

VELIMIR KHLEBNIKOV

1922–2022

One Hundred Years of a Myth

edited by

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Velimir Khlebnikov 1922-2022. One Hundred Years of a Myth

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Luca Cortesi

VELIMIR KHLEBNIKOV 1922-2022

One Hundred Years of a Myth

This volume collects the proceedings of the International Conference *Velimir Khlebnikov 1922-2022: One Hundred Years of a Myth*, held on October 28th, 2022, at the Alma Mater University of Bologna, Italy, an event dedicated to commemorating the centenary of the death of Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922). The conference's theme was not only a reflection on the life and work of this great Russian author, but also an exploration of the enduring myth that has grown around the poet from during his lifetime, a myth that has continued to shape and influence literary and cultural discourse well beyond his passing.

This volume contains some of the papers from the conference in revised form, as well as new contributions. These are 14 selected papers, which exemplify the richness and diversity of scholarly engagement with Khlebnikov, casting new light on the poet's oeuvre and the evolving legacy that has captivated readers, critics, and scholars for a century. In addition to the academic and research work, thus enriching this publication, are two distinctive contributions that highlight the symbolic and evocative impact of the reception of Khlebnikov's work. It is for this reason that such contributions have been placed at the beginning of the volume. They embody the perspectives of individuals connected to the art world,

yet external to the academic sphere, almost as a reminder to us—scholars and admirers of this great author—that coming to life beyond the written page, his works become truly accessible even to non-specialists.

The Myth of Khlebnikov in the Artist's Eyes

The first contribution, *Bobebobi, bobeteo*, dedicated to the *ptichii yazyk* (language of birds), is by Vera Miturich-Khlebnikova, the granddaughter of the poet's sister Vera. It offers a compelling perspective on how Khlebnikov interpreted the “voices” of birds and how he transcribed them into his *zvukopis'* [sound writing].

In the second contribution, *Zapisi khudozhnika. 1911 god* [An Artist's notes from 1911], Stepan Botiev, a Kalmyk artist and poet, dwells on key events that took place in 1911, a crucial year in Russian cultural and artistic life, and how these were not only reflected in the development of Khlebnikov's aesthetics, but also fostered a dialogue between literature and different domains of art, such as the figurative and music spheres.

Shaping the Myth of Velimir Khlebnikov

Central to the theme of the conference was the exploration of how the reception of Khlebnikov's works contributed to the creation of a myth—a myth that has continued to evolve and adapt over the past century. The notion of myth in this context refers not merely to the biographical or “hagiographical” narratives that have surrounded the poet but also to the symbolic and cultural significance that Khlebnikov has come to embody. This mythologization is evident in the way Khlebnikov's work has been appropriated, interpreted, and reinterpreted across different contexts and epochs.

The second section of this volume addresses one of these key questions: how Khlebnikov's work has been instrumental in shaping

different perspectives on literary cultural memory that transcends the poet's historical moment. The papers collected here explore various dimensions of this process, from the critical reception of Khlebnikov's writings in different cultural contexts to the ways in which the poet's themes have been taken up by subsequent generations of writers and thinkers. These studies reveal the complexities involved in the construction of literary myth, demonstrating how Khlebnikov has come to represent not only the particularities of a specific historical period but also more universal themes that continue to resonate today.

Gabriella Imposti's article, *Notes on the Beginning of the Myth of Khlebnikov in Italy*, deals with the rise of the myth of Khlebnikov in Italy. The author starts from the considerations that the Italian Futurist press devoted to the famous prediction on the collapse of an empire in 1917, where it emerges that this prophecy was seen as addressed to the German Empire. In retrospect, this is particularly significant, given the anti-German sentiments of the early Khlebnikov. It is in this period that the beginning of the myth of Khlebnikov in Italy can be placed, a myth that would, however, remain somewhat 'forgotten' until famous scholars such as Lo Gatto first, Poggioli and Ripellino later, revived it and brought it to the attention of the cultivated Italian reader. This culminated in the translation of Khlebnikov's poems and in an essay on the poet, his character and his poetics, published by Ripellino in 1968. This edition profoundly conditioned the reception of Khlebnikov's *oeuvre* and contributed to the formation of a myth that persists in Italy today.

Sergei Biryukov's contribution, *Zhivoe nasledie Khlebnikova* [Khlebnikov's Living Legacy], takes on a different angle to tackle a similar question. It explores how Khlebnikov influenced successive generations of Russian poets, in this way showing how his *oeuvre* continues to live on, thus acquiring a kind of immortality.

This same line of reasoning is continued in Ol'ga Egorova's article, *Khlebnikovedenie. Razmyshleniia ob istorii i o budushchem v god 100-letiiia bessmertiiia poeta* [Khlebnikov Studies: Reflecting on Their History and Future in the Centenary of the Poet's Immortality], in which the current state and future perspectives of Khlebnikov studies are discussed. It highlights various events and online resources dedicated to the poet and introduces a project by the author: an unconventional album marking three anniversaries—Khlebnikov's 130th birthday, Gennady Glinin's 75th birthday, and the 30th anniversary of the International Khlebnikov Readings in Astrakhan.

The International Khlebnikov Readings (*Mezhdunarodnye Khlebnikovskie chteniia*) in Astrakhan, a key initiative to honor Velimir Khlebnikov, were first organized on the suggestion of A.E. Parnis, a world-renowned Khlebnikov scholar. Ol'ga Kuzovleva's paper, *Pis'ma A.E. Parnisa k N.S. Travushkinu. 1970-1984 gg.* [A.E. Parnis's letters to N.S. Travushkin, 1970-1984], illustrates how Parnis, through over a decade of correspondence with Professor N.S. Travushkin of the Astrakhan Pedagogical Institute, played a pivotal role in reviving interest in Khlebnikov. Parnis also campaigned for a memorial plaque at Khlebnikov's former home and worked to promote his legacy through local publications. His research uncovered several of Khlebnikov's texts, identified the poet's true birthplace, and reestablished connections with Khlebnikov's descendants.

Velimir Khlebnikov: life, work, relevance, and interpretation

Velimir Khlebnikov occupies a unique and pivotal place in the literary context, not merely as a figure of historical significance but as a writer whose work transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. Born into a period of profound socio-political and

cultural transformation, Khlebnikov witnessed and engaged with the forces of scientific development, social change, and nationalism that characterized late 19th- and early 20th-century Russia. These themes are intricately woven into his *oeuvre*, reflecting a consciousness that was deeply attuned to the tensions and paradoxes of his time.

The enduring relevance of Khlebnikov's work is another focal point of this volume. In examining the continuing influence of the poet, the conference participants moved within different theoretical frameworks, in this way opening new avenues for the understanding of Khlebnikov's work.

Aleksandr Parnis's contribution, *Khlebnikov: the 1908 Sudak Encounters. Meeting Vyacheslav Ivanov: the Beginning of a Dialogue*, opens the third section of the volume. The paper explores the significance of a hidden hint to the beginning of the relationship between Khlebnikov and Vyacheslav Ivanov.

Vera Terëkhina's essay, *Velimir Khlebnikov i Pushkin-budetlyanin* [Velimir Khlebnikov and Pushkin-Futurian] explores Khlebnikov's role in shaping Russian Futurist thought through the recognition of tradition and Pushkin's literary influence, casting light on the way in which the conflict between rejecting tradition and acknowledging its influence led the "Futurians" to reinterpret classical poetry.

Andrei Rossomakhin's article, *Leonardo i Velimir. Renassansnyi tvorets kak "khudozhnik-dlya-proizvoditelya". Predvaritel'nye nabliudeniya* [Leonardo and Velimir: The Renaissance Creator as an "Artist for Producers". Preliminary Observations] draws parallels between the works and lives of Leonardo da Vinci and Velimir Khlebnikov, both of whom blended scientific and artistic methods in their creations and considered themselves inventors. Each can be described as "an artist for theorists" and "a poet for creators" Both

figures have become legendary, with complex idiostyles that share formal similarities, earning them the title of *homo universalis*.

Ol'ga Sokolova's contribution *Experiments with Universal Language from the 1910s to the 1930s: Velimir Khlebnikov, the Gordin Brothers, and the "Kosmoglot" Society* addresses the fundamental question of language. Exploring the concept of "universal language" both in linguistics and the poetic Avant-garde from the 1910s to the 1930s, the paper demonstrates that linguistic experimentation was central to both scholars and poets during this period, when socio-political reforms introduced new realities and concepts, demanding an updated vocabulary. Driven by hopes of world revolution, linguists and poets alike developed universal languages. Notable examples include Khlebnikov's *zvezdnyi yazyk* (language of the stars) and the Gordin brothers' experiments, which expanded on Khlebnikov's ideas.

Guido Carpi's paper, *Kak sdelana zaum' Khlebnikova* [How Khlebnikov's Zaum Is Made], continues the investigation in the field of language experimentalism, by assessing the effectiveness of hermeneutical principles developed by Maksim Shapir and others in analyzing Velimir Khlebnikov's *zaum'* (transrational language).

Elena Petrushanskaya's article, *Ot idei mirovogo radio u Khlebnikova – v budushchee* [From Khlebnikov's Idea of a Global Radio... To the Future], offers a fresh perspective on the utopia that Khlebnikov envisioned in his manifesto *Radio of the Future* (1921). The Russian poet imagined a world connected by the *samoglas*—a divine, unifying image symbolizing a global network of human spirit. The author examines Khlebnikov's framework, from his early vision of a world information web and spiritual unity to the ongoing "radio theme" in Russian literature.

Luca Cortesi's article, *Antichnost' v avangarde: o dialogakh V. Khlebnikova* [Antiquity in The Avant-Garde: Khlebnikov's Dialogues], analyzes Khlebnikov's essays in dialogue form, most of

which have received limited scholarly attention, and aims to bring these lesser-known texts into focus, revealing their remarkable depth.

Ronald Vroon's contribution, *Khlebnikov and Whitman. A Reappraisal*, demonstrates that Walt Whitman's influence on Velimir Khlebnikov is widely acknowledged but often oversimplified, partly due to Kornei Chukovskii's claim that Khlebnikov's early poem *Zverinets* parodies Whitman. Although Khlebnikov later praised Whitman, he denied any influence on his pre-revolutionary poetry. This study closely examines key paratexts in Chukovskii's Whitman translations, particularly the edition Khlebnikov reportedly owned in 1921–1922, to explore how these paratexts may have shaped his view of the American poet.

The papers included in this volume provide a comprehensive and multifaceted examination of Velimir Khlebnikov's work and legacy. They illustrate the richness of his *oeuvre*, the complexity of the myth that has grown around the poet, and the ongoing relevance of Khlebnikov's work in contemporary literature and literary studies. Through their diverse methodologies and perspectives, these contributions offer new insights into the ways in which Khlebnikov has been received, interpreted, and reimagined over the past century.

As we commemorate the centenary of Velimir Khlebnikov's death, this volume serves as both a tribute to the author's enduring influence and a testament to the vitality of *khlebnikovedenie* [Khlebnikov Studies]. The editors hope that the papers collected here will inspire further research and discussion, encouraging new generations of scholars to engage in Khlebnikov's work and to explore the rich possibilities that it offers for understanding both the past and the present literary and cultural milieu.

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