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Velimir Khlebnikov's "Christmas Tale" *Snezhimochka*

Abstract:

A wide range of dramatic forms can be found in Khlebnikov's dramatic oeuvre, which is to be seen against the background of Russian classical literature and culture, Symbolism, and also the Futurist theatre of the time. In this paper I focus on Khlebnikov's early dramatic work *Snezhimochka* (Snowwhite, 1908) retracing its connections with the folk character of *Snegurochka* as it is represented in Afanas'ev's famous collections of folktales, on which Ostrovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov respectively based the play *Snegurochka* (1873) and the opera (1882) of the same title. Furthermore, I highlight how the motif of the Snow Maiden played an important role in the revival of interest in folklore and Slavic mythology in St Petersburg Symbolist circles, which the young Khlebnikov attended at the time. Finally the 'opera' *Victory over the Sun* and the play *Snezhimochka* are compared with reference to the theme of the sun, the characters and above all, the treatment of language and neologization.

Key words: Velimir Khlebnikov, Russian Futurism, Russian Symbolism, *slovotvorchestvo*, Aleksandr Ostrovsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, The Snow Maiden, *Snezhimochka*.

Introduction

Velimir Khlebnikov's literary production is not easy to determine according to traditional criteria of genre, as he often uses the same text both as an individual piece and by inserting it into a more complex structure for which he adopts a different genre definition. Cataloguing Khlebnikov's work from the point of view of traditional genres becomes even more complicated when we deal with his dramatic production, which has been categorized in different ways, depending on the publishing criteria and the theoretical approaches adopted by the scholars who have edited the collections of his works.¹ This can be explained with Khlebnikov's "склонность к 'смешению' – предметному, жанровому и стилевому 'метабиозу'" (Grigor'ev 2000: 25) ("A tendency to 'mixing', to a 'metabiosis' of topics, genres and styles"). As Duganov observed, "ни одна из хлебниковских драм не укладывается в традиционные жанровые рамки. По существу, каждая из них оказывается жанровым новообразованием, лишь более или менее соотносимым с известными образцами." (Duganov 1990: 184) ("None of Khlebnikov's dramatic pieces fits into the traditional genre patterns. Each piece is essentially a new genre formation, which can only partially be traced back to already known models.")² A wide range of dramatic forms can be found in Khlebnikov's work, from the dramatic poem to the lyrical drama and the monodrama, from the dramatic sketch, the historical drama, the pastoral to an *ante litteram* radiodrama.

The historical and social settings of Khlebnikov's dramatic works span a period from pre-history, as in *I i E* (I and E) (SS 4: 25-36), to the future, as in *Smert' budushchego* (The Death of the Future. SS 4: 285-289). The catastrophic end of a mythical civilization and of the Russian Empire are at the centre respectively of *Gibel' Atlantidy* (The Destruction of Atlantis, SS 4: 40-48) and *Nastoiashchee* (The Present

Day, SS 4: 103-119). The idyllic past depicted in *Lesnaia toska* (Sylvan Melancholy, SS 4: 66-74) is balanced by the setting in contemporary decadent St Petersburg in *Markiza Dezes* (SS 4: 206-219; CW II: 218-229). Ancient Slavonic times and Herodotus's Scythia are the backgrounds of *Devii-Bog* (The Girl-God, SS 4: 128-156; CW II: 171-196) and *Asparukh* (SS 4: 157-163; CW II: 230-234), while the events of *Sestry-molnii* (The Flash Sisters, SS 5: 280-304) take place in revolutionary 1917 Moscow. The action of *Oshibka Smerti* (SS 4: 227-236; CW II: 252-) is set in the realm of the dead, *Bogi* (The Gods, SS 4: 237-247; CW II: 261-268) in the realm of immortal gods, and *Gospozha Lenin* (SS 4: 180-183; CW II: 237-241) in the mind of a person, while *Pruzhina chakhotki* (Tuberculosis Spirochete, SS 4: 248-252; CW II: 269-272) takes place in a blood cell.

From the linguistic point of view, Khlebnikov's dramatic works present a wide variety of registers, styles and vocabulary. There are neologisms, archaisms and colloquialisms, along with expressions that belong to classical Russian poetry, *zaum'*, onomatopoeias, *zvukopis'*, transcriptions of the language of birds and even an artificial language that Khlebnikov defines as "the language of gods" (Imposti 2010).

The "First Pan-Russian Conference of the Bards of the Future"

Most of Khlebnikov's theatrical works "were written, or at least conceived"³ between 1908 and 1910 (Duganov 1990: 183). In her memoir about her brother, Vera Khlebnikova states that *Snezhimochka* was one of his first pieces (Khlebnikova 1923: 59). It was written at the end of 1908 (Starkina 2007: 43, 309). This is the drama which appeared with the initial title of *Rozhdenstvenskaia skazka* (A Christmas Tale) as one of the dramatic works to be performed in the new "Budetlianin" (Futurian)

theatre announced by the so-called “First All-Russian Conference of the Bards of the Future” (Pervyi vserossiiskii s’ezd baiachei budushchego), which took place in July 1913 in the Finnish village of Uusikirkko. The only participants in the “Conference” were in fact Kruchenykh, Malevich and Matiushin (SS 4: 370; Terekhina 2014: 339-354). Khlebnikov, who was expected to take part in the event, could not join them because he lost the money he had been given for the journey.⁴ In August the three artists published a *Declaration of the First All-Russian Congress of Bards of the Future* (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999: 770). Its prime purpose was “1) Уничтожить «чистый, ясный, честный, звучный Русский язык», оскопленный и сглаженный языками человек от «критики и литературы».” (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999: 354) (“To destroy the ‘pure, clear, honest resonant Russian Language’, emasculated and rubbed out by the tongues of the bosses of ‘criticism and literature’.”) The second was “2) Уничтожить устаревшее движение мысли по закону причинности, беззубый здравый смысл, «симметричную логику», [...] и дать личное творческое прозрение подлинного мира новых людей.” (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999: 354) (“To destroy the old-fashioned, sluggish and philistine way of thinking based on ‘symmetrical logic’, [...] in order to give a creative pre-vision of the real world of new people”). Another target of this programme was the frivolous art of inferior artists and prolific hacks “беспрерывно выпуская все новые и новые произведения в словах, в книгах, на холсте и бумаге” (“incessantly releasing more and more works in words, in books on canvas and paper”). In contrast with the decrepit production of passéiste theatres such as “the Art Theatre, the Korsh Theatre, the Alexandrinskii, the Bolshoi and the Malyi”, the Bards of the Future announced the creation of a new theatre called “Budetlianin” (Futurian), where new specially-written *pièces* would be staged (SS 4: 370). These were Kruchenykh’s *Pobeda nad Soltsem*

(Victory over the Sun), Maiakovskii's *Zheleznaiia doroga* (Railroad) and Khlebnikov's *Rozhdenstvenskaia skazka* (A Christmas Tale), that is to say *Snezhimochka*. As it turned out, however, only Kruchenykh's "opera" was realized, while Maiakovskii presented the tragedy "Vladimir Maiakovskii" instead, and Khlebnikov's *pièce* was not staged.

Khlebnikov, however, did write (SS 4: 370-371) a "Prologue" for Kruchenykh's "opera", whose title, "Chernotvorskii vestuchki", consisting of Slavic-based neologisms can be translated as "Blackcreating Newsflashes" (Bartlett 2011: 20, in Kruchenykh 2011). Kruchenykh's performance of the "Prologue" at the beginning of the show provoked much hilarity among the public, who, however, did not grasp much of Khlebnikov's text (Shatskikh 1996: 39-40; see the contemporary reviews in Kruchenykh 2011: 87-95; Starkina 2007: 132).

Very much in the Pan-Slavic spirit that inspired the young poet at the time, the "Prologue" is made up of a number of colourful neologisms which list all the possible 'attractions' the Futurian Theatre may offer its public. These neologisms are mainly theatrical terms created exclusively on the basis of Slavonic roots⁵ that can be 'translated' back into standard Russian thanks to the brief list which Khlebnikov had sent to Kruchenykh earlier in August 1913 (SS 4: 155):

Люди! Те, кто родились, но еще не умер<ли>. Спешите идти в *созерцог*
(или *созерцавель*) «Будетлянин»!

[...] От *мучав*⁶ и *ужасавлей* до *веселян* и *нездешних смеяв* и *веселогов*
пройдут перед внимательными *видухами* и *созерцалями* и *глядарями*:
минавы, бывавы, певавы, бытавы,⁷ *зовавы, величавы, идуньи, судьбоспоры*
и *малюты*.⁸

(Folks! Those who were born and have not died yet. Hurry to the “Futurian” *contemplace* (or *contemplator*).

[...] From the *tragedeeds* and *horrordeeds* to the *cheervilles* and unearthly *lauflings* and *cheerlogues* the attentive *spectateers*, *contemplateers* and *glanceers* will see: *passdeeds*, *presdeeds*, *songdeeds*, *extra-timedeads*, *calldeads*, *glorydeeds*, *futurlings*, *fateflicts* and *littlelings*.)⁹

The “Prologue” is a linguistic experiment mainly consisting of neologisms, not only for the Russification of theatrical language but for the theatricalization of the “word as such” (Terekhina 2014: 339-340). In fact, by forming new words about theatre, a new conception of theatre can be created, where the stage of the Futurian theatre is taken by a new protagonist: the Word. As Kruchenykh states in the *Declaration of the Word as Such* (1913): “Новая словесная форма создает новое содержание, а не наоборот.” (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999: 72) (“A new verbal form creates a new content, and not vice versa.”)¹⁰ The poet word-maker takes the place of the gods by creating a new world made up of new words.

Although the “Prologue” is structurally very similar to the well-known *Zakliatie smekhom* (Incantation by Laughter), it never acquired the same fame as the short poem.¹¹ This is perhaps because, at the time, it was performed and printed just once as a part of the ‘opera’ *Victory over the Sun*, while *Incantation by Laughter* was reprinted several times and often performed in public. Another reason for this could be that *Zakliatie smekhom* is constructed on the derivation from one single lexical base, while the “Prologue” offers a wide range of neologisms from various Slavonic roots, which makes it more difficult to “translate” into the ordinary language.

At this point a question arises: what did the theatrical pieces announced for the Budetlianin Theatre have in common? In this article I will try and illustrate how much

the Symbolist ambience young Khlebnikov came into contact with when he moved to St Petersburg in late 1908 influenced his views on “slovotvorchestvo” (word-creation) and “mifotvorchestvo” (myth-creation). I will also try to illustrate to what extent he was influenced by Russian folklore in his ‘imitation’ of Ostrovsky’s play and Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera. A comparison between Kruchenykh’s “opera” and Khlebnikov’s “winter’s tale” will conclude the article.

Slovotvorchestvo

The dramatic piece *Snezhimochka* belongs to the first dramatic works that Khlebnikov wrote in 1908, as testified by a notebook dated 1908, which contains some fragments and neologisms used in the *pièce* (NP: 393). As we have seen above, it was a period when the poet was experimenting with Slavic-based neologisms and was developing neo-Panslavic views in opposition to the Germanic world in the wake of the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 1908 (see Baran 1985 70-71, 87). Furthermore, after moving to St Petersburg, Khlebnikov was being introduced to the leading literary circles of the capital, such as Ivanov’s “Tower” and Remizov’s house (Baran 1987; Shishkin 1996; Starkina 2007: 42-43, 309).

Khlebnikov’s much-advertised *slovotvorchestvo* is seen as one of the founding pillars of Russian Futurism. One of the reasons is that Burliuk attempted to re-write the history of Russian Futurism and along with it Khlebnikov’s own literary career by bringing forward by a couple of years (to 1908) the creation and publication of *Sadok Sudei* (actually published in April 1910) and ascribing the composition of the texts he published in Khlebnikov’s *Tvoreniia* (1914) to a much earlier period (1906) than the actual one (Khlebnikov 1914; NP: 6). In fact, Khlebnikov’s first experiments with word

creation were rooted in the contemporary Symbolist ambience¹² and developed some of the ideas that Viacheslav Ivanov and others were promoting in their writings about creating a new mythology based on Russian national folk traditions (SS 6.1: 361: for a comparison with Ivanov's own neologization see Pertsova and Rafaeva 1999: 380-382).

Ivanov's essay "O veselom remesle i umnoi veselii" (On the Joyful Craft and the Joy of the Spirit)¹³ had a strong impact on Khlebnikov's vision of language creation (*slovotvorchestvo*), in particular the following passage:

Через толщу современной речи, язык поэзии – наш язык – должен прорости и уже прорастает из подпочвенных корней народного слова, чтобы загудеть голосистым лесом всеславянского слова" (Ivanov 1995: 170). ("The language of poetry, our language, must grow through the thick growth of contemporary speech; it is already growing from the subterranean roots of the nation's word in order to ring out as the loud forest of the all-Slavic word. Ivanov 2001: 126).

Khlebnikov clearly alludes to these very words when he writes to the 'Maestro' in March 1908 from Kazan' while sending him a few poems:¹⁴ "Читая эти стихи, я помнил о 'всеславянском языке', побеги которого должны прорасти толщи современного, русского" (SS 6.2: 112; SS 6.1: 361). ("Reading these lines I remembered about the 'all-Slavic language', the shoots of which should grow through the thick of the contemporary Russian language.")

Ivanov's metaphor of the Russian language seen as a tree that grows from the trunk of the 'all-Slavic language' is further developed in the article *Kurgan Sviatogora* (The Burial Mound of Sviatogor)¹⁵ that Khlebnikov was writing at the same time he

was working on his play. Here the young poet uses “deblo”, a word aptly borrowed from the Serbian language that means ‘trunk’ (Ivanov 1986: 62):

И не должно ли думать о дебле, по которому вихорь-мнинец емлет
разнотствующие по красоте листья – славянские языки, и о сплюсненном во
одно, единый, общий круг, кругевихре – общеславянском слове? (SS 6.1:
26).

(And does it not behove us to consider the tree trunk about which a seeming
vortex moves the Slavic languages, those beautiful, diversificating leaves, and
also consider the common Slavic word, the vortex circle that fuses them all into
one single general circle?) (CW I: 235).

Furthermore, the ‘foreign’ word “poet” is replaced with the Slavic-based
neologism “slavobich”¹⁶ (Parnis 1978: 236, fn 44; Imposti 2018: 263), which in turn
derives from “slavoba” ‘literature’ (SS 6.1: 412; Pertsova 1995: 323).¹⁷ “Не потому
ли высший суд славобича всегда лежал в науке о числах?” (SS 6.1: 24)¹⁸ (“Is that
not why the supreme arbiter for a wordworker has always been found in the science of
numbers?”) (CW I: 232). The “slavobich” has the task of giving voice to the Russian
land by breaking with the evil charm that for a long time has compelled Russian
literature (*slavoba*) and even the great Pushkin to imitate foreign songs (SS 6.1: 24,
CW I: 233-234). In line with Ivanov’s metaphor, the poet himself is compared to a
tree “Вот он шумит своими ветвями, и не окружим ли мы его порослью молодых
древ?” (SS 6.1: 25) (“Have his branches finally begun to sound, and do we not
surround him like a grove of young saplings?” CW I: 234).

For Khlebnikov “слова суть лишь слышимые числа нашего бытия” (SS 6.1:
24) (“Words are only the numbers of our existence made audible. CW I: 232). In his

vision “experiments with derivation (*slovotvorčestvo*) [are] the verbal equivalent of a mathematician’s work with imaginary numbers or non-Euclidian geometries” (Baran 1987: 186). Word creation (*slovotvorčestvo*) therefore breaks with the traditional way of thinking, it goes beyond a certain segment of time or space, “неологизмы используются поэтом и для создания собственных мифов” (Pertsova and Rafeeva 1996: 15) (“neologisms are used by the poet in order to create his own myths”).

Apart from Ivanov, one of the first St Petersburg writers with whom Khlebnikov became acquainted in the autumn of 1908 was Aleksei Mikhailovich Remizov, who in his memoir-novel *Kukkha* (1923) mentions a series of writers and literati who used to visit him. Among them there is the young Khlebnikov “с которым слова разбирали” (Remizov 2011: 63) (“with whom we used to dissect words”). Remizov recalls his first impression of the young poet who “показался прописной узорной буквой. [...] ‘Планетчик’, хотел оруссить весь земной шар.” (Remizov 2011: 436) (“seemed to me an illuminated capital letter. [...] An ‘astrologer’ who wanted to Russify the entire globe.”)¹⁹

What intrigued Remizov was the young poet’s attitude towards language: “Он не то что подкапывается под корень, а хочет вытащить и пересадить. Эта словесность мне по душе: тут слово в его существе ‘бескорыстное’, ‘само-в-себе’, а не то, чтоб прикрывать собою пустые призраки” (Remizov 2011: 436) (“He doesn’t just dig the root, he also wants to pull it up and transplant it. I like this kind of literature: here the word is essentially ‘disinterested’, ‘itself’, not something with which to disguise empty ghosts.”)

In 1907 Remizov had published *Posolon’* (Sunwise), a collection of tales that can be considered an innovative way to revive Slavic mythology and folklore. Among

them there is the short tale “Snegurushka” (Remizov 2000: 46-47; Rozanov 2019: 261), which probably influenced Khlebnikov in his choice of this character for his play.²⁰ Not only did Remizov rework some very popular folk plots, mixing them with other folk motifs in *Posolon*, he also used borrowings from regional *govory* (dialects) and even neologisms in his attempt at enhancing his conception of Russianness (see Baran 1987: 176). One can assume that because of this at the time Khlebnikov found in Remizov a possible sympathetic model.²¹

This hypothesis finds some confirmation in the fact that Khlebnikov gave Remizov a copy of his play *Snezhimochka*, as testified by a letter to Kamenskii from January 1909: “Что говорит Ремизов о моей ‘Снежимочке’?” (“What does Remizov say about my ‘Snowflake’?”) (SS 6.2: 118). Unfortunately, there are no documents left attesting to Remizov’s opinion about Khlebnikov’s first play.

Snegurochka...

Snezhimochka was not performed at the Budelianin Theatre, nor was it published during Khlebnikov’s lifetime. Only a variant, which combines excerpts from the first act and the prologue to the third act, was published in the miscellany *Vesennnee kontragenstvo muz* (The Spring Counteragency of the Muses, 1915) with the title *Snezini* and an erroneous date (1906), probably due to Burliuk, as are the numerous misprints.²² On the cover of the notebook containing the fair copy of the play the title “Snezhimochka. Rozhdestvenskaya skazka. Podrazhanie Ostrovskomu” (“Snezhimochka.²³ A Christmas tale. Imitation of Ostrovsky) was crossed out. Underneath was added “Rozhdestvenskaya skazka” (NP 393-394; SS 4: 368-369).

This is the very title that was mentioned in the *Declaration of the Bards of the Future*.²⁴

Khlebnikov's *pièce* was initially conceived as an "imitation of Ostrovsky",²⁵ who in turn was well-acquainted with the contemporary studies and theories in folklore and had also been able personally to observe and record folk songs and rituals connected with the Iarilo festival in the villages near his country estate (Batiushkov 1917: 51). He used all of this and the motif of the Snow Maiden, mainly taken from Afanas'ev's famous collection of Russian folk tales, for his 1873 play, in which he aimed at finding a synthesis between drama and music, word and dance, myth and history in order to express the idea of the continuity of the national cultural traditions and of the indissoluble connection between past and present (Lotman 1989: 20-21).

The folk tales about Snegurochka, also mentioned as Snezhevinochka (Afanas'ev 1985, II: 222, 425) and Snegurushka (Afanas'ev 1984, I: 45, 445), present four main variants: 1) an old childless couple mould from snow the figure of a girl who comes to life. In summer she goes into the forest with her friends and melts away;²⁶ 2) Snegurochka goes into the forest with other girls who kill and bury her. Their crime is discovered thanks to a pipe made from the reed that grows on her grave and transforms itself into Snegurochka (Afanas'ev 1985, II: 222); 3) Snegurochka goes into the forest with other girls and gets lost, but some wild animals rescue her (Afanas'ev 1984, I: 45); 4) Snegurochka is kidnapped by an old man who puts her into a bag and later spends the night at her parents' home. They discover and free her (Elkina 2014: 163). Particularly important in all of these variants is the contraposition between the Snow Maiden and the heat of the sun (or of the fire) that eventually melts her. Her demise is not described as a tragedy. Afanas'ev describes the Snegurochka tales as "a gracious poetic" ("gratsioznyĭ poeticheskii") way to explain the ordinary

natural phenomenon of the hot sun melting the snow in springtime (Afanas'ev 1868: 641).

Ostrovsky expanded the original tale into a full-length drama by adding a sub-plot involving the mythical Russian village of Berendei and a love plot which is absent from the original folk tales (Halbe 2005: 42-43). He also took other characters from Russian mythology like Spring the Beauty (Vesna-Krasna) and Grandfather Frost (Ded Moroz), whose daughter is Snegurochka.²⁷ In the Prologue they discuss what to do with Snegurochka, who is now fifteen and wishes to live with human beings because she is attracted by Lel's melodious songs. They decide to let her go and live with the humans and choose as her adoptive parents a couple of poor peasants. It turns out, however, that Snegurochka is a misfit who disrupts the Berendei village life. Not only does the young merchant Mizgir' leave his fiancée Kupava when he first sees Snegurochka, but the other village lads are also attracted to her (Ostrovsky 1989: 97). She is fascinated by the shepherd Lel's song, but he ignores her and throws away her flowers. She is sad because of her inability to love and asks her mother for this gift (Act 4, scene 2). Although Vesna-Krasna grants it to her, she warns her daughter not to linger in the sun's hot rays or she will die.²⁸ When finally Snegurochka falls in love with Mizgir', he is happy, but ignores her pleas to stay away from the light and insists on her following him to the Iarilo festival and into the hot sun. Inevitably, Snegurochka melts uttering her last words of love and farewell to the world:

Но что со мной: блаженство или смерть?

What's happening to me? Is it bliss or death?

Какой восторг! Какая чувств истома!

What a delight! What a feeling of languor!

О мать- Весна , благодарю за радость,

O mother Spring, thank you for this joy,

За сладкий дар любви! Какая нега	For the sweet gift of love! What agonizing
Томящая течет во мне!	Bliss is flowing in me!
[...] Люблю и таю, таю	[...] I love and melt, I melt
От сладких чувств любви ! Прощайте, все	From the sweet feelings of love! Farewell to you
Подруженьки, прощай, жних! О милый,	all.
Последни й взгляд Снегурочки тебе.	My friends, my sweetheart! My dear,
(Таёт.)	The last gaze of the Snow Maiden is for you.
(Ostrovsky 1989: 204)	(She melts away.)

Immediately afterwards, Mizgir' desperately throws himself into the lake (Act 4, scene 4). The king of Berendei, however, does not linger on these tragic events and rejoices in the return of the hot weather:

Снегурочки печальная кончина	Shegurochka's sad end
И страшная погибель Мизгирия	And Mizgir's terrible death
Тревожить нас не могут; Солнце знает,	Cannot trouble us. The Sun knows
Кого карать и миловать. Свершился	Who is to be punished and who is to be spared.
Правдивый суд! Мороза порожденье -	A rightful judgement has been meted out!
Холодная Снегурочка погибла.	Frost's offspring, the cold Snegurochka died.
[...]	[...]
Теперь, с ее чудесною кончиной,	Now, with her miraculous end

Вмешательство Мороза прекратилось.

Frost's interference has ceased.

Изгоним же последний стужи след

Let us ban the last trace of frost

Из наших душ и обратимся к Солнцу.

From our souls and let us turn to the Sun.

[...]

[...]

Палящий бог, тебя всем миром славим !

O blazing god! We celebrate you with all the world!

Пастух и царь тебя зовут, явись!

The shepherd and the king call you, show yourself!

(Ostrovsky 1989: 205).

On 11 May 1873 *Snegurochka* was first performed at the Malyi theatre in Moscow with music specially composed by Tchaikovsky. Unfortunately, it was not a great success for a number of reasons, some due to the excessive dimensions of the stage that made the actors' voices inaudible. Most critics were puzzled by Ostrovsky's sudden choice of subjects taken from folklore and fairy tales. Neither did they appreciate his use of verse or the musical part, which, in their opinion, failed to enhance the play as a whole and was too independent to be used as accompaniment (Kashin 1939: 102-103; Halbe 2005: 51-52). Some critics said that the performance was very similar to a fairbooth show (Lotman 1989: 13-14). Furthermore, the character of Snegurochka was not appreciated because of her (alleged) coldness and lack of feelings (Frey 2018: 75). Only a few critics appreciated the play (and Tchaikovsky's music), among them Ivan Goncharov who saw this play as an important stage in Ostrovsky's work as a dramatist deeply interested in history (Lotman 1989: 14-15). Even Rimsky-Korsakov at first did not like it:

В первый раз «Снегурочка» была прочитана мной около 1874 года, когда она только что появилась в печати. В чтении она тогда мне мало понравилась, царство берендеев мне показалось странным. [...] чудная, поэтическая сказка Островского не произвела на меня впечатления.
(Rimsky-Korsakov 1980: 172)

(“I had first read *Snyegoorochka* in 1874 or thereabouts, when it had just appeared in print. At that reading I had liked it but little; the kingdom of the Byeryendyeys had appeared queer to me. [...] In a word, Ostrovski’s wonderful, poetic fairy-tale had made no impression on me.”) (Rimsky-Korsakov 1923: 193)

In spite of the initial failure of its first production, with Ostrovsky’s play a process of re-mythologization of the character of Snegurochka and of her story began. The Silver Age of Russian literature marked a revival of the play seen as an early experiment in *Gesamtkunstwerk* that at the time of its first production could not be realized for lack of technical means and of a director’s strong unifying vision. At the turn of the century there were several theatrical productions of the play, among them Stanislavsky’s in 1900 for the Moscow Art Theatre.²⁹ Furthermore, several poets and artists of the Silver Age were inspired by the figure of Snegurochka (Dushechkina 2002).

From this point of view, it is notable that just five years after first reading the play, Rimsky-Korsakov read it again and this time he greatly appreciated it and decided to compose an opera, basing the libretto on Ostrovsky’s text.³⁰ He cut it down to suitable operatic dimensions, basically keeping the original text but mainly condensing the structure of the play and eliminating secondary characters and subplots involving the social life of the village, the quarrels of Snegurochka’s

adoptive parents, and the extramarital adventures of the boyar's wife Elena Prekrasnaia (Frey 2018: 76). He cleansed the language of the most mundane and colloquial traits that in Ostrovsky's play reflect the social milieu of the Berendei village. He also highlighted Nature and the seasons as integral components of the opera by associating them with musical themes that consistently recur in the opera and give it a stronger sense of coherence (Ruch'evskaia 2002: 228-232). Furthermore, the scenes of the original play connected with calendar festivities, for instance the Maslenitsa scene, are further developed and set to genuine folk tunes performed by choruses that often replace, and amplify Ostrovsky's dialogues or stage directions (Ruch'evskaia 2002: 232-235; Frey 2018: 74). The composer made the character of Snegurochka more consistent by insisting on her feelings and her loneliness in a world of strangers, rather than on her conflict with the villagers and her adoptive parents. He achieved this by condensing some dialogues between Snegurochka and other characters into solo ariosos (for instance, with Lel' in Act 3 Scene 2 of Ostrovsky's play). Snegurochka's final death song is thus the culmination of a series of arias and in particular is a reprise of the initial melody of the Prologue arietta, where the Snow Maiden mentions Lel's songs that figuratively cause her to melt (Frey 2018: 80-84): "И дни, и ночи слушать я готова / его пастушьи песни. / И слушаешь, и таешь..." (I am willing to listen to his shepherd's songs day and night. / You listen to them and melt...). Snegurochka's "first true expression of love in the opera" (Halbe 2005: 150) also represents the ultimate metamorphosis of the character, who literally melts because she finally acquires the mortal ability to love. Rimsky-Korsakov expressed this by composing the song as a variation on the folksong melody "Ai vo pole lipen'ka". This sums up the identification that the Snow Maiden makes between people's folksongs and their ability to love. "It was folksong

that first attracted her out of the forest; during her stay in the village it was folksong that gave her the greatest pleasure; and in the end, she will express her love for those close to her with a motive from folksong.” (Halbe 2005: 148-149). This “exquisitely subtle musical gesture” (Halbe 2005: 150) is probably what contributed to the opera’s success during the Russian Silver Age.

In his memoirs, the composer expresses his satisfaction with his work:

“Кончая «Снегурочку», я почувствовал себя созревшим музыкантом и оперным композитором, ставшим окончательно на ноги.” (Rimsky-Korsakov 1980: 183)
(“When completing *Snyegoorochka* I felt a fully matured musician and operatic composer who had finally come to stand on his own feet.”) (Rimsky-Korsakov 1923: 205).

In spite of the technical shortcomings of the production, from the very first performance at the Mariinskii Theatre in St Petersburg in 1882, Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera had huge success and became a stable item in the repertoire of Russian opera theatres.³¹ On October 8th 1885 *Snegurochka*, the “aesthetic manifesto of the Mamontov Circle” (Haldey 2010: 112), was performed at Mamontov’s Private Opera with costumes and scenography by Viktor Vasnetsov,³² which thanks to very thorough research in authentic folk costumes, materials, objects and interiors, impressed the public because of its genuine national character and the powerful and effective ‘synthesis of the arts’ on the stage (Shkafer 1936: 132-133). Vasnetsov’s sketches of sets and costumes were also used for the 1908 production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera at the Opéra Comique in Paris, which had the misfortune to have to compete with Diaghilev’s simultaneous production of *Boris Godunov*. It was nevertheless greeted with interest by the Parisian critics (Haldey 2010: 289, 337).

...and Snezhimochka

Although its performance was announced in the *Declaration of the Bards of the Future* and despite the fact that Burliuk several times insisted that Khlebnikov should publish it (SS 4: 368), *Snezhimochka* was never performed at the time and only an excerpt was published by Burliuk in *Vesennnee Kontragenstvo Muz* (1915) with several misprints. It was first published by Khardzhiev and Grits in *Neizdannye Proizvedeniia* in 1940. As mentioned above, Khlebnikov began writing this play in 1908 when he was promoting markedly Pan-Slavic ideological views and was experimenting with neologisms based on Slavic roots. A trace of his work on an alternative theatrical terminology can be seen in the use of Slavic-based neologisms, for example “deimo” (derived from “deistvie” and “pis’mo”) instead of “deistvie” (act)³³ and “vvod’mo” (from “vvedenie” and “pis’mo”) instead of “vvedenie” (introduction, prologue). In the fragment of the work published by Burliuk in *Vesennnee Kontragenstvo Muz*, we also find “deina” (from “deistvie” and “kartina”, scene) (SS 4: 369).³⁴ Furthermore, the names of the numerous fantastic spirits that populate the play, from *Snezhimochka* herself to the various *Slezini*, *Smekhini*, *Nemini*, *Slepini*,³⁵ are a very productive field of neologization (see Ivanov 1986: 65; Janecek 1996: 143).

In the play there are an incredible number of characters who belong mainly to three groups: spirits, animals and humans. Their appearance can be limited to just a few lines, with frequent shifts between one group and another, sometimes with no apparent logical continuity. “Это не просто игра слов, это игровое слово, бесконечно изменяющееся и превращающееся слово-оборотень.” (Duganov 1990:

192) (“This work is not only a wordplay, but a playing word, a word-shape-shifter which is endlessly changing and transforming itself.”) This shape-shifting character of the word is closely related to a world of spirits and animals. It is as if Khlebnikov here gave a dramatic realization of the concept of “language as a part of Nature”.³⁶

Khlebnikov’s *pièce* consists of three acts (“deima”) and a Prologue (“vvod’mo”), which is placed not at the very beginning of the play but before the third act. In spite of the fact that *Snezhimochka* was described by the author as an “imitation of Ostrovsky”, the closest reference by Khlebnikov appears to be Rimsky-Korsakov, who is mentioned several times at a meta-dramatic level.³⁷ When *Snezhimochka* arrives at the village, the children greet her as “Snegurochka”, recalling the staging of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera at the Narodnyi Dom (People’s House), a theatre that was affordable for the populace.³⁸ Only later is she recognized as *Snezhimochka*. “The ultimate impact of such devices is to suspend the suspension of disbelief. These are plays within plays, only the outer play is missing.”³⁹

In a manuscript held in the Russian Central Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) dating back to 1908-1909 we find a project for a “Slavic evening”, where, along with Ivanov’s and Gorodetsky’s speeches, Khlebnikov would present his *pièce* about the “correction of the Russian personality” (“Исправление русской личности... Пьеса...” SS 4: 370). Khlebnikov was probably planning to present *Snezhimochka* at Ivanov’s “Tower”.⁴⁰ Apparently, he did not manage to do this, which eventually led to a swift cooling of his relationship with Ivanov’s circle. This in turn coincided with his approaching the group that would become famous as *budetliane*, or the Russian Futurists. This, in a way, contributed to an overshadowing of the link between Khlebnikov’s early dramatic *pièce* and the Symbolist ambiance.

The scene of the first act of the play is set in the forest where, according to the plot of Ostrovsky's play and Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, Snegurochka has spent her childhood. It is a fantastic world populated by spirits and animals of the wood and the winter. The human beings, however, are unable to see this hidden fantasy world and even deny its very existence, but they are swiftly punished for their disbelief (SS 4: 166). A hunter who has ventured into the wood after a wolf is beaten by the woodgoblins and the spirit of winter and chased away (SS 4: 168).

At the end of the first Act the news that Snezhimochka has left her home in the wood and gone to town creates distress among the people of the forest. In Act Two she goes to the Hooder (Khovun) and here for the first time she is mistaken for Rimsky-Korsakov's Snegurochka (SS 4: 170). After that she arrives in town and children again greet her as Snegurochka and the crowd surrounds her in awe. A policeman that recalls Gogol's grotesque policemen in *The Overcoat* takes her to the station for disturbing the peace. The episode where Snezhimochka is at the police station was cut by Khlebnikov (see SS 4: 369). Before Act Three there is a "vvod'mo" (prologue) set in the wood where the woodgoblins and snowpeople cry for Snezhimochka's departure. Act Three opens with a song about sacrifice and vengeance that summarizes the meaning of the Act:

Я тело чистое несу

И вам, о улицы, отдам.

Его безгрешным донесу

И плахам города предам.

Я жертва чистая расколам,

И, отдаваясь всем распятым,

Сожгу вас огненным глаголом,
Завяну огненным заклатьем.

(SS 4: 175)

I offer up my virgin body
to the city's streets.
I yield my sinless body
to the next death it meets.
I am violence's victim,
I am the slave of crucifixion.
My words of fire will burn your ear
with flaming curses as I disappear.

(CW, I: 168)

It is the day of the Festival of Purification (Prazdnik Ochishcheniia). The crowd solemnly swears to use only Slavic words, wear Slavic clothes, worship only Slavic gods, and continue to maintain and reinforce Russian customs:

Начинаются состязания русских в беге, борьбе, звучобе и славобе. Русские скачут, прыгают, бегают. Играют на свирелях. Поют. (SS 4: 176)

(Competitions begin between Russians in running, wrestling, versing and praising. The Russians run, dance, leap about. They play woodwhistles. They sing.) (CW II: 169).

In the meantime, Snezhimochka has disappeared:

Снежимочки нет. Она таинственно исчезла, но то место, где она была, покрыта весенними цветами. Унесите же в руках, как негасимые свечи, разнесите по домам знак таинственного чуда и, может быть... (SS 4: 166)

(Snowwhite⁴¹ has left us. She vanished very gently, but the place where she was standing is now covered with spring flowers. Go pick them, carry them from house to house like eternal candles, signs of a mysterious miracle, and maybe—) (CW II: 169)

Snezhimochka has melted into blue flowers that burn like candles and people in procession pick those flowers and sing a final hymn to the revival of Slavic pride and customs: “Но нами вспомнится, чем были, / Восставим гордость старой были. / И цветень сменит сечень, / И близки, близки сечи.” (SS 4: 177) (“Yet we remember what we were / And will bring back our former pride. / Now May replaces January, / battle struggle comes again.” CW II: 170)

It is clear from this summary that the overall meaning of the play is a celebration of the “Slavic revival”, whose pivotal figure is represented by Snezhimochka as a variant of the folktale character. At the beginning of the twentieth century in the Russian collective imagination, the stress had shifted from Snegurochka’s tragic melting in spring because of the fierce rays of the sun to a figure that was identified as a festive helper and granddaughter of Grandfather Frost in the New Year celebrations (Dushechkina 2002). This can also explain why Khlebnikov defined his play a “Christmas Tale” in opposition to Ostrovsky’s and Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Spring Tale”. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that the Iarilo festival is replaced by the festival of Purification, which recovers the original Slavic spirit in contraposition with the materialism and vulgarity of modern times.

While the role of the fantastic reality of the wintry forest is enhanced, that of the sun and the love plot in Khlebnikov's work have disappeared, or better they remain only in the memory of the reader, in the pre-text of the play, thanks to the repeated allusions to Rimsky-Korsakov's opera and to *Snegurochka*. Khlebnikov focuses on *Snezhimochka*, (who can be seen as an alias of the poet himself), going to town not because whimsical curiosity but as a gesture of self-sacrifice for the purification of the language to which the 'song' quoted above alludes (see Lanne 1983: 198).

There is no trace, however, of the idyllic, carefree atmosphere of the Berendei village and there is no old and wise Berendei king either. On the contrary, the townfolk are depicted as vulgar and unable to see beyond their preconceptions. The poet insists on their inability to discern *Snezhimochka*'s real identity because of their stereotyped and artificial concept of Russianness. Furthermore, a hint of irony can be discerned in the appearance of a workman in the midst of the fantastic wood creatures who boldly denies their existence (SS 4: 166; see Lönnqvist 1985: 96).

Unlike in Ostrovsky's play and in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, the disappearance of the main character is not the dramatic climax of the play and is not represented on the stage. It is merely announced. What is left of *Snezhimochka*, however, the blue fragrant flowers, are "signs of a mysterious miracle" (CW II: 170), that is to say the revival of Slavic customs. The motif of fire, contiguous to that of the sun (see Baran 1996; Lanne 1983: 93-101), is transferred to the flowers that burn like candles and are picked up by the people, thus kindling the flame of their "former pride" (CW II: 170) (*гордость старой были*) (SS 4: 177).

The fact that *Snezhimochka* was meant to be performed with *Victory over the Sun*, has not until now seemed to have suggested the existence of some kind of affinity between these two plays (with the exception of Janecek 1996: 143-144). The link, however, can be found in the common reference to the operatic world and the role that the sun plays in both texts, although, as we have seen, in *Snezhimochka* the sun motif is somehow implicit in the “cultural memory” of the reader. If in *Victory over the Sun* the idea is to defeat the sun in order to create a new future world, in Khlebnikov’s play we find another type of battle to restore the archaic world of the Slavs.

In spite of the different settings and plots, a certain similarity between *Victory over the Sun* and *Snezhimochka* can be found in the multiplicity of episodic characters, in the rapid shift from dialogue to choruses and songs, and in the disruption of the structure of conventional drama (Janecek 1996: 143). The attitude towards language, however, is different, in spite of its central role in both plays. The neologisms in Khlebnikov’s play generally keep within the limits of regular Russian word-formation (Vroon 1983; Janecek 1996: 144-145), thus realizing the author’s intention of purifying the Russian language from foreign non-Slavic elements and creating his own folklore (see Lanne 1983: 194). Kruchenykh’s ‘opera’, on the other hand, presents numerous instances of zaum’ and “masculinization” of words (See Böhmig 2011: 111) in his specific type of transrational language that aims at “Annihilat[ing] the antiquated way of thinking according to the law of causality, toothless common sense, ‘symmetrical logic’.” (“Уничтожить устаревшее движение мысли по закону причинности, беззубый здравый смысл, «симметричную логику»”) (Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999: 354). Furthermore, although Khlebnikov’s play presents some abrupt passages from a scene to another

and can be read as a parody of contemporary Symbolist mysteries, it essentially keeps a certain dramatic logic. In Kruchenykh's work, on the contrary, "absurdity predominates [...] [in] the alogical progressions of events, entrances and exits, disjointed dialogues, grotesque costuming and sets" (Janecek 1996: 122).

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to highlight the complex intertextual connections of Khlebnikov's early play *Snezhimochka* with the literary and operatic tradition that developed the character of the Snow Maiden and contributed to its becoming a kind of "new myth" at the turn of the twentieth century. I have examined the Symbolist milieu within which the play was conceived and composed and its strong link with the neo-Panslavic ideology that at the time profoundly influenced the poet. In spite of this, the play *Snezhimochka* also has a place in the history of Russian Futurism. Its mention in the *Declaration of the Bards of the Future* along with *The Victory over the Sun*, and Burliuk's insistence on its publication make this text appear crucial for the creation of the myth of Khlebnikov as a Futurian poet, whose main distinctive trait is word-creation.

¹ In the 1986 edition of Khlebnikov's *Tvoreniia* (Creations) the section devoted to "dramatic works" contains just eight works: *Snezhimochka* (Snowwhite), *Chertik* (The Little Devil), *Markiza Dezes* (The Marquise des S.), *Gospozha Lenín* (Mrs Laneen), *Asparukh*, *Mirskónca* (Backworlds), *Oshibka smerti* (Miss Death

makes a Mistake), while in the most recent Russian edition of the Futurian's *Sobranie Sochinenii*, Volume Four contains as many as twenty-one "dramatic poems, dramas and scenes" as well as a number of fragments and variants. Furthermore, the authors of the few articles specifically devoted to Khlebnikov as a dramatist often also mention among his dramatic writings works which Khlebnikov himself defined as "supersagas" or poems (see SS 1: 433-445 for the editorial criteria).

² Translations from Russian are mine, unless otherwise stated.

³ Emphasis added.

⁴ See his letter to Matiushin, dated July 1913, in SS 6.2: 154. See Matiushin's "Russkie kubofuturisty", in Terekhina and Zimenkov 1999: 500. According to Starkina (2007: 117-118), however, this might have been an excuse for Khlebnikov to avoid taking part in the "Conference".

⁵ The word 'deimo' (act) is also used in the play *Snezhimochka*, see below.

⁶ See Vroon 1983:154: "*mučava* and *borava* (cf. *Mučit'* and *borot'sja*), two types of tragedies".

⁷ See Pertsova 1995: 105. In his letter to Kruchenykh from 22 August 1913 Khlebnikov writes: "*Бытава* – драма вне времени" ("*Bytava* is an extra-temporal drama") (SS 6.2: 157).

⁸ Italics in the original.

⁹ My translation. For a provisional translation into English of another excerpt of the "Prologue", see Janecek 1996: 145. In her English translation in

Kruchenykh 2011: 20-24 Rosamund Bartlett adopts the strategy of domesticating the neologisms, explaining their morphological structure in the footnotes.

¹⁰ English translation (Lawton 1988: 68).

¹¹ As Vladimir Markov observes: “‘Incantation by Laughter’ has remained Khlebnikov’s most famous poem even to this day, often obscuring many of his other more outstanding achievements.” (Markov 1968: 7).

¹² And on the knowledge of nineteenth century works on Russian language and folklore such as Buslaev’s and Afanas’ev’s (see Baran 1987; Garbuz and Zaretski 2000).

¹³ It was published in 1907 in the journal *Zolotoe Runo* and later included in the collection *Po zvezdam* (1909).

¹⁴ The list of these poems can be found in Starkina’s biography of Khlebnikov (Starkina 2007: 308-309). See also Ivanov 1986: 63-64.

¹⁵ The article remained unpublished at the time. In January 1909, Khlebnikov sent it to Kamenskii in order to have it published in the journal *Luch Sveta* (Ray of Light), which unfortunately closed down soon afterwards. The essay was first published in NP: 321

¹⁶ In CW ‘slavobich’ is translated as ‘wordworker’.

¹⁷ In the 1986 edition of Khlebnikov’s *Tvoreniia*, the editors explain the words “slavoba” and “slavobich” respectively as ‘literature’ and ‘writer’ (Khlebnikov 1986: 704). This word is also used in a short poem dating back to 1907 “Kto v slavobe charodei”, which was first published by Kruchenykh in *Zapisnaia knizhka*

Velimira Khlebnikova in 1925 (SS I: 82, 461). This word can also be found on p. 48 of Khlebnikov's *Tvoreniia 1906-1908* (1914) and in the play *Snezhimochka*: "Начинаются состязания русских в беге, борьбе, звучобе и славобе." (SS 4: 176). ("Competitions begin between Russians in running, wrestling, versing and praising.") (CW II: 169). From the context in *Snezhimochka* the word appears to be built following the model of the deverbative *bor'ba*. In Pertsova (1995: 463) we find 29 words formed with the suffix -ob(a) and 37 from the suffix -b(a) that Vroon (1983: 60) describes as a nominalizing deverbative suffix, unproductive in contemporary Russian language whose meaning is "process or action designed in the verbal root". Khlebnikov's neologisms are formed not only from verbal basis (Pertsova 1995: 151, 138) but also from nominal and adjectival basis (*krasoba* from *krasivyi*, *pis'moba* from *pis'mo*) (Pertsova 1995: 187, 283). In Serbian, however, the suffix -ob(a)/-b(a) is productive and forms feminine nouns with the meaning of action or process if derived from verbal basis or abstract qualities if from adjectival basis (Stevanović 1986: 453-455).

¹⁸ Elsewhere, in the same article, the editors of SS choose to use another spelling of this word, admittedly using brackets to mark their choice: "Русская сл<о>воба вторила чужим доносившимел голосам и оставляла немым северного загадочного воителя, народ-море." (SS 6.1: 24) ("Russian wordwork echoes voices from foreign places; it has left speechless the mysterious warrior of the north, the nation-sea.") (CW I: 233). In the commentaries the editors remark that "Для Хлебникова важна лексическая близость «слова» и «славы». (SS 6.1: 412). ("For Khlebnikov the affinity between 'slovo' (word) and 'slava' (glory) was very

important.”). However, in Chlebnikov 1986 the word “slavoba” and its derivatives are spelled with an ‘a’.

¹⁹ In Remizov’s novel *Chasy* (*The Clock*, part IV) the word ‘planetchik’ is used in the sense of ‘astrologer’ (Remizov 2001: 59, 479). However, in his much later letter about his relationship with Khlebnikov Remizov might have used this term in reference to the budetliianin’s self-appointed role of chairman of the entire globe.

²⁰ In the 1930 edition of *Posolon*, published in Paris (Remizov 1930: 61-62) the title of the story is ‘Snegurka’ and is located the winter section (‘Zima liutaia’), while in the 2000 Russian edition (Remizov 2000, II: 46-47) the story is located in the “dark” autumn section (‘Osen’ temnaia’) and presents some slight variants, while the character is called ‘Snegurushka’.

²¹ It is interesting to notice that the word “Posolon” is also used in Khlebnikov’s 1908 poem *Boevaia*, which recalls the anti-German ideas expressed in his *Vozzvanie k slavianam* (SS 6.1: 197-198, 410): “Посолонь, слава! За солнцем, друзья, - / на запад за солнечным ходом,” (SS 1: 192, 475) (“Sunwise, glory! [Let us follow] the course of the sun, / [Let us follow] the sun toward the West.)

²² Apparently, the piece particularly attracted Burliuk’s interest, as results from his correspondence with Khlebnikov and Kamenski in 1914 and 1915 where it is mentioned several times with a certain insistence (see NP: 393; SS 4: 368).

²³ In CW II both ‘Snezhimochka’ and ‘Snegurochka’ are translated with ‘Snowwhite’. Thus the playful confusion between Khlebnikov’s character and her literary and fairy tale models is lost because the same name is used in this translation. Only on page 164 is the English title of the opera, “Snow Maiden”, mentioned, with

reference to the opera, whose title is in fact not quoted at all in this passage. I would therefore prefer to translate Snezhimochka as ‘Snowflake’ in analogy with the translation of the existing Russian word ‘snezhinka’ on which Snezhimochka is based.

²⁴ As Khlebnikov in his letters mentions the piece with the title “Snezhimochka”, in his edition of the poet’s unpublished texts Khardzhiev used this title with the subtitle “Rozhdestvenskaya skazka” (A Christmas tale) (NP: 394, SS 4: 368).

²⁵ Lanne comments that the whole value of the correction lies in the crossing out of the word “podrazhanie” (imitation): “Khlebnikov avait senti que sa pièce était bien autre chose qu’une banale imitation de *Sneguročka* d’Ostrovskij, même si initialement elle avait été conçue comm un ‘à la manière de’. La ‘manière’ d’un auteur transforme toujours la ‘matière qui’il choisit (cette ‘matière’ n’étant bien souvent que la ‘manière’ d’un autre auteur).”(Lanne 1983: 193).

²⁶ The reasons for her melting can be different. In some tales, with her girl-friends she takes part in the Iarilo celebrations jumping over an open fire and thus melts (Afanas’ev 1868: 640-641). In others she does not manage to hide from the sun’s hot rays and melts away.

²⁷ In the later development of the figure of Snegurochka in Russian nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture, she becomes Ded Moroz’s granddaughter and helper during the New Year celebrations and there is no mention of an affair between Ded Moroz and Vesna-Krasna (Dushechkina 2002).

²⁸ “Таи любовь от глаз Ярила-Солнца, / Спеши домой немедля, не любуйся / Багряными потоками рассвета,- / Вершины гор покрылись позолотой,

/ И скоро царь светил осветит землю.” (Ostrovsky 1989: 196). “Conceal your love from Iarilo-the Sun’s eyes, / Hasten home immediately, do not look at / the crimson streams of dawn, / The tops of the mountains are covered with gold, / and soon the king of the stars will light up the earth.”)

²⁹ Apart from Stanislavsky’s production in December 1900 (Stroevea 1973: 59-60), Ostrovsky’s *Snegurochka* was produced at the Moscow Malyi Theatre by A.P. Lensky with Tchaikovsky’s music and at the Aleksandrinskii in St Petersburg with Vera Komisarzhenskaia in the role of Snegurochka. There was also a production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera for the Moscow Private Opera.

³⁰ “В зиму 1879-80 года, я снова прочитал «Снегурочку» и точно прозрел на её удивительную красоту [...] Проявлявшееся понемногу во мне тяготение к древнему русскому обычаю и языческому пантеизму вспыхнуло теперь ярким пламенем. Не было для меня на свете лучшего сюжета, не было лучших поэтических образов, чем Снегурочка, Лель или Весна, не было лучше царства берендеев с их чудным царём, не было лучше мирозерцания и религии, чем поклонение Яриле-Солнцу” (Rimsky-Korsakov 1980: 173). (“During the winter of 1879-80, when I re-read *Snyegoorochka*, its wonderful, poetic had become apparent to me. [...] My warmth towards ancient Russian custom and pagan pantheism, which had manifested itself little by little, now blazed forth in a bright flame. There was no better theme in the world for me, there were no finer poetic figures for me than *Snyegoorochka*, Lyel’ or Vyesna (Spring); there was no better kingdom than the kingdom of the Byeryendyeys with their wonderful ruler; there was no better view of world and religion than the worship of Yarilo-Sun.”) (Rimsky-Korsakov 1923: 193).

³¹ It is true that towards the end of the 1880s the opera disappeared from the repertoire of the Mariinskii theatre for a few years. For a detailed analysis of the first production of the opera at the Mariinskii theatre and of the following productions in St Petersburg, see Bakanova 2016.

³² They were created in 1882 for a Christmas home production of Ostrovsky's play. Vasnetsov played the role of Grandfather Frost and Savva Mamontov Tsar Berendei. In 1898 the Private Opera took *Snegurochka* to St Petersburg where it was received enthusiastically. The same year in December at the Mariinskii theatre there was a sumptuous but tasteless production of the opera in the spirit of the pseudo-Russian style. In spite of its apparent defects, this production was repeated in 1905 (Bakanova 2016: 27-47).

³³ A word that is no less Slavic than the one it replaces (Janecek 1996: 143).

³⁴ In the play we find other theatre-related neologisms: “И мучоба / Входит в звучобу,” (SS 4: 165) “and sufferance / turns to soundance” (CW II: 158). See Khlebnikov's letter to Kruchenykh with the dictionary of theatrical neologisms quoted above (SS 4: 155).

³⁵ Translated as “Snowleens, Laffones, Dumbettes, Blindettes” in CW II: 157.

³⁶ “мудрость языка, который мудр потому, что сам был частью природы.” (“the full wisdom of language— which is wise because it was itself a part of nature”, CW I: 279) These are the words the Disciple uses in the philosophical dialogue *Uchitel' i uchenik* (Master and Disciple), published in Kherson in 1912 (SS 6.1: 35).

³⁷ In the play Rimsky-Korsakov's name is explicitly quoted twice in the second act and a number of times indirectly, for example by alluding to the performances of the opera in the People's House in the second 'deimo' (SS 4: 170, 372; CW II: 164).

³⁸ The fact that the opera had been staged in Paris in May 1908, shortly before the composer's death a month later (21 June 1908) might have influenced Khlebnikov's choice of this subject.

³⁹ From "Introduction to the Plays" (CW II: 156).

⁴⁰ He did, however, give Remizov his play to read, as we have seen above.

⁴¹ See footnote 23.

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Abbreviations used

CW *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*

NP *Neizdannye Proizvedeniia*

T *Tvoreniia*

SP *Sobranie Proizvedenii*

SS *Sobranie Sočinenii v shesti tomakh*

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