

## DCCD 2020

### Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

# DIALOGUE OF CULTURES AND ITS NATIONAL DOMINANTS IN THE STYLE OF V. KHLEBNIKOV

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### *Abstract*

Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) aimed at understanding and integration of world culture riches to find new synthesis that involves solving key issues of mankind history, culture and its future. In his works of fiction, articles on various subjects, mathematical calculations, he sought to combine in a new mythology and a single "star language" theory pantheons, symbols, creativity of peoples living on different continents, representing different civilizations, in general – all humanity. This was especially evident in a number of his works and articles of the late 1910s and early 1920s: "Tuda, tuda...", "Azy iz uzy. Edinaya kniga", "Zangezi", "Nasha osnova", etc. On the other hand, "worldliness", increased in the last period of his work, focus on dialogue of cultures and their new synthesis were accompanied by other processes in the writer's creativity and outlook. The picture of the united humanity conceivable by him was actually based on the discoveries of Russian culture, on the dominant cultural style of Russian Silver Age, and the world language was based on the Russian language and literature, including his own creative work. The worldliness, or "tendency to world-wide responsiveness" (F. Dostoevsky) of Khlebnikov was accompanied by strengthening of his creative thinking national orientation, which is found not in the sloganistic nationalist-chauvinist way, as in some of his early articles, but in sacrifice and a deep involvement in the fate of the Fatherland.

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## 1. Introduction

Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) was a member of Budetlyane (one of the first futurism groups), "King of Time", one of the main poets of the Russian Silver Age, a writer, thinker, futurist (in his own words), "a warrior of the kingdom that did not appear". All his exceptionally intense creative life he worked to achieve new opportunities for humanity, for the sake of finding unity, which is not possible without dialogue of cultures implementation as well as their synthesis, that was directly or indirectly included into many of his works and articles. This area of Khlebnikov's active creative work manifests Western European traditions and "universal sympathy tendency" of the Russian people, as Dostoevsky (1984) mentioned in his "Pushkin speech" (p. 136). Khlebnikov also strived for comprehensive, primarily literary synthesis as the most important cultural trait of Russia's Silver Age, that is pointed out in the works by Mineralova (2004). In his search for synthesis V. Khlebnikov was independent and original, although in his early period he was obviously influenced by the ideas of V. Ivanov, one of the largest theorists of arts and dialogue of cultures synthesis, who productively addressed antiquity style in his works.

## 2. Problem Statement

V. Khlebnikov, a "citizen of the world", tried to invent a universal world "star" language, common to all the peoples of the Earth, regardless of traditions and cultural characteristics of a particular country. Sokolova (2019) highlights that "this 'universalization' most consistently manifested itself in the search for a 'universal' language in the texts of Khlebnikov, Joyce and Jolas, and was characterized by interlanguage synthesis" (p. 256). By doing this, as researchers of his work pointed out, he followed rationalistic philosophy tradition, in particular Descartes, although there were other milestones. In the policy article "Nasha osnova" ("Our basis") Khlebnikov (2006) wrote: *Esli b okazalos', chto zakony prostyh tel azbuki odinakovy dlya sem'i yazykov, to dlya vsej etoj sem'i narodov mozjno bylo by postroit' novyj mirovoj yazyk – poezd s zerkalami slov Moskva – New York* ("If it turned out that the laws of simple alphabet bodies were the same for a linguistic family, then a new world language could be invented for the entire family of peoples – a train with words mirrors Moscow – New York") (p. 168). However, Khlebnikov (2006) aimed at creating a unity of humankind cultural field and improving mutual understanding between people and nations. That's why he suggested constructing world language not rationally, abstractly, conventionally, as philosophers and linguists did, but in a different way, carefully observing the "everyday" language.

In the poem "Tuda, tuda" ("There, there...") that is said to be most distinctive in terms of dialogue of cultures and forms of its implementation in Khlebnikov's style (Vasilev, 2015), according to manuscripts dating back to May 9, 1919, the poet appealed to utopia inherent in futurism (Potts, 2018), and created conversation between gods of different civilizations: Japanese, Chinese, Estonian, Indian, Native American, African, Norse, Semitic, Ancient European and others. This conversation constitutes a single "peaceful" as well as plot image, some sort of new mythology project: *Tuda, tuda, gde Izanagi / Chitala "Monogatori" Perunu, / A Erot sel na koleni k Shang-Ti, / I sedoj hohol na lysoj golove / Boga pohodit na sneg, / Gde Amur tseluet Maa-Emu, / A Tien beseduet s Indroj, / Gde Yunona s Tsintekuatlem / Smotryat Korreddzhio / I voshistcheny Myril'o, / Gde Unkulunkulu i Tor / Igrayut mirno v shashki, / Oblokotyas' na ruku, / I Hokkusaem voshischena / Astarta, - tuda, tuda!* ("There, there, where Izanagi / Read "Monogatori"

to Perun, / And Eros sat on the lap of Shang-Ti, / And a gray toupee on the bald head of / God is like snow,  
/ Where Cupid kisses Maa-Emu / And Tien talks with Indra, Where Juno with Centeritem / Watch  
Correggio / And admire Murillo, Where Unkulunkulu and Thor / peacefully play checkers / Leaning on a  
hand, / And Hokusai admire / Astarte, – there, there!") (Khlebnikov, 2001, p. 51).

Arenzon and Duganov (2001) (the authors of notes to vol. 2 of the poet's collected works) pointed out that "the picture of a peaceful gods' assembly of different times and peoples... " (p. 512) can be compared with the satirical work by the ancient author Lucian "Dialogues of Gods" and with the poem "Religii" ("Religions") by Verhaeren (1961) from the book "Bujnye sily" ("Tumultuous Forces"). For example, with this passage: *Tam dlya Hrista Vulkan o nakoval'nyu b'yot / Moguchim molotom. Dovol'ny Satanoju / I Yagve i Ammon. Sdruzhilis' mezh soboju / Privratniki nebes – apostol Pyotr i Tot* ("There for Christ the volcano strikes the anvil / with a mighty hammer. Happy with Satan / are Yahweh and Ammon. Became friends with each other / Gatekeepers of heaven – the Apostle Peter and the Other". The image *Tuda, tuda* ("There, there...") that frames this poem is also distinctive. This "replay of the song of minions ("Dahin, dahin...") in Goethe's novel "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship" (vol. 3, ch. 1). According to F. Tyutchev who translated the song of minions, repetition turned into a "literary saying"; in the Russian poetic tradition it means the author wants "something that is vague and far away" (see, for example, in A. Maikov's poem "Alpine Glaciers" (1858): *Tam, znayu, uzhas obitaet, i net lyudskogo tam sleda. – No serdtse tochno otvechaet na chej-to zov: Tuda! Tuda!* ("There, I know, terror dwells, and there is no human trace. – But the heart is definitely responding to someone's call: "There! There!") (Arenzon & Duganov, 2001, p. 512). However, Khlebnikov's image is alien to both satirical dominant inherent in a number of works by Lucian about Olympic gods and symbolist-decadent touch of Verhaeren's image, "reconciling", and as if putting God (Yahweh) and Satan on the same level. Khlebnikov subtly and tactfully avoids biblical theme in creating this image, although in other works allusions to the Holy Scripture, the Orthodox calendar and Christian culture in general are abundantly present (Pavlovsky, 2019; Ryzhakov, 2019). W. Weststeijn, who wrote about perception of Khlebnikov's work by Aiga, underlined: "In the free verse of Khlebnikov, Majakovskij and Elena Guro Ajga hears the echo of Old Russian legends and the orthodox liturgy. Echoes of the orthodox liturgy we may also hear in Ajga's poems, particularly when he makes one sound – generally the "a" – the image-symbol of an entire poem» (Weststeijn, 2016, p. 11).

### 3. Research Questions

Universal semantic plans of dialogue of cultures literary realization and Khlebnikov's synthetic linguophilosophical theory require further study. There are a number of questions that have already been discussed to some extent in scientific sources, for example, the links nature between futurism and the Baroque culture (Cecchini, 2019), and those that were not previously mentioned by scholars. They tackle the features of the poet's artistically expressed worldview, specifically (according to Sakulin's terminology (1990)) characteristic features of his style, place and role of cultural synthesis focus, as well as extent to which emphasis on the "worldliness" and universality of the poet's figurative language, his theoretically modeled "star language" are rooted in the national culture. This conclusion about the national essence of Khlebnikov's creativity was made by Uspenskii on the material of B. Livshits's memoir "One and a Half-Eyed Sagittarius": "Only a real Creator, vital and primordial, natural in its manifestations, can live

according to the laws created by him. He may be incomprehensible to society because he violates accepted social norms, but whether people know it or not, he enriches the literary language and is, by his nature, a national poet. This is V. Khlebnikov" (Uspenkii, 2016, p. 91).

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

To clarify the features implemented in the style of Khlebnikov's dialogue of cultures and its role in the formation of a national tradition as the most visual imagery and declarative outline of the dialogue and associated synthesis (the poem "Tuda, tuda" ("There, There...")), as well as linguophilosophical one, which has the same literary component, it is essential to refer to wider context of his creative work, more specifically, to some works in which the poet planned to include the quoted one – the poems "Azy iz uzy" ("The Basics from Bonds") and "Ladimir". It is important to find out to what extent and in what aspects Khlebnikov relies on national culture traditions in the field of language, art, and religion when creating a dialogue of cultures literary image, forming a single humanity myth and its basis in the form of linguophilosophical constructions.

#### 5. Research Methods

The article relies on the following methods: comparative historical, typological, semantic-stylistic. Sakulin (1990) in his fundamental works on theoretical history of literature established its synthetic construction, which is centered on the work and the author, and one of the most important tasks is to create a scientific history of styles. The scholar paid special attention to the content aspects of the work, the study of form style and its wide connections with cultural environment and epoch style.

#### 6. Findings

##### 6.1. Poem ("superpoem") "Azy iz uzy" ("The Basics from Bonds")

The poem "Tuda, tuda" ("There, there...") contains the most clear and succinct Khlebnikov's dialogue image – unity of cultures. It is included into the poem, or, according to another description, "superpoem" (genre created by the author) titled "Azy iz uzy" ("The Basics from Bonds"). The title of the poem is symbolic and means "a liberated person": Az – I, person, and also the abbreviated name of Asia; uzy (bond) – manacles, lack of freedom. The poem opens with the section "Edinaya kniga" ("The United Book"), which contains a list of the world great rivers located on different continents and the poet, connecting them and people living on them in a single whole. The work ends with a small fragment "Zaklinanie mnozhestvennym chislom" ("Spell Plural"), containing a roll call with the climactic part: "Vpered, shary zemnye!" ("Forward, the balls of earth!") (Khlebnikov, 2002, p. 287), cf.: "Tuda, tuda" ("There, there..."). The lyric hero is not a cosmopolitan who doesn't care where he is or where his home is. He painfully experiences the fate of Asia, his native continent: "O, Aziya! Sebya toboju muchu" ("Oh, Asia! I torment myself with you") (Khlebnikov, 2002, p. 286). And the synthesis of microcosm – man and macrocosm – nature, universe is realized in the Slavic and Russian contexts, in the spaces of Russia, by enumerating its main rivers – European and Asian: "Ya, volosatyy rekami ... / Smotrite! Dunaj techyot u menya po plecham / I – vihor' svoevol'nyj – porogami sineet Dnepr. / Eto Volga upala mne na ruki, / I

*greben' v ruke – zaborom gor / Cheshet volosy. A etot volos dlinnyj – Beru ego pal'tsami – Amur, gde yaponka molitsya nebu, / Ruki slozhiv vo vremya grozy*” “I, hairy with rivers... / Look! *The Danube* flows over my shoulders / And – a self-willed whirlwind – *the Dnieper* turns blue with rapids. / This is *the Volga* that fell into my hands, / and a comb in my hand – the fence of the mountains / Scratches my hair. And this hair is long – I take it with my fingers – *the Amur*, where a Japanese woman prays to the sky, / Hands folded during a thunderstorm” (Khlebnikov, 2002, p. 278). The Danube and the Dnieper are possible allusions to “Tale of Igor’s Campaign”, both names are found in translations and transcriptions of the famous “Yaroslavna’s Lament”.

## **6.2. The Poem "Ladomir"**

### **6.2.1. Mystery**

One of the absolute peaks of Khlebnikov's creativity is the poem “Ladomir” (1920, 1922) in its first full version. The poet, according to some sources, returned to it later, and it also included the poem given at the beginning of the article. The new figurative and stylistic context, typical of futurism (Ialongo, 2016), depiction of the First World War and revolutions events, could not but affect his perception and literary functions. Thus, the poem, based on national historical material, dedicated to revolutionary events of 1917 description and their great and tragic continuation, has the features of a mystery – a genre and a semantic phenomenon, one of the dominant cultural styles of the Silver Age. The poem shows three mystery worlds and the lyric hero's alter ego ascent-descent into them, endowed with “a prophet and a seer” features.

### **6.2.2. Spellcasting**

Mystery is closely intertwined with magicalness (Ioffe et al., 2017) similarly to a spell undertaken by the poet with stylizing special formulas. One of the spells forces the recipient to become an active conjuring party: “*Nesi v ruke gremuchij poroh - / Zovi dvorets vzletet' na vozduh*” (“Carry the rattling powder in your hand – / Make the palace blow up”) (Khlebnikov, 2003, p. 234). The process of fulfilling the requirement *nesi gremuchij poroh* (“carry the rattlesnake”) (“carry” here is a metonymy) should make “the palace blow up”. However, the most powerful weapon is the conjuring word. In this context, the already quoted “Tuda, tuda” (“There, there...”) changes its meaning. This is not a literary dream and “not an urge to reach “the obscure faraway””, but the spell formula, implementation of cosmic mysteries, a radical renewal of humanity, of the heavenly world – the world of unified mythology (Grübel, 2019) and a single supertemporal world culture. Penskaya (2019) stated that “the energy of space, without exception, is carried by all Khlebnikov's gestures that are fixed in the word” (p. 167). Even a fable for him is “a way of connecting times” (Ternova, 2018, p. 129). The poet-theurgist needs an object to influence, mystery is designed to involve the entire universe in a common action, including “human-animal interaction” (Mondry, 2017, p. 17).

### **6.2.3. National style**

The central image of the heavenly world is Freedom Unfading (Svoboda Neuvyada). Neuvyada (Unfading) is a word with a living internal form, rooted in popular culture and in Orthodoxy that defined Russian national style. Its semantics, related to flower name of the unfading, immortelle, describes the

denial of withering, i.e., exhaustion, death. The image of Neuvyada is also linked to Mary, the mother of Jesus, whom the Church calls the Ever-Virgin; “The Unfading Color” is the name of one of the icons depicting her. The Neuvyada Freedom movement is one of manifestations of the “smart fire” that captures foundations of the universe – another key symbol of the poem (Vasiliev, 2015): “*Svoboda idyot Neuvyada / Pozharom vselesnoj dushi*” (“Freedom comes Neuvyada / Fire of the universal soul”) (Khlebnikov, 2003, p. 243). The word *smart* (umny) in the poem is clearly ambiguous, it occurs repeatedly in various combinations: “smart tunes”, “smart fire”, “smart mane”, “there is no glow smarter”, “country of mind”, “smart ear of rye”, also – “*Umejtem luchshie umy, / Namordniki odet' na mordy*” (“be able (umejte), the best minds (umi), / to put muzzles on the seas”) (Khlebnikov, 2003, p. 243). This image is also associated with the Orthodox tradition (cf.: “smart doing”, etc.).

### **6.3. Dramatic poem “The Gods”(“Bogi”)**

#### **6.3.1. “Lost” paradise**

The poem “Tuda, tuda” (“There, there...”) is prefixed to this later dramatic work (1921) as an epigraph. According to Gasparov (2000), the play echoes the philosophical drama of G. Flaubert “The Temptation of Saint Anthony”, “in which a string of gods passes – also emphatically international, dying one after another, because their age is over; the setting of this Olympic scene (a mountain, above it another mountain) and remarks describing the appearance and actions of the gods in long lists, closely resemble the style of Khlebnikov's exposition in “The Gods” and the scene in the corresponding to plane II of “Zangezi” (p. 291). But if the protagonist of Flaubert's plays is terrified with ancient deities cults cruelty, Khlebnikov's emotional-semantic background images are different: different cultures and civilizations gods as a whole live in peace, although the play ends with the murder of a known “troublemaker” – the God of trickery and deception in Norse mythology Loki of Baldur (Baldr), the God of spring and light that sharply dramatizes the plot, previously close to idyll. This changes the opening “There, there...” meaning. It seemed as if the doors of a new Paradise opened – universal agreement of cultures, unification of pantheons, transformation of humanity. However, in this new Paradise, though illusory, a new fall from grace was fatally committed, with apparently disastrous consequences for this “Paradise”. This final culmination contains a deep philosophical thought, perhaps fundamentally correcting Khlebnikov's favorite idea of a unified humanity. Gasparov (2000), having called two other dialogues of Lucian – “Council of Gods” and “Tragic Zeus” (the latter in this context is particularly characteristic), which, in his opinion, were Khlebnikov's plays basis, concluded that Velimir Khlebnikov “portrays for himself and the reader <...> one of the constant themes of world mythology – gods death...” (p. 293).

### **6.4. National folklore tradition**

#### **6.4.1. Genre of riddles**

This idyllic and tragic figurative picture is embodied by V. Khlebnikov individually, as M. Gasparov (2000) believes “in the form of a gigantic counting machine” (p. 293): “in the behavior of the gods in Khlebnikov's play, one can find similarities to all stages of counting. When counting, players stand in a row or in a circle, each in their own place; the teller begins to go around, chanting a counting rhyme on a syllable or a word for each; the last “get out” falls on someone (or “buck”, or “crunch”, etc.), and they

leave the circle; the count continues, the circle gradually narrows, until the last one remains – the one to be the next teller” (Gasparov, 2000, p. 292).

#### **6.4.2. “Zaumny (abstruse) language” and popular black magic**

On the other hand, the so-called “*zaumny (abstruse)* language” used in the play goes back to the national folklore tradition – popular black magic (this observation was made by Y. Mineralova). “Zaum” in this context is quite logical to associate, for example, with Sabbath witches songs or mermaids’ magic song, the texts of which are given in the collection of I. Sakharov (Sakharov, 1991, pp. 175-179).

#### **6.5. "Star language" and inner form**

Abstract universal language, designed to unite people, representatives of different peoples, and to realize the dialogue and unity of cultures, must be most “purified” from national languages influence. However, it was the Russian language that became the basis of V. Khlebnikov's theory of the universal, “star” language. In fact, the poet finds in this language signs a special image, inner form, that is something typical of natural, traditional, and national languages. According to Khlebnikov (2000-2006), thought direction contains “sound-substances” meaning (p. 167). The expression “path for fate” (in the word) takes on a very definite meaning: it also “directs thought”, but according to the laws of “imaginary” “star” language. The meaning of a word consists of “sound-substances” meanings that make it up, and “words started with the same consonant are united by the same concept and seem to fly from different sides to the same point of the mind” (Khlebnikov, 2000-2006, p. 174). In other words, V. Khlebnikov creates a special poetic etymology for sounds and sound combinations (words that begin with certain sounds), which, generally speaking, is quite common for literary, especially poetic, texts. This means that “star language” and “star twilight” objectively reflect semantics facts of poetic speech, or rather, semantic relationship of repeated sounds and sound complexes. This is exactly the effect that the poet hoped for when convincing the reader of his discoveries. His experience was comparable to searches and discoveries of V. V. Mayakovsky (Lahti, 2014). Such ideas were reflected in various ways in V. Khlebnikov's poetic practice (“Vystrel iz P”, “Mladenets – materi muka, mol’...”, “Na lyzhu vremeni...” – “A Shot from P”, “Baby-mother flour, moth...”, “On the skis of time...” and many others). One of the most illustrative examples is the poem “El’ (L)” (late 1921 – early 1922, the original version – “The Word about El’ (L)”), where the abstract, established by empirical “research”, “meaning” of the sound /l/ (л) (in particular, as one spatial picture elements of the world – the article “Our Basis”) is subjected to a similar semantic component in the principle of an infinite number of words beginning with /l/.

## **7. Conclusion**

So, V. Khlebnikov was one of the most prominent representatives of the Russian Silver Age, a writer and thinker whose work was of a synthetic nature and solved not only, and sometimes not so much literary tasks, but other – philosophical, historiosophical, worldview problems in various periods of his activity. He paid special attention to cultural dialogue issues, formation of a new mythology associated with it, and a special, aimed at removing national differences, “star language”. One of his most characteristic works on this subject was the poem of 1919 “Tuda, tuda” (“There, there...”) with its main motif going back to I. V.

Goethe and receiving a reinterpretation in Russian poetry of the XIX century. This text, containing a vivid image of different cultures and civilizations gods conversation, apparently the result of rethinking satirical dramatic works by Lucian, of Verhaeren's poems, and possibly other sources, aims at creating a universal, unified mythology for the whole world. Creation "The United Book" of humanity represents the result and at the same time a program of dialogue of cultures. No matter how abstract ideas and images of this kind may be, their detailed analysis shows a significant, and often key role of a national culture in their creation that needs overcoming in favor of unity and dialogue. The poem "Tuda, tuda" ("There, there..."), integrated into the poem "The Basis from the Bonds", is placed in the Slavic and primarily Russian context through microcosm and macrocosm synthesis in the image of a lyric hero, as if holding the great Russian (European and Asian) rivers. The poem "Ladomir", one of poet's most studied works, which also included "Tuda, Tuda" ("There, there"), bears epoch cultural style imprint at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries with its settings for literary synthesis and mystery stylization. In this context, the utopia poem acquires new stylistic features: semantically not too definite aspiration to the dream is replaced by a spell-like beginning, an image of a magical action to transform the universe, the source and instrument of which was thought to be the Russian revolution. The dramatic poem "Gods", which most consistently applied "gods language", or in V. Khlebnikov's case – abstruse language (*zaumnyy*), the universal language basis, by the genre itself refers to popular culture. According to M. Gasparov, it represents "a gigantic riddle", and from the point of view of literary speech, as highlighted by Y. Mineralova, is associated with the folk warlock. Finally, Khlebnikov's "star language", which at first glance is extremely abstract and "in fact" implements a model of future mankind unity, is also largely based on Russian national culture traditions. Language and literature are characterized by repetitions of sound complexes, which in the context of the work receive a unique semantic reference close to the semantics of a separate "sound-substance", which was interpreted by the poet as world language basis. In one of his last poems "*Vshi tupo molilisya mne...*" ("Lice stupidly prayed to me...") (1921) V. Khlebnikov wrote: "*Moj belyj bozhestbennyj mozg / Ya otdal, Rossiya, tebe: / Bud' mnoyu, bud' Khlebnikovym. / Svai vbival v um naroda i osi, / Sdelal ya svajnyuj hatu / "My – budetlyane". / Vse eto delal, kak nitschij, / Kak vor, vsjudu proklyatyj lujd'mi*" ("My white divine brain / I gave, Russia, to you: / Be me, be Khlebnikov. / I drove piles into the mind of the people and the axis, / I made a pile hut / "We are budetlyans". / I did all this like a beggar, / like a thief, everywhere cursed by people") (Khlebnikov, 2001, p. 287). The lines that are amazing in their artistic power, reminding both of ancient lapidarity and persecuted poet-prophet image of Russian literature, show how aspiration to the future, which was undoubtedly associated by the poet with dialogue of cultures intensification, has clear national priorities –sacrificial service to the people, the country, and Russia.

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