who has ever seen them stay? [...] And since the pleasures of this world only last for a moment, why do we hold on to the Tree of Wishes? It is useless! Where are the ancestors who thought that the tree belongs to them and tenaciously clung to it? Let me, dear father, achieve one thing with the help of the tree – one single and truly divine gift – show benevolence to others” (ibid.). The father agrees with the son. After hearing the Jimutavahana's plea for the tree to be given to those who yearn for property, the tree is raised to heaven. The envious relatives, however, explain the loss of the tree as the king's shortcoming and weakening of his power. Therefore, they prepare themselves to take power. The king's son Jimutavahana knows that if conflict breaks out, his father will win. However, he does not consider royal power to be worthy of fratricidal bloodshed. In his view,

the desire for power is an expression of misery: “No one would overpower you, father, if you took to arms! But would a noble man yearn for power by killing his relatives? Why do we need power? Let us go far away from here and do good deeds, which will provide welfare in this and the other world. And let the poor relatives who crave for power rejoice!” (p. 96). The father grants the son his wish. They both lead an ascetic life as hermits.

The story goes on with Jimutavahana eying princess Malajavati at a pilgrimage site in the temple of the goddess Gauri and falling head-over-heels in love with her. After overcoming various obstacles, he eventually marries the princess. As we know, the wedding theme in our fairy tale norm is the grand finale, if not the explicit goal, of the sujet. But the Sixteenth Story continues. The happily married Jimutavahana learns that the Lord of the Birds Garuda collected a bloody toll from Vāsuki, King of the Snakes, for the fraudulent offence of Kadru, the mother of the King of Snakes. Every day, he kills one snake. Jimutavahana feels sorry for the innocent suffering snakes (in the narrative, they take an anthropomorphic form) and he decides to put himself into Garuda’s claws to face certain death instead of the unfortunate snake. His decision is enhanced on seeing a victim. It is a charming young man, accompanied by his weeping mother. When Jimutavahana explains his intention to the two, the mother and the young man reject it: the mother, arguing that Jimutavahana has just become her second son for his bravery, and the young man because Jimutavahana’s life is now incomparably more valuable than his thanks to Jimutavahana’s decision to sacrifice himself. Before his death, the young man goes to worship the deity on the coast. However, at the very same moment, Garuda swoops down from heaven to the sacrificial site and begins to devour Jimutavahana. The royal prince, dying in his claws, says: “I wish I could sacrifice myself for others in every rebirth! I don’t want redemption or heaven if I cannot do good to others” (p. 101)<sup>12</sup>.

The prince’s refusal of “ascension” and redemption may be included among the “gable top” positions of the second existential grammar. In our view, they are most articulated in the Twentieth Story. This story introduces the demonic giant Jwalamukhi who wants to kill king Chandravali (see above). The king asks him for mercy. He promises to bring him another human victim as a replacement for himself. The giant agrees. However, he has one condition: the victim must be a seven-year-old boy. On the king’s order, the news spreads all over the kingdom. When a seven-year-old Brahmin boy hears it, he decides to lay down his life for the king: “Although a child, he always liked helping his neighbors just like in his previous lives, so he seemed to embody the retribution for the good deeds that people did” (pp. 124-125). The child justified his decision to his parents as follows: “The human body is full of

unspeakable dirt [...] it is ugly by birth, a field for disaster, and it passes away soon. Therefore, wise men say that the only treasure in the cycle of life is to gain merit through the worthless body!” (p. 125).

Let us define the ideologemes in the direct speech of the seven-year-old hero. First, all events, including the boy’s life, are set in the “cycle of life” (the reincarnation rule). The second principle is the concept of earthly “equipment”, including matter and physicality, as something unclean and worthless because it is ephemeral. The boy says that birth into the body, i.e. coming into life, is “ugly” and it is a “field of unhappiness”. Life in the body is a loss.<sup>13</sup>

The seven-year-old boy in the cited segment also says that a voluntary loss of the body, i.e. life, leads to “wealth” and “merit”. The context of the story suggests that this does not mean wealth and achievements in *this body/life/world* but somewhere *else*.

The continuation of the story, however, goes beyond the present shape/position of the second grammar. The boy does not renounce his body (and the “earthly world” with it) to gain well-being, eternal bliss and salvation from the suffering of the sansar existence (as if in such desires he only recognized the transformed form of longing for the same secular and physically conditioned ideals as those that characterize standard egotism, but more sustained and intense). He does not want to liberate himself nor achieve heavenly joys: “at that moment, he did not desire the heavenly joys or redemption, which would yield no benefits to others, but he wished his body served his fellow men in each rebirth” (p. 126).

When the Vetala demon poses a riddle to king Trivikramasena at the end of the story and asks why the boy laughed shortly before his death (beheading), the monarch replies: “How ridiculous are those who were deceived by the ephemeral body – ugly and full of disease and pain! What a strange desire to preserve the body in this world where even the Brahma, Indra, Vishnu, Rudra and other deities must perish! When the son saw their prodigious delusion, he realized what he would achieve with his sacrifice, and he laughed in astonishment and joy” (p. 126). Although heavenly chariots appeared in the firmament at the moment of the boy’s death and the gods sprinkled the boy with a rain of flowers, the story does not say that this would in any way alter the fact that the boy died; e.g. the boy is revived, ascends to heaven, receives a reward in another world etc. A reward or gain of this type would deny the meaning of the second existential grammar in its key purpose: it would be worthwhile for the boy to suffer and die for a state that appears to be profitable in the idealized prospect of the flesh (yearning not to lose existence but to get rid of suffering) and the “earthly nature” (the idea of a paradise accepted by the majority, angelic and heavenly

realms as a distilled bliss of this world, i.e. maximum and unblemished comfort, delight, pleasure, beauty, sufficiency etc.).

Strictly speaking, the Twentieth Story admits at least a threefold interpretation of the rule, which the second existential semiotic grammar stands on in its top form. These are the variants of the same principle. The first variant was introduced in the previous section. According to it, a loss in this world is rewarded by a gain in some other world. This eventuality can be noted in the words of king Trivikramasena who said that the boy laughed before his death because he knew what he would achieve with his sacrifice. The king's statement, especially the verb "attain" indeed connotes some form of gain, however, this gain is not determined by an "earthly" experience, and it is not contained in its categorical apparatus:

*A loss in this/lower world (e.g. wealth, power, fame, body, life etc.) - a gain in a radically different/higher world.*

The second aspect of the same rule is (pre)determined by the narrator's note that the boy did not desire heavenly joys or redemption, which would yield no benefits to others, but he wished his body served his fellow men in each rebirth:

*A loss in the sphere/world "I" - gain in the sphere/world beyond "I".*

The third way of expressing this principle follows from the narrator's claims that the boy had no desire to attain heavenly joy and redemption at the moment of death. Apart from what the narrator says, the third form of the rule is also supported by the fact that the "gain" is not mentioned in the narrative and it is not expressed or named:

*A loss/gain in this world – an event that is beyond the "gain and loss" grammar.*

#### 4.4. Hypothesis on the archgrammars and their combinatorial variants

We have shown that Vetala-panchavimshati contains two different existential archgrammars. The first one, so to speak, has a reverse polarity of the second:

<i>First archgrammar:</i>	<i>Gain</i>	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>Loss</i>
	$\updownarrow$		$\updownarrow$
<i>Second archgrammar:</i>	<i>Loss</i>	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>Gain</i>

This divergence may be represented by the Tree of Wishes theme in the Sixteenth Story and the theme of death of a seven-year-old child in the Twentieth Story:

*Tree of Wishes: 1st Archgrammar = Gain  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd Archgrammar = Loss*

*Death of a child: 1st Archgrammar = Loss  $\leftrightarrow$  2nd Archgrammar = Gain*

The other themes we mentioned in relation to the second archgrammar could be used as variables in this scheme: gain/loss of a beloved beauty, gain/loss of a royal throne and wealth, wandering devoid of property, revival of the dead etc.

These two codes produce a combinatorial framework for the subsequent subcodes. What other archgrammars are there? First, let us reiterate that from a syntactic point of view, both archgrammars are connected by the “gain-loss” and/or “loss-gain” syntagm. This means that each positive assumes a certain negative and vice versa. From a combinatorial perspective, only two eventualities come to mind.

First:

*Gain – Gain*

(For example, in Vetalapanchavimshati it is represented by the storyline of king Candasena from the Seventh Story: he gains a most devoted servant in Sattvashila, but neglects him criminally; however, he also gains the love of the underwater beauty whom his servant falls in love with).

Second:

*Loss - Loss*

(It can be seen in the same story: the king’s servant Sattvashila and his suffering caused by the king’s disregard, which is consequently enhanced by unrequited love).

These are some examples of gain-loss chains in one sphere and/or one world. They are based on the principle:

*Both-And*

The combinatorial variants of these subgrammars are then extended by linking the gain from one sphere with the gain in another sphere and/or loss in one world with the loss in another world. This is a variation of the “both-and” principle with an extension:

*Here-There*

In Vetalapanchavimshati, the syntagm “gain (here) - gain (there)” is represented by frequent asceticism, self-denial and other forms of sacrifice to the gods, which is carried out in the interest of this world, materialist or even malevolent gain (e.g. in the Ninth Story the king repents to gain a child).

The second combinatorial variant of the “both-and” principle with the “here and there” extension is their use in the “loss (here) - loss (there)” syntagm. In Vetalapanchavimshati, it is represented, per exemplum, by all portrayals of suicide for an injury suffered in this world (e.g. for the death of a loved one) regardless of the fact that a suicide is viewed negatively even in the *other world*.



However, Vetalapanchavimshati also shows us a combinatorial variant, which is based on a different principle:

*Neither (gain/loss/here) - Nor (gain/loss/there)*

As we have indicated earlier, it is present in the Twentieth Story. The voluntary death of the Brahmin's son, who gives himself up for the king, leads to an unexpressed event that transcends the very archgrammar of gain and loss. This theme opens up a perspective in which the content, including the contradictions between the gain and loss categories, "empties" itself. In the real world, this corresponds to the ideologies that are most concisely developed in the historically constitutive Theravada Buddhism (with a subsequent overlap with Mahayana, Chan and Zen), Taoism, Upanishad Gnosis and Advaita Vedanta. Within these systems, one can encounter a notion that the very distinction between a gain and a loss and the existential positives and negatives is in itself a manifestation of insufficient knowledge, slavish dependence and craving for the world, or a projection of illusory categories into *actuality* etc. (Plesník, 2001).

## **5. Instead of a conclusion – intercultural synapses**

To create a generalized model of our evidence, we would have to analytically process a much wider material base than the said twenty-six Demon Stories. Therefore, the following conclusions only have a hypothetical validity.

In Vetalapanchavimshati we are dealing with existential archgrammars, which were established long before the established written and copyrighted forms of this collection. The transition between them is smooth and the boundaries are blurred. In their escalated forms, however, they represent an irreconcilable contradiction. One archgrammar hails the world, the other turns away from it in an effort to approach something radically different.

The two said codes are used for the verbal incarnation and fictional portrayal of different world views.

The first one – the close side – should be readily identifiable in our civilization and cultural space. It is mostly the asymptomatic platform of our everyday life, policies, science and art.

The second one – the far side – is more symptomatic. It calls for an explicit definition. First, let us emphasize that it is assumed in all cosmogonies/-nomies/-logies that place some other, better and more perfect universe of existence or state (paradise, heaven, nirvana etc.) on the "earthly" sphere. The impetuses for turning away from the "earthliness" were most blatantly materialized in the culture of the Indian subcontinent (with the exception of Taoism,

this is where all spiritual systems we mentioned in relation to the second grammar emerged). The empirical world and life in it with all its gains and losses are devalued here in at least two ways: (1) it is an immaterial illusion, delusion, apparition, appearance (maya); (2) captivating source of suffering (samsara), and therefore even the “builder/cosmocrat” of the earthly world can be regarded as a deity of death and malevolence (the Buddhist Mara).

The elements of ideology of “turning away”, which corresponds to the second grammar, are also present in our Christian culture. By way of example, this concerns gnosis, which is usually regarded as a Platonic interpretation of Christianity (Pokorný, 1998; Rudolph, 2010).<sup>14</sup> Gnosticism is characterized by a clear acosmism: a departure from the earthly, present, material and phenomenal world as a “prison” and “dark place” (Rudolph 2010, p. 120). Motivationally, it is backed by the desire for another existence, perfect fullness and completeness (pleroma), which may be achieved through a return to the divine essence, which we alienated ourselves from through our “worldly” involvement.

The exemplary nature of gnosis (some of its streams, movements or texts) also lies in the fact that its acosmic attitude is (also) manifested by the “reversed” reading of some biblical stories. Compared to their canonically official interpretations accepted by the majority, clear counterinterpretations are promoted in this case. These are – similarly to the “upper” archgrammar of Vetālapanchavimśati in relation to the “lower” grammar – the “negative” of the catechetically rigid understanding/interpretation of these stories, and therefore a thematological variation of Všeticka’s “hourglass” principle (Všeticka, 1997, pp. 28, 29).

First of all, the very creation of the world is considered to be a result of errors or mistakes, failures, omissions, lapses, decay or a fall into the bondage of all-encompassing death (Rudolph, 2010, pp. 82, 88, 94, 125) “The world was created due to a misstep. The one who created it wanted to make it imperishable and immortal. He failed and did not achieve what he hoped for” (Gospel according to Philip, cited by Rudolph 2010, p. 88); “The Gnostic salvation is a liberation from the world and the body, and not from sin and guilt, as is the case in Christianity, unless the earthly world itself is a sin, in which the divine soul fell not by its fault; however, its fault is that it got involved with the principalities of this world” (Archontics - L. P.; Rudolph, 2010, p.127). The creator of this material world (Demiurg, Yaldabaoth and/or Plané = GR. error, Pokorný, 1998, p. 113) then represents a lower heavenly being in the gnostic systems, often labelled by acrimonious attributes (for more details, see: Pokorný, 1998, p. 54, 119; Rudolph, 2010, p. 79). Above it stands the true invisible “unknown” God. “Similarly to the world, earthly material being is a product of the

anti-divine Demiurg, and accordingly, it is a sphere with enmity to God, controlled by evil forces, and active in and manifested through passions and lust” (Rudolph, 2010, p. 93).

This value inversion is also reflected in the interpretation of other biblical themes. For example, according to Ophites (a Gnostic stream), the prohibition of eating fruit from the tree of knowledge is a consequence of the fact that the builder “of the material world, who is in essence a lesser god, does not want man to know the true God and be liberated from the bondage”. He prohibits man to<sup>15</sup> “eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and if not for the serpent who transferred the message from the divine world (“you will be like gods”), man would have remained in the realm of matter. The Ophites understand the serpent as an incarnation of the divine Wisdom” (Pokorný, 1998, p. 61; see also: Rudolph, 2010, p. 97). In turn, some Gnostics considered Cain to be a “positive hero who defied the lower god” (Pokorný, 1998, p. 62; see also: Rudolph, 2010, p. 141). From this perspective, they voiced their doubts – and formulated them in a much more radical way than what we paraphrase here – about whether the earthly Adam, Moses, Abraham, David, Solomon and the twelve prophets knew the “true spiritual Savior with his heavenly ancestry” (Pokorný 1998; p. 62, for the corresponding quote from the Second tract of the Great Seth, see: Rudolph, 2010, p. 149, 150)<sup>16</sup>.

However, this already takes us beyond the limits of existential semiotics and literary arts, which define our competences, into the realm of religious studies, dogmatic hermeneutics and ideological disputes of the “actual” world.

Therefore, we will touch on both – existential semiotics and verbal arts – in the addendum to our interpretation. We will do so without having to leave gnosis itself, to which our thinking about the second archgrammar logically and inevitably pointed as one of its most articulated world view systems, encoded according to its rules. The gnostic Hymn of the Pearl (written in the third century AD) will allow us precisely that.

This song is a parable-based image of the ascension of the soul from the “Egyptian captivity” of the earthly world up home to itselfness (apokatastasis). The Hymn of the Pearl contains a triplet that accurately and clearly metaphorically refers to what feeds and nourishes this particular/other archgrammar, what precedes its verbal “incarnations”, systematic arrangements and interpretation; to the existential state that Martin Heidegger called mood, attunement, or “how we are, how we feel” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 161); to the state from which – and not before which! – we pronounce all things, know all things about anything, believe in something and anything; to what we find ourselves in before all this as in our initial (bythos), “prereligious” and “prescientific” life sensation:

“I was alone and lonely  
and I remained a stranger to those I lived among”.<sup>17</sup>

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This study was made possible thanks to the APVV 17-0026 project titled “Thematologic interpretation, analysis and systemization of archnarratives as the semiotic models of the world and existential strategies”.

<sup>2</sup> The superfluous-deficit opposition was categorially introduced into Slovak literary science by Peter Zajac (1990). He made it one of the basic differentiation criteria between the literary genres.

<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of literary science, our contribution overlaps with the literary theory dealing with this topic. Therefore, *thematology* would be the most appropriate name for it. This term, however, is already used by comparative literature to label the research of interliterary and intertextual links connected with the topic. We use it indicatively to label the subsystem of literary theory, which focuses on the thematic plane of text as the image of the world. Narratology or “sujetology” (Horálek, 1979, p. 33) is its counterpart. This corresponds to the contention presented by Claude Bremond, according to which the “semiological analysis of a narrative can be divided into two areas: analysis of narrative techniques on the one hand and the search for the laws governing the portrayed world on the other” (Bremond 2002, p. 118). According to Seymour Chatman (2008, pp. 14-35), this duality corresponds to the opposition *logos* and *lexis* in Plato, *mythos* and *logos* in Aristotle, *inventio* and *dispositio* in classical rhetoric, *fabula* and *sujet* in Tomaševski, or *story* and *discourse* in several structuralists (Genette, 2002; Todorov, 2000, 2002; see also Doležel’s distinction between the *narrative worlds* and *intentional functions*: Doležel, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Otakar Pertold further notes: “The Vetalaṅcavimśati collection is preserved in two independent reviews. The older review is associated with the name Shivadaśa as its author; it exists in several manuscripts, more or less independent and varying, as is usually the case in India. [...] The Shivadaśa text is not very different from the Vallabhada review, which was preserved only in a few manuscripts. The Demon Stories are almost the same as those rendered in verse by Kṣhemendra in his Big Bouquet of Stories and Somadeva in the Ocean of the Streams of Stories. In addition to these four versions there is a fifth one, which is substantially different – the Dzambhaladat version. [...] In the Dzambhaladat version, three stories are missing and they are replaced by three other, much longer, protracted and partly improper stories” (Pertold, 2008, p. 9). Our interpretation of Vetalaṅcavimśati is based on the Somadeva version translated by Oldřich Friš of 1956. In it, the original poetic form is rendered in prose. According to Otakar Pertold, Friš’s process contributed to the literal understanding of the translation (Pertold, 2008, p. 13). This means that the fact that we build on the Friš’s translation into prose should not constitute a serious problem for the validity of our interpretation having regard to its thematologic focus (for the issue of maintaining invariance in translation on the different text levels/planes, see Popovič, 1968).

<sup>5</sup> In the Indian “folk stories”, this demon, “usually lives in the body of a corpse. The Vetalaśa are therefore usually conjured and worshiped at burial grounds, which is where they most often reside. By offering him sacrifices and worshiping him, man can subdue this demon and become his master. The highest sacrifice is a human sacrifice” Pertold, 2008, p. 149).

<sup>6</sup> The genre classification of Vetalaṅcavimśati is not clear. On the one hand, Otakar Pertold speaks of Somadeva Kathaśaritsaśara, which also includes Vetalaṅcavimśati, explicitly as the “real” collection of “*fairy tales in our sense*”, in which the author turned the “*old folk tales*” into verse (Pertold, 2008, p. 8; emphasis by E. P.). In parallel, however, these texts are referred to as “stories”, “*skazky*” or “narratives” (ibid.). Dušan Zbavitel refers to Kathaśaritsaśara as a collection of various “fairy tales”, “fables”, “anecdotes”, “legends” or “myths” (Zbavitel, 1981, p. 13). He also uses some genre non-specific terms, such as “ancient Indian narratives” heroic and/or love “stories” (ibid.; see also Horálek, 1979, pp. 129-141).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, though, that the narrative structure of the Demon Stories is the result of additional author’s adjustment of the collected narratives (for more information, see Pertold, 2008, pp. 7-8).

<sup>8</sup> This, and all other subsequent references with a page number refer to the Demon Stories (Friš - Pertold - Fišer, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> This also includes the social structure and folk customs (Marková, 1996; Fuller, 2004; Bongard – Levin – Vertogradova – Kullanda, 1985; Litman – Rybakov, 1983). The society in the Vetlapanchavimshati stories is divided into castes, ranging from the lowest-ranking Sudra (servants) through Vaishya (dealers, buyers) and Kshatriya (warriors, rulers) to Brahman (priests).

<sup>10</sup> Ad 1. Resurrection is one of the recurring themes in the Vetlapanchavimshati collection. The ability to bring the dead back to life is shared by the divine and earthly creatures (the entire king's family in the Fourth Story and the Brahmin in the Ninth Story is brought to life by a god's intervention, the priest in the Second Story knows the magical chant to raise a burnt child from the dead; see also the Sixth Story). Some characters can levitate. The penitent Brahman (Eighteenth Story), similar to the sage in the Twentieth Story, "knew a magic spell, which made all wishes come true" (p. 111). In the Vetlapanchavimshati world, verbal incantations and curses are effective (the father in the Twelfth Story, upset by the behaviour of his daughter, casts a spell, which comes literally true). The ascetic Vamasiva (Twenty-third Story), who has supernatural powers and practises strict penance, enters the body of a dead young man and makes it alive, engulfed by the desire for youth (sic!). The Vetala demon incarnates into the corpse not only in the framework story, but also in the Third Story etc. In Vetlapanchavimshati, a symmetrical rule applies: a gain of supernatural powers is only possible thanks to a loss, i.e. asceticism (this principle is used in all stories that deal with the acquisition of siddhi, i.e. supernatural powers). Ad 2. In addition to supernatural beings, representatives of the ancient Indian pantheon and the underworld, which we have already mentioned, an important role in Vetlapanchavimshati (considering that most of them portray a love affair) is also played by Kama: deified erotic desire and lust (Kamadeva is the god of love, similar to the European Eros or Cupid). The mythical Garuda, half bird – half human, emerges in the Sixteenth Story. A parrot who mastered all sciences is the main character in the Third Story: "He came on earth from the higher worlds as a bird because he was struck by a curse" (p. 28). At the end of the story, the parrot turns into a Gandharva (a demigod being that pleases the gods with its singing and music) and ascends to heaven in this form etc.

Ad 3. In the Seventh Story, the daughter of King of the Asurs (incarnation of dark forces) gives the ruler Candasena a "sword, which made him invincible, and fruit, which repudiated old age and death" (p. 55). In the garden of king Djimutaketu (Sixteenth Story) "grew a Tree of Wishes, which was passed from generation to generation and was widely known as Manorathadajaka, the Giver of Wishes. When the king asked the tree for a heir, he received a son who remembered his earlier birth" (p. 94).

<sup>11</sup> The prince and his friend are helped in this unscrupulous deception by the nanny of the beautiful Padmavati, an old woman who the prince and his friend bribe with good food and drink: "The old woman rushed [to execute the requested fraudulent service - L. P.] as a reward because she craved for more delicacies, drinks and other things they flooded her with" (p. 20). However, even Padmavati herself shows signs of proprietary ruthlessness. She is jealous of the prince to the point of trying to poison his friend. When the friend learns about it, he explains her behaviour to the prince as follows: "She sent me the poisoned food because she loves you, but when I am around, she thinks you do not belong to her only, and you could leave her and go your city as a result of my influence" (p. 22).

<sup>12</sup> However, the goddess Gauri, who watches the scene from heaven, revives Jimutavahana with miraculous nectar. The prince's bravery impresses Garuda himself. He promises to fulfil all the wishes of the king's son who rose from the dead. Jimutavahana replies: "Have mercy on the snakes and eat them no more! [...] And let those that you have previously eaten come to life as well [...]" (p. 103).

<sup>13</sup> This ideologeme (the world and the body as a worthless ephemeral affair, which is underlined by the misery of death) is formulated in Vetlapanchavimshati on the level of explicit morals (p. 134, 135, 138 etc.).

<sup>14</sup> However, according to recent findings, gnosis emerged independently of Christianity although it infiltrated it in various ways, and it also developed within its context and in a close coexistence with it (Pokorný, 1998). From this point of view, which is our present concern, it is connected with Plato through the underestimation of the visible material world and corporeality.

<sup>15</sup> That is: to Adam and Eve – her creation from the male rib is a fabrication according to some Gnostics whose purpose is to ensure Eve's/woman's subordination to Adam/man (Rudolph, 2010, p. 101).

<sup>16</sup> Even the understanding of Sodom and Gomorrah is “upside down”: “The cities, which are viewed negatively in the biblical tradition, have [...] a positive undertone for the Gnostics because they belong to the history of salvation” (Rudolph, 2010, p.141).

<sup>17</sup> Pokorný (1998, p. 18)

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