Russianness in Aleksei Remizov's Early Writings

Magdalena Mot

Department of Russian and Slavic Studies

McGill University, Montreal

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Dedication

The main part of the present work is dedicated to my paternal grandmother, Evdokiia Nazarov, because she gave me the most precious gift I have ever received – her way of life. This thesis is also dedicated to my husband, Ovidiu Moţ. Without his tremendous love and support, I would never have had the opportunities that have made this project possible.

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A Note on Translation and Transliteration

The Russian words, titles and proper names appearing in the English main body of the text are transliterated according to the modified Library of Congress system, i.e. without the diacritics and ligatures required by the strict style. Exceptions are made when quoting directly from an English-language publication, preserving the system followed in the given article or book. Citations and source references, on the other hand, are given in the original Cyrillic. If not otherwise specified, translations from the Russian are mine.

Table of contents

"Я живу в другом мире и моя тоска и моя гореcть не ваши, я свободный от всяких пут – позволено или запрещено. И слышу, и это молотком стучит по голове: «не смей». И всю мою жизнь я буду слышать «не смей». Мне не сметь?"

Алексей Ремизов

[I live in another world, and my longing and my sorrow are not yours, I am free of all fetters – the permitted and the forbidden. And I hear, this is a hammer pounding on my head: «Don't you dare». And for as long as I live I shall hear «don't you dare». *I* should not dare?]

Aleksei Remizov

Abstract

This thesis examines three different collections from the early works of the Russian writer Aleksei Remizov (1887-1957): *Posolon'* (1907), *Leimonarion* (1907), and *Besnovatye: Savva Grudtsyn and Solomoniia* (1951). Each of them highlights a different approach taken by Remizov in preserving Russianness. In this analysis the concept of Russianness does not constitute a specific national or historical scheme. The reference is rather to a spiritual legacy, a condition of soul. *Posolon'* calls for the regaining of a lost cyclicity and looks back in time at the common folk's way of life. *Leimonarion* is one of the most expressive examples of the constant duality of Remizov's position on the dominant artistic and ideological ideas of the time; this collection looks at the old world through the new eyes of a modern era. "Savva Grudtsyn" and "Solomoniia" present a perpetual moral struggle, which pits the profanity of a secular world against the sacred values to which people ought to aspire.

The results of the study show that Remizov, using different themes and different literary genres, pursues one broad concern: Russianness. This theme permeates not only his literary language, but also the content of the works discussed here. In *Leimonarion* Russia is kept together by her people and their belief in salvation; in *Posolon'* Russia is all about folklore, joyful games, tales and rituals; in *Besnovatye* Russia is saved by the simplicity and purity of the *iurodivye*, the 'Holy fools.'

Résumé

Cette thèse présente une analyse de trois recueils du début de la carrière de l'écrivain russe Alexis Rémizov (1887-1957) : *Posolon'* (1907), *Leimonarion* (1907) et *Besnovatye: Savva Grudtsyn et Solomoniia* (1951), chacun mettant en évidence une manière propre à l'auteur de sauvegarder la russitude. Dans le cadre de cette analyse, la russitude n'est pas un paradigme national ou historique, mais plutôt un héritage spirituel, un état d'âme. *Posolon'* invite à la reconquête d'une cyclicité perdue et se retourne vers le mode de vie des gens ordinaires. *Leimonarion* est un exemple des plus éloquents de la dualité constante de la position de Rémizov dans l'espace artistique et idéologique de son temps; ce recueil jetant un regard sur l'ancien monde à travers les yeux de la modernité. « Savva Grudtsyn » et « Solomoniia » présentent l'incessant conflit moral qui oppose le caractère profane du monde laïc à des valeurs sacrées auxquelles les gens devraient aspirer.

La conclusion de cette étude met en évidence le fait que, tout en utilisant des thèmes et des genres littéraires divers, Rémizov a une seule visée : la russitude. Ce thème pénètre non seulement son écriture même, mais aussi le contenu des trois ouvrages analysés. Dans *Leimonarion*, l'unité de la Russie est assurée par son peuple et par sa foi en la délivrance; dans *Posolon'* la Russie est représentée par le folklore, la joie ludique, les contes et les rituels; dans *Besnovatye* la Russie est sauvée par la pureté des *iurodivyie*, les « fous saints ».

Chapter I

Remizov's *Posolon'* – Regaining A Lost Cyclicity

The idea that there are cycles of events in nature, in history, in micro- and macrocosms is old enough to seem axiomatic. Yet, cyclicity attracts the greatest interest when the phenomenon itself, the stability that underwrites it, seems in peril. Like many Russian modernists, Aleksei Remizov was preoccupied with this relationship between the individual and the universe, observing it in the specific context of his native land. Arguably, the millenarianism that dominated Russian fin-de-siècle culture points to linear thinking, as did the utopian project of Stalinism, where traditional elements were distorted or eliminated. On the other hand, the general flight from history of European modernism as a whole promoted the notion of return and human orientation to the cosmos at large (e.g. myth-making).

These trends dovetail in Remizov's *Posolon'* (*Sunwise*).[1] In the first 1907 edition, this context is seen as intrinsically attached to the condition of the Russian soul[2] and the writer seems to be worried about its constancy over time. To find an innate relationship between the two levels of being, Remizov looked both back in time, through research into scholarly texts, and to the present, through direct contact with people who lived in isolated regions, where old

[1] Charlotte Rosenthal translated the title as *Sunwise* (1986).
[2] As mentioned in the introduction, in his writings, Remizov perceives Russianness as a condition of the Russian soul rather than as a problem of nationality. It might be said that for the writer Russianness is something similar to a spiritual state of mind.

customs were still preserved (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 105).[3] He is not only keen to preserve Russianness in *Posolon'*, but equally committed to promoting its reimplementation in daily routine, to reconnecting what he believed to be a broken cycle in his people's relation with their own vagrant soul.

The present analysis focuses on the first 1907 edition of *Posolon'*.[4] In keeping with its title from Old Slavic, 'Sunwise' (*po-solntsu*), the collection follows the sun, whose rising and setting represent the cyclical perpetuation of life itself. The four seasons find their places in the four parts of *Posolon'*: "*Vesna-krasna*" ("Beautiful Spring"), "*Leto krasnoe*" ("Beautiful Summer"), "*Osen' temnaia*" ("Murky Autumn"), and "*Zima liutaia*" ("Harsh Winter"). Each of these four parts includes seven pieces. Through this pattern of 'four and seven,' Remizov rebuilds in *Posolon'* the universal motif of the ritual cyclicity of life, situating it, through his specific descriptions of rituals, children games and customs, on Russian soil. Four, the number of primordial elements, symbolizes terrestrial space and rational organization, while seven symbolizes perfect order – it is the number of colours, musical notes and planetary spheres – and marks the complete duration of a cycle (Cirlot 232-3).

In the spring and summer sections, descriptions of ritual and children's games prevail, while the autumn and winter parts are composed chiefly of

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[3] Remizov visited the village of Kostroma in 1912, where he wanted "to get a whiff of Russian spirit" (*dukhom russkim podyshat'*) and, in a letter to Blok (20 August), he relates: "I re-energized myself with the image of olden days (*starina*), I took deep breaths of Russian speech. I re-wrote my story and this time it came out better." Raevskaia-Hugs also stresses the impact of rural life on the writer: "Vologda, where Remizov headed directly from Ust'-Sysol'sk, marks the starting point of his conscious writing" (45).

[4] To the second edition of *Posolon'*, published in 1911 in St. Petersburg as the sixth volume of his works, Remizov added a second part, "K Moriu-Okeanu" ("To the Sea"), reprinted in the third 1930 Paris edition and in the fifth 1996 St. Petersburg edition. In the fourth 1978 Moscow edition, "K Moriu-Okeanu" was not included.

skazki or 'fairy tales.' This order is a natural one: spring symbolizes childhood and the predisposition to play games, while autumn and winter symbolize maturity, and the inclination to settle down, as one would have to in order to give a tale a full hearing. The structural logic of *Posolon'* follows not only the seasonal evolution from one spring to the next, but also human growth as a whole. According to Remizov, the "games, rituals and toys are observed through children's eyes, as if they really were a vivid and self-contained reality" (*Sochineniia* 1, 89). Spring is not only a time of year in *Posolon'*, but a sacred time, filled with prophetic signs, intricate promises and allusions, all of them waiting to be unveiled. Spring is the time of new expectations, sacredly connected to the Annunciation (25 March/ 7 April), which was highlighted by Remizov on many occasions as a time of change (the short story "Monashek" in *Posolon'*, but also in apocryphal legends or tales, such as "Savva Grudtsyn" or "Solomoniia").

When asked why he wrote a book such as *Posolon'*, Remizov replied:

> Probably because I was born on St. John's Eve (*Kupal'skaia noch'*),[5] when at midnight the fern blossoms and all the malevolent forces, from the woods and waters, gather together in a round [wild] dance, and everything is so mirthful and thunderous; I felt I have eyes to see all those spirits of the woods and waters; two of my works, *Posolon'* and *K Moriu-Okeanu*, are essentially stories about my friends and acquaintances from the invisible, devilish world (*mira nevidimigo – 'chertiach'ego'*). (*Sochineniia* 1, 344)

[5] This is a Slavic celebration of pagan origin marking the end of the summer solstice and the beginning of the harvest (midsummer). Kupalo, god of love, harvest and the personification of the earth's fertility, is ranked third among divine beings (after Perun and Veles). His night was the only time of the year when the earth would reveal its secrets and make ferns bloom to mark the places where its treasures were buried, the only time when trees may speak or even move, and witches gather. The Christian church claimed the day for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24th, new style) (*Kratkaia ents.* 311-3 and 583).

This particular birth date, Remizov often insisted, gave him the "sharpened eyes of Kupalo" (*"kupal'skie, podstrizhennyie glaza"*) (*Sobranie* 8, 416) with which to peer into the very depths of life. He believed in the natural sensitivity of humans to seasonal changes, as well as in a deep, deliberate connection between a human being and a particular place in the macrocosm. According to this logic, there is no change on Earth without a response from the cosmos, as in the old saying that when someone dies, a star falls down.

In the introduction to the latest St. Petersburg edition of *Posolon'* (1996), I. Danilova affirms that it is time to return this text to its primary readers – children (Remizov, *Posolon'*, 6). Yet *Posolon'* is a book not so much for children, as for adults. It was written to make its Russian reader recall his roots and equally to preserve the simple, natural ways of a Russian childhood (consider that most of the aristocratic elite at the time were sadly underinformed of their own traditions and customs). *Posolon'* carries forward valuable folkloric roots and recalls the bright spirit of children, the magic vision they are born with, and their natural sense of allegiance with the whole cosmos. Children's games (not only those described by Remizov, but in general) are entertaining repetitions of actions or roles, but also a model, a paradigm for a potential reality, something that might shape the next generation's way of thinking. The imaginary world of game playing is a way to regain spiritual freedom and to take control of nature and the space around you, an archaic approach to the task of turning chaos into cosmos.

Remizov believed that a spiritual return to his country's roots would help resurrect its essential Russianness. The seasonal structure of *Posolon'*

serves as a map for this way back. To achieve this journey through time, the return to the spring of human life, Remizov proposes a method as simple as everything else in *Posolon'*: act, bearing in mind the games he describes, play them, recall the old rites and the simplicity of life.

If at first glance the several descriptions of children's games in *Posolon'* might seem pitched exclusively to a juvenile audience, consider the author's decision to use annotations at the end of the book, evidently aiming "to call his readers' attention to the underlying seriousness of his purpose" (Carden 210). The affirmation that "play may very well include seriousness, whereas seriousness seeks to exclude play" (Huizinga 45) is an old one, yet pertinent in Remizov's case. His annotations to *Posolon'* are certainly serious in tone.

Patricia Carden, in her "Living Vessel of Memory" (1986), is the first[6] to mention that Remizov was most likely aware of Edward Tylor's theory of ritual, which imparts to children's play a new cultural importance; she says that "there are particular aspects of the ritual school's theory that suit Remizov's poetics better than any other; the emphasis on ritual action is one of these, the theory of survivals, another" (Carden 210). The theory of survivals is related to the way in which some of the old rites survived in such marginal forms as children games, and Remizov gives us Kostroma, Kukushka, Krasochki[7] and a few others. Carden contends that children games are not a 'marginal' form in Remizov's view.

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[6] Shortly after Carden, in the same year, Rosenthal agreed with this statement in her article "Remizov's *Sunwise* and *Leimonarium*: Folklore in Modernist Prose" (96).
[7] In the homonymous short stories of the spring section of *Posolon'*.

Remizov sees life as a complex scheme, which people need to enter during the playtime of their lives (i.e. childhood), a time that develops one's personality and builds connections with the past. Historians and psychologists have often considered humans as playing beings. Huizinga sees the instinct for play as the central element in human culture: he considers that human performances (in the areas of law, war, science, poetry, philosophy, and art) all originated as play activities.[8] Remizov shares this serious assessment of play. His desire to make people follow *Posolon'* and eventually regain a lost condition of their soul represents the work's most vital contribution to the quest for *russkost'*. Remizov felt that at the beginning of the twentieth century ritual ties to the past had been broken and *Posolon'* offers itself as a link in the chain of national survival. Far beyond mere amusement, *Posolon'* presents its reader with the most graceful game performed by a human mind, the very act of writing.

Posolon' is based on folk tradition; Remizov obviously took into account folkloric research of the last half of the nineteenth century. Russian folklore caught the public's eye in the 1840s, with the work of F.I. Buslaev (1818-1897), considered the first genuine Russian folklore scholar, followed by that of A.N. Afanas'ev (1826-1871), author of the most important compilation of Russian oral folk tales[9] and a representative of comparative Slavic studies. Both Buslaev and Afanas'ev were influenced by the ideas of the western school of

[8] Huizinga's book, *Homo Ludens*, devotes one chapter to each of these activities; its main idea revolves around the function of the "play-element" in human life.
[9] Between 1855 and 1863, eight editions of his collection *Narodnye russkie skazki* [*Russian Folk Tales*] were published.

Comparative Mythology.[10] This school considered folktales to be vestigial fragments of myths, an assumption that would explain why some quite similar folktales appeared in many different locations. Following the same logic, Remizov considers that certain children's games have their roots in ancient ritual actions:

> Можно заметить, что обрядовые действия, вырождаясь у взрослых, переходят к детям в виде игры. Так древние обряды Ивановского кумовства (на Ивана Купала) с завиванием венков, со сплетением травы, волос, с поцелуями и песнями перешли в игру «Крещение кукушки». [It may be observed that as ritual actions die out among adults, they are transferred to children as games. This is how, for instance, ancient rites performed on St. John's Eve, such as the union of St. John, enacted through the weaving of floral wreaths, the plaiting of grasses and hair, kissing and singing, became the game known as «Baptizing the Cuckoo».] (*Sochineniia* 1, 92)

Even though Remizov was concerned that a book like *Posolon'* might lack broad public appeal,[11] paradoxically, it became the most vivid and treasured among his writings. Remizov dedicated the original 1907 edition of *Posolon'* to both his three-year-old daughter Natasha and to the symbolist Viacheslav Ivanov (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 50). This double dedication evokes the link between a child's way of perceiving life and that of a poet. *Posolon'* is an invitation to rediscover the human heritage embedded in games and folktales. As soon as Ivanov received a copy, he wrote to Remizov: "*Posolon'* is for me one of the brightest pages of my life: these words represent the value I bestow

[10] The founder of this school was Adalbert Kuhn (1812 - 1881), a Germanist, and one of its leaders was F. Max Müller, a Sanskrit scholar who translated the *Rig-Veda* and held that European folktales were the fragmented remains of the myths of Indo-European peoples. On the principles of this school is based Afanas'ev's three-volume work *Poeticheskie vozzreniia slavian na prirodu* [*The Poetical Views of Slavs on Nature*] (1866-1869).

[11] In a letter from St. Petersburg, dated 11 January 1907, Remizov confesses to Aage Madelung (a translator active between 1905 and 1909) that *Posolon'* was not likely to succeed with the general public, given the relative lack of interest in this literary genre, based on folklore (*Letters from A.M. Remizov*, 44).

on you and your book, and this is my response to the great joy you have given me, a mood engraved in this book" (*Viacheslav Ivanov*, 91).

Its message of circularity, its call for the preservation of the Russian spirit and identity, brings *Posolon'* close to *Limonar'*. This message was a common one by the beginning of the twentieth century: "the materialization of the *Russian Idea* took place in the atmosphere of political reaction during the reign of Nicholas I" (Hellberg-Hirn 5, original emphasis); thus Remizov, like the Slavophiles, locates Russianness both in the past and in the *narod*. What singles him out from his predecessors is a modernist way of thinking, reflected in his approach to re-writing and reviving old subject matter, transforming the reader's perception of the text. Remizov was deeply caught up in romantic nostalgia for the unsullied, rustic life, and devoted considerable time and effort to exploring the special condition of the Russian soul.

The writer worked on both collections almost simultaneously, throughout 1906 on *Leimonarion* and between 1900 and 1906 on *Posolon'* (*Sochineniia* 1, 344). Both collections possess "a poetic charm and are rooted in the world of make-believe" (Aronian, *Selected Prose*, 4). In *Leimonarion* Remizov tries to emphasize *dvoeverie* (dual faith) as an indelible attribute of the Russian spirit; it is his contention that Christian and pagan elements alike shaped the Russian people's identity. There may also be a political motivation for writing *Leimonarion*, as Gracheva contends (an argument outlined in the second chapter); but the motif of the Russian revolution, which destroys old customs and traditions, returns us to the initial point of our discussion: imminent changes in Russian life and society put the preservation of

Russianness in a hazardous position. In *Posolon'* "Remizov is drunk with the irrational element of the Russian myth, of the Russian imagination, with the Russian fantastic and inimitable way of life (*byt*) and with the Russian language" (Il'in 85). All these elements, added to an original literary style, make his work unique. Remizov himself singles out *Posolon'* among his writings: "I'm not a novelist – he said – I'm a songster, and *Posolon'* is my only true offspring" (*Sochineniia* 1, 344).

In her analysis of the folktale elements in *Posolon'*, Susan Marie Schilling divides the pieces included in the book into four categories: a) poems; b) short stories; c) literary folktales; d) sketches and short anecdotes (91-150).[12] However, this classification does not account for all of the stories in *Posolon'*. Seven are left out: "Monashek" ("The Little Monk"), "Chernyi petukh" ("Black Rooster"), "Boroda" ("The Beard"), "Kikimora," "Bab'e leto" ("Indian Summer"), "Razreshenie put" ("Unshackling Fetters"), and "Troetsyplennitsa" ("Three Times a Brood-hen"). "The Little Monk," "Indian Summer," and "Kikimora" might be categorized as short stories (b), the first one introducing spring, the second autumn, and the third presenting a mischievous creature; but for the other four, a fifth category should be added (e): 'ritual stories' or 'stories about a sacred rite.'

"Black Rooster," "The Beard," "Unshackling Fetters" and "Three Times a Brood-hen" describe a ritual action, performed on a specific date, by particular persons, with or without the participation of the whole community (village). Northrop Frye defines the narrative of a work of literature, considered as "the

[12] Schilling also gives definitions for these genres and sub-genres and provides short plot summaries.

imitation of a generic and recurrent action or ritual (archetypal narrative)" as "mythos" (366). The performance described in the four stories mentioned above is not necessarily religious in an Orthodox sense, but involves something sacred according to a pagan logic. Because of its repetitive nature – the ritual occurs every year, on a specific date, and accepts no factual changes – a ritual action engenders cyclicity. It is the persistence in performance that keeps a ritual alive and preserves the spirit of commitment in its performers. This spirit is what Remizov was looking for.

Remizov's ritual story is close to the type describing a game, such as "Kostroma," a ritual of the spring cycle (Carden 208) or "Kukushka," originally a summer ritual held on St. John's Eve. Game descriptions feature children playing, involuntarily performing a ritual action, while in ritual stories adult characters act in all seriousness, they consciously follow a sacred rite and expect a response from a spirit (good or evil).

Before analyzing Remizov's ritual stories, I should mention a few facts about his style in this book. *Posolon'* contains no folktales in the usual sense of the term. Remizov's *skazki* in the "Harsh Winter" part, such as "Zaika," "Medvediushka" ("The Little Bear"), or "Zaichik Ivanych" ("Ivanych, The Little Hare") are literary folktales or short stories (Schilling 99 and 116). Here Remizov portrays adults and the adult world through the eyes of children. Remizov's literary folktales make use of fantastic transformations and personification, and they contrast with "the typical oral folktale texts in their description of setting, development of characters and combination of elements from different types of folktales: explanatory, animal folktales, fairy tales or

legends" (Schilling, 116-7). This combination of elements draws on the reader's familiarity with Russian folktales, because even though Remizov's annotations are helpful, they do not supply specific details about folktale elements.

How literary stylization applies to Remizov's *Posolon'* is a question previously clarified by Schilling: "stylization, i.e. the reproduction, in a new literary context, of stylistic features from a previously existing source" (48) is not what Remizov pursues in *Posolon'*. His combination of folktale characters and motifs, pagan superstitions, folk customs and beliefs, and ritual elements, can hardly be called stylization, the scholar concludes, because the author alters his sources in order to create his own literary text.

Because the problems of style and language in Remizov's work have been widely analyzed, what should preoccupy future analysis is the context in which the author situates ritual actions. A rite deals with repetitions and marks the intersections between the cosmic, general human, and individual levels. In *Posolon'* cyclicity might be seen as a method employed to preserve Russianness through the ritual recurrence of certain actions. The Russian spirit is inscribed in the actions and customs set forth in *Posolon'*, and also in its language and cyclical structure. As Remizov conceives it, the state of a nation's soul is related to its ethnic identity as a group that shares a distinctive cultural and historical tradition. Hellberg-Hirn says that the "ethnocentric symbolism" of Russianness encloses "a terrain of the body" (folk tradition, costume, food etc.), and "a spiritual terrain" that covers "Russian spiritual life as expressed by language, art, and Orthodox Christianity, i.e. Russia's collective soul"

(Hellberg-Hirn 7).[13] In *Posolon'* the individual being is incorporated into the collective identity and then related to the Russian land (*russkaia zemlia*), its enchanting space. Thus Remizov intermingles that 'terrain of the body' with the 'spiritual terrain.'

In his book, life is perceived as a cycle, influenced by many powerful forces, both seen and unseen. An individual has no control over the unfolding of his or her various cycles, but is expected to play instead a conscious role, to maintain, by the proper choice of action, the balance of the natural rotation. Carden says that "from the ritual school of ethnography (James George Frazer, 1854-1941), with its new emphasis on actions (rituals) rather than stories (myths), came the idea of 'calendar' in the anthropological sense, that is, of the arrangement of rituals in the order in which they are observed in the natural cycle of seasons" (Carden 209).

The spring section commences with a short sketch, "Monashek" ("The Little Monk"), whose title figure arrives at someone's house to signal the coming of spring. The story was traditionally told on the eve of Annunciation Day (*Blagoveshchenie*) [25 March/ 7 April] and Remizov explains that the "whitish little monk" (*belen'kii monashek*) is the herald of the sun (*Sochineniia* 1, 89). On this day it is forbidden to work, or even to plait one's hair. Old Slavic sayings connected with this date include the following: "beautiful maidens don't plait their braids, and birds don't weave their nests," "the cuckoo lives with no nest, because she dared to weave one on Annunciation Day" (*Mesiatseslov*, 73). In the Christian tradition, it is the Archangel Gabriel who

[13] The author did not refer to Remizov in particular.

brings God's word about the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation is regarded as a new beginning in the process of the 'salvation' of humankind.

In Remizov's rendition, one senses a pure, childish joy in the narrator's meeting with the little monk, who carries a budding twig. Although the language Remizov uses is unsophisticated and childlike, its simplicity is profound and suitable for the theme of a call to 'return to national roots.' After all, spring is commonly seen as a symbol of childhood. If, as Patricia Carden says, for Remizov "the child is a kind of vessel in which the present is stored for future use" (208), then the quality of what is being 'stored' is, without a doubt, important for that future. Might *Posolon'* be considered a kind of container, where Remizov tried to accumulate precious life-segments, in order to have them all connected at the end of his work? These are the issues to be addressed below.

The mixture of elements in the various parts of *Posolon'* is not accidental. By interlacing folktale characters in his narrative, Remizov wanted to draw people's attention to the mythical roots of their practical activities, as he himself discloses in his comments (*Sochineniia* 1, 89). For instance, Remizov introduces two familiar characters from Russian folklore, *seryi volk* (the grey wolf) and *Ivan Tsarevich*, into "Gusi-Lebedi" ("The Swan-Geese"), a game description tale. As Schilling points out, the genre mixture places "fantasy beings [...] in unexpectedly ordinary contexts," in this case, a children's game. This adds "a new dimension to the associations of familiar folktale characters." Thus, the Russian reader is expected to know the fairy

tales in which Ivan Tsarevich appears and to make connections between Remizov's tale and what he knows from his own oral culture (99). Without a doubt, Remizov wanted his reader to recall his heritage, and implicitly his *russkost'*. Yet more importantly, the author wanted his reader to pay special attention to the continuous re-appearance of those 'mythical elements' in his ordinary life, to the existence of a fragile yet logical cycle.

"Black Rooster" is the second piece in the summer section of *Posolon'*. In his annotation, Remizov explains that the title creature absorbs all diseases and evil spirits, and that "the burning of a black rooster is related to the rite of ploughing and also to the purification of the village from sickness and evil" (*Sochineniia* 1, 94). People believed that the land had to be purified before ploughing; this would guarantee them exclusive right to the harvest, by barring all evil creatures' claim to any part of it. Thus, the black rooster was a gift offered to those evil spirits, a sacred sacrificial victim.

Everything in this story is concentrated on the ritual action, celebrated by the entire village on a summer midnight, between Thursday and Friday, held to be an auspicious time, in that it bears the fewest taboos. The beautiful Alena leads the whole village in procession. With a great deal of noise, pushing and shoving, the villagers enter the hencoop of one Pakhomov, the village sorcerer. They burn brooms to give off smoke, and seize the black rooster. Pakhomov's black rooster represents his connection with the other world; the sorcerer is upset by its loss. The bird is carried to the opposite end of the village, making a circle around the area intended to be protected. This march is part of the ritual action as a whole, thus outfits, gestures, noises, the identity

and order of the participants, are all parts of a greater design. To achieve success, i.e. protect their village from any alien force, the participants must adhere to a preset pattern of ancient and mysterious origin.

The black rooster is a symbol of death, a servant of the devil, as opposed to a rooster of any other colour, considered to be a symbol of superiority, vigilance, courage and pride, a symbol of sunrise. The black rooster's involvement with black magic is well known around the world. It was the most common sacrifice offered to the devil on various occasions. Chevalier and Gheerbrant contend that the rooster (of any colours but black), along with the lamb and the eagle, is part of the emblem of Christ, which makes once again evident its connection to the symbolism of the sun and resurrection (vol. 1, 347). It is believed that the rooster became an "important Christian symbol during the Middle Ages, when it nearly always appeared on the highest weathervanes, on cathedral towers, and was regarded as an allegory of vigilance and resurrection" (Cirlot 51).

For a complete analysis of the ritual described in this story, Remizov refers the reader to E.V. Anichkov's study, *Vesenniaia obriadovaia pesnia na zapade i u slavian* (*The Ritual Song of Spring in the West and Among the Slavs*), published in two volumes in St. Petersburg (1903-1905), while Remizov was working on *Posolon'* in his Vologda exile.[14] This general reference suggests that Remizov did not intend to give specific information on this rite. Instead, he focuses on producing a modern literary text that can stand on its own, modern not only in Remizov's use of language, distinctive as everywhere in

[14] Remizov starts working on *Posolon'* in 1902, but he was granted permission to move to one of the two capitals in 1905, and he decided to settle in St. Petersburg.

Posolon', but also in its insistence that readers participate in the process of reading, drawing on their own ideas and knowledge:

> Алена верхом на рябиновой палке с мутовкой на плече, нагая, впереди с горящим угольком, за Аленой двенадцать девок с распущенными волосами в белых рубахах, с серпами и кочергами в руках и другие двенадцать с распущенными волосами, в черных юбках держат черного петуха.
> [On a rowan stick and with a churn-staff on her shoulder, Alena leads, naked, and bearing a burning coal; behind Alena follow twelve maidens with dishevelled hair and white shirts, carrying reaping-hooks and pokers, and another twelve maidens with dishevelled hair and black skirts, carrying the black rooster]. (*Sochineniia* 1, 31)

As can be seen from the above, feminine elements prevail in this ritual action, a fact that makes the contrast with the sole masculine element at hand, the black rooster, even more evident. Firstly, the "rowan stick" is a feminine symbol because the tree[15] in Slavic folklore symbolizes a cursed woman or maiden (for that very reason it is forbidden to cut it down). The rowan also figures in dealings with the evil spirit (*Slav. mifologiia*, 419, '*Riabina*'); in many traditional cultures, the rowan was the tree most often credited with protective magical powers against all incursions of witchcraft. "To prevent spells on farm animals and butter-making, the churn-staff and the shafts of forks used in the cowhouse and stable must be made of its [rowan] wood."[16] Secondly, all the tools mentioned in Remizov's tale are traditionally associated with women's work. Thirdly, women perform the entire ritual action. Given that the text under discussion is related to a ploughing ritual, these items must be regarded as pieces of the entire picture, i.e. as symbols of a fight with some evil unseen forces, carried to increase the fertility of the soil, itself conceived as

[15] A small tree with compound leaves, white flowers, and red berries, also called *mountain ash*.
[16] 'Rowan.' *A Dictionary of English Folklore*. Ed. Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud (Oxford University Press, 2000) <http://www.oxfordreference.com>.

feminine. Dishevelled hair, for instance, is typical of evil feminine characters, such as *rusalki*, *vily*, and *ved'my* (river nymphs, unplaited maids, and witches). Thus, the maidens in Remizov's text act as intermediaries between the human world and the realm of evil spirits. They sacrifice the black rooster to appease the evil spirit, and in so doing, to banish wickedness from their village for the time being. The naked leader, Alena, is a being returned (through disrobing) to her natural, innate condition; at the same time, her nudity is meant to protect her from any diabolic power (*Slav. mifologiia*, 88 and 312, '*Volosy*' and '*Nagota*').

Of interest here too is the symbolic opposition between white and black (Alena is followed by the twelve maidens in white and another twelve in black). The opposition, "like all dual formulae in symbolism, is related to the number two and to the great myth of the Gemini" and connected with Slavic mythology through *Bielbog* (White-god) and *Chernobog* (Black-god) (Cirlot 56-7). The corresponding positive and negative semantics determine "the ceaseless alternations of life/death, light/darkness and appearance/ disappearance" (ibid. 59), each of which embody and promote the inevitable cyclicity of events.[17]

The ritual action ends successfully; the black rooster is burnt as tradition demands, but the wizard Pakhomov does not accept the loss of his familiar so easily. He is determined to punish Alena, the leader, casting at her window a spell for disease: "Чтобы у нее [...] и спинушка и брюшенько

[17] In west Slavic mythology, *Bielbog* was the god of success and happiness, associated with positive beginnings; *Chernobog* was his opposite, regarded sometimes as the god of battle and related to *Triglav* (The Three-headed) (*Mify*, Vol. 1, 167 and vol. 2, 625).

красным опухом окинулись и с зудом." [Let her little back and her little belly be covered by a red swelling and itchy inflammation] (*Sochineniia* 1, 32).

Another ritual story, "The Beard," comes at the end of the summer section of *Posolon'*, signalling that the harvest is almost complete. In his commentary at the end of *Posolon'*, Remizov explains that "*zavivanie borody*" ("beard plaiting") is an ancient pagan rite performed at the end of the harvest and, for more scholarly data, refers the reader to the second volume of Afanas'ev's *Poetical Views of the Slavs on Nature*. "Black Rooster" and "The Beard" describe two ritual actions, which connect the two central moments of the eternal bond between humankind and the land that sustains us: ploughing and harvest. "The Beard" aims to maintain an unbroken cycle, to mark the end of harvest by preparing the land for the next spring's ploughing. Exhausted after the harvest labour, the participants in this ritual ask the field to return to them the strength they have poured into it, so they may prepare for the next spring.

At the end of harvest, all the villagers are summoned to gather around the last lot of grain, called *Boroda*. This imaginary "beard" might be also a secret place where the "soul of the field, a goat-faced [hence bearded] creature" could hide (*Sochineniia* 1, 96).[18] The ritual of making this beard ready and attractive for its mystical owner (the soul of the field) is, as in "Black Rooster," dominated by women. Their prevalence could be attributed to the fact that traditionally women performed most of the harvest work and were responsible for the greater part of spiritual life in the village. Remizov's attention to

[18] Remizov is citing from Potebnia, *Ob'iasneniia malorusskikh i srodnykh narodnykh pesen*, [*Explications of Ukrainian and Related Folk Songs*] Varshava, 1887.

feminine spirituality set his writing apart, as Reznikova, and subsequently Slobin, comment on the author's own confession: "He claimed closeness to 'the expression of a woman's soul' and felt that the female voice granted him a greater oneness with nature and origins, the freedom to write differently, and an insight into suffering and pity within the female domain" (Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions*, 17).[19]

> Несут девки межевые васильки, подвивают васильками Бороду, расцвечивают ее васильками – крестовой слезой. И кругом, как ковер, васильки.
> Борода собрала людей вместе, – поднялось на всю ниву веселье.
> Запалили солому, заварилась отжинная каша.
> – Нивка, отдай мою силу!
> И идут хороводом вокруг Бороды, ведут долгие песни, перевиваются долгие песни пригудкой, и опять на широкий разливной лад хороводы.
> [The maidens carry wild cornflowers, then weave the cornflowers into the Beard, make it colourful with cornflowers – and with a cross-vaulting tear.
> There are cornflowers all around, like a carpet.
> The Beard brought the people together, – mirth rose all over the field.
> They set the straw on fire, made blackberry porridge.
> – Little field, give me back my strength!
> And they dance the round dance around the Beard, sing long songs, weave whistles into those long songs, and again there follow round dances, broad and spreading]. (*Sochineniia* 1, 38)

Putting ordinary people in a magic-like setting, Remizov transfers the miraculous world of 'once upon a time' and 'a place far away' to the real world, and does not seem to care whether its incredible elements fit or not. Reality is simply assumed. *Nivka* (the little field) is seen as an animate being (*Nivka, otdai moiu silu!*), as is *Boroda*; both demand respect. The *khorovod*, or round dance, describes a protective circle around *Boroda*, which becomes the pivot of the entire ritual action. By asking for their strength back, the villagers wish to

[19] Compare N.V. Reznikova, *Ognennaia pamiat'* (Berkeley, 1980, 51). Compare also Vladimir Solov'ev and the influence of his cult of the Eternal Feminine on the "younger" symbolists (Blok, Belyi, Ivanov and others).

ensure that natural cyclicity, the seasonal round, is not harmed and that *Nivka* will accept them back again the following year.

Remizov resumes a by-now familiar pattern. The individual is incorporated into the collective and then linked to the *russkaia zemlia*, the enchanted space, where fantastic or powerful creatures such as "*chetyre ptitsy – zheleznye nosy*" ("the four birds with iron noses"), "*molodaia medveditsa*" ("the young she-bear"), "*Vyndrik-zver'*" ("Indra-the beast") constantly appear (*Sochineniia* 1, 97).[20]

The last lot of grain is not called *Boroda* simply because it resembles a beard. In Slavic tradition, it is symbolically connected with the beard of Veles, Spas, Elijah or St. Nicholas (*Sochineniia* 1, 96). Veles, whose name is phonetically and etymologically linked to the common noun *volos* ('hair'), is the deity of earth, waters and the underworld. When the Slavs were converted to Christian orthodoxy, Veles was assimilated by Vlasii, or Vasilii (St. Basil), the protector of cattle (*Mify* 1, 227). Veles was at first the sovereign and shepherd of a celestial, mythical cattle of clouds, but then he became the shepherd of ordinary cattle (Afanas'ev, vol. 1, 356). At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the northern parts of Russia peasants still kept the old custom of leaving a 'gift' in the field for Veles, i.e. a few stems of grain called "*Volosovaia borodka*" ("Veles's little beard") (*Mify* 1, 227). According to

[20] "The mythical creature, Indra, moves underground just as the sun moves in the sky" (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 1, 97). Compare Afanas'ev, who argues that Veles replaces Indra (vol. 1, 350-8). "In Vedic times, Indra was the supreme ruler of gods. He was the god of thunder and storms, the greatest of all warriors, the strongest of all beings" (*Encyclopedia Mythica* on-line, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/indra.html>).

Afanas'ev, the ritual appeasement of Veles was intended to deprive all wizards and evildoers of the power to inflict a wasting disease on their grain.[21]

Remizov's ritual story has a symbolic ending: "And the *khorovod* blazed on, till sunrise" (*I gorel khorovod, poka solntse vzoshlo*). The *khorovod* thus becomes a circle of fire, fuses with the sun itself, and leaves the reader with the representation of a cyclical life-sequence.

As mentioned above, Remizov's stories do not have a fixed structure, with established characters. The writer takes pleasure in altering the usual associations of sayings, interweaving irony in the proverbs he uses, and adding an amusing touch to his work. His sketch "Kikimora," for instance, is hard to understand without some information on what this creature might be. Remizov learned of Kikimora, thought to be a forest fairy, during his exile in the northern Ust-Sysol'sk region (Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions*, 15).[22] All the reader can grasp from this story at first glance is that Kikimora is a cheerful prankster, who has endeared herself to children:

> "Га! ха-ха-ха! Я Бабушке за ужином плюнула во щи, а Деду в бороду пчелу пустила. Аукнула-мяукнула под поцелуи, хи!... – Вся затряслась Кикимора, заколебалась, от хохота за тощие животики схватилась."
> [Ha! ha-ha-ha! I spat in Granny's cabbage soup at dinner, and I flung a bee in Granddad's beard. It said "halloo-meow" when it was kissed, hee!... – Kikimora shook all over with laughter, swayed back and forth, then grabbed her scraggy belly.] (*Sochineniia* 1, 39)

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[21] Afanas'ev remarks that the substitution of Veles's name by Elijah, St. Nicholas, or even Christ at times is highly significant, because it shows the path of Christian influence and also testifies to the identity of the pagan Veles (Vol. 1, 357).

[22] "The house where he lived in Ust-Sysol'sk belonged to a woman whose three daughters became eager listeners of his evening readings. [...] The youngest sister, Ode, a mysterious, quiet girl who was never tired of listening, was thought, by her family, to be possessed by a forest sprite, Kikimora" (Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions*, 15).

Slobin points out that the author "established the cosmic necessity and authenticity of his writing by placing it in the oral tradition as part of the eternal natural cycle of life" (*Remizov's Fictions*, 17). Thus, by situating his own, twentieth-century voice within a traditional collective discourse, he brings the reader closer to the very condition of the Russian soul he was so eager to preserve. This fusion also shows how natural cyclicity can help restore Russianness, because rotation presumes repetition and, therefore, reappearance.

Another ritual story, "Razreshenie put" ("Unshackling Fetters"), the third one in the autumn section of *Posolon'*, focuses on the ritual action that marks the moment when a child stands up on his legs for the very first time. Remizov says that this is a tradition found in the northern Russian region of Olonets. According to an old belief, each child is born with his legs tied by many invisible, tangled ropes, and only the "*staraia veshcha*" ("old thing," referring to a woman of advanced years) knows how to untangle them:

> "Старая веща знает, – видит веревку, шепчет заклятье, режет:
> – Пунтилей, Пунтилей, путы распутай, чтобы Вольге ходить по земле, прыгать и бегать, как прыгает в поле зверье полевое, а в лесе лесное. Сними человечье проклятье с младенца... [...] Старая веща знает. Ножик горит под костлявой землистой рукой."
> [The old thing knows, – sees the rope, whispers the spell, and cuts it:
> – Puntilei, Puntilei, unfetter the fetters, let Vol'ga walk the earth, let her bounce and run, as field animals bounce in the field, as forest animals bounce in the forest. Remove the human curse from the babe. [...] The old thing knows. The knife burns beneath her bony, earthy hand.] (*Sochineniia* 1, 44-5)

Note the phonetic and etymological play on the root **put-*, which extends to the name Puntilei, linked by Remizov to St. Panteleimon

(*Sochineniia* 1, 98).[23] Why the fetters are connected to this particular saint is unclear. Nor does the author explain why he placed "Unshackling Fetters" in the autumn section of *Posolon'*, a decision made all the more confusing by the fact that St. Panteleimon the Healer's saint's day falls in the summer. Among this saint's various responsibilities is his patronage of suffering people and physicians. Following this line of reasoning, "*staraia veshcha*," who unfetters the child, might be regarded as the witchdoctor of the village. The fetters symbolize the absence of freedom of movement, of proper contact with the earth. Their removal in Remizov's story bears not only the general meaning of gaining autonomy, but also marks, as an initiatory rite, the child's entrance in a new social category, that of a 'self-sufficient' person with an instantly recognizable gender; in the past, for British people, this was the moment when a child passed from being called 'it' to the more personal 'she' or 'he.'[24] Once unfettered, the child is free to go and find his own path in life.

By emphasizing the need to perform the ritual unshackling of the fetters, the miraculous proprieties of the old woman's "bony and earthy" hand, and also the contrast between a naive child and an omniscient old person, Remizov invites his modern reader to reflect on a people's way of life. The reader's response to the text might act as a boomerang circling back to make him more inquisitive about the present in which he lives. Remizov was troubled by the upheavals of the beginning of the twentieth century and

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[23] The saint is known in Russia as St. Panteleimon the Healer (27 July/ 9 August), and his name comes from Greek, *pan, pantos*, + *eleemon* meaning 'kindhearted with everyone.'

[24] In English, the pronouns *it* and *its* were used to refer to babies, although with the passing of the Victorian era this usage came to be considered too impersonal, with many advocates arguing that it demeans a conscious being to the status of a mere thing <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_(pronoun)>.

objected to the speed of change, which swallowed not only the people's old traditions, but also their spirit and sense of identity.

"Troetsyplennitsa" ("Three Times a Brood-hen") is also included in the autumn part of *Posolon'*. A hen who has borne three broods is sacrificed, consumed, and then buried following an old ritual.[25] Only faithful widows (those who remain celibate after their husbands' deaths) can prepare and eat this special hen. Even so, one man is allowed to take part in this ritual action, provided he puts on a woman's head-kerchief. The ritual is also called "the praying of hens" (*moleniia kur*) and takes place on the first of November, the day of Damian and Kozma, protectors of marriage, blacksmiths, and poultry.

N.E. Onchukov, in a letter to Remizov in which he declares *Posolon'* a success, says, "You have dug up even 'Troetsyplennitsa'! It is hard to find today a reader of your calibre" (*Sobranie* 2, 630). In other words, this ritual had faded into obscurity. Why a 'three times brood-hen' must be killed and why only widows are allowed to eat it remains a mystery. Remizov emphasizes only the obligation to perform this sacred slaughter to avert some unnamed evil consequence. After eating the hen in complete silence, without even using a knife, just breaking it in pieces with their bare hands, the widows must bury the hen's bones in the yard.

A closer reading of the text reveals a pattern found in almost all of Remizov's ritual stories, a scheme that reunites three of the four elements: water, fire, earth. Air, the fourth element, is all-pervasive, yet emphasized in

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[25] "Троецыпленница – курица, высидевшая три семьи цыплят – по три года парившая" [The Three Times Broody is a hen who has borne three broods, who has hovered about three years] (*Sochineniia* 1, 98).

some cases by the wind or a gathering storm. Thus, in "Three Times a Brood-hen," one finds: (1) air, "*po poliam khodit veter*" ("the wind is walking through the fields"), against which a door is bolted, "*naglukho zaperli dver'*"; (2) water, as a part of a purification rite, "*s zagovorom vymoiut ruki*" ("they will wash their hands while uttering a spell"), (3) fire, "*i zazhigaiutsia svechi*" ("the candles are lit"), and (4) earth, "*vyryli iamku... zakapyvaiut kurochku*"[26] ("they dug a hole... buried the little hen"). Finally, wind and water combine: "*Obduvaet kholodom veter, pomachivaet dozhdik*" ("The cold wind blows, the rain drizzles down"). Every ritual action has its own design and the order of the elements constitutes the unseen, inner life of the rite. This pattern (air-water-fire-earth) reveals an alternation of masculine (air-fire) and feminine (water-earth) elements that probably tell us about purification and fertility.

Remizov speaks of the inner life of a ritual as the driving force behind his effort to resurrect various customs or practices in modern literature. He insists: "people should finally move on from seeing insignificance and mystery in an utterance or custom, and ought to make their way into its soul and its life, which, for that reason, need to be revealed" (*Sobranie* 2, 608).[27] Obatina points out that Remizov's mythopoesis is motivated by his desire "to explain human existence," as the writer puts it: "I have started to create a legend about myself, or, if you prefer, 'to tell a story' ('*skazyvat' skazku*')" ("Polemicheskii dialog," 190). In an age of rapid, forward-looking change, Remizov chose to redirect his search for answers into the past, to the people who believed in tales

[26] The hen's bones are buried in a *korchaga*, a large earthenware pot; thus we encounter the double presence of the element of earth.
[27] From Remizov's *Pis'mo v redaktsiiu* (1907), his first program statement.

and performed rituals; the author was curious to find out why were they less vulnerable to the hardships of life.

Remizov's apocryphal legends, short stories, and ritual descriptions of both children's games and customs might be deemed a means of identification with that special condition of soul, Russianness, and also as a quest for its survival. *Posolon'* is not a tool to search for the universal truth, or a means to seek an ideal universal religion. *Posolon'* marks a path leading towards the understanding of the world's completeness, as a Russian, in the writer's person, might see it. The author's ceaseless work on *Posolon'* (he would add stories, drawings, and comments to it throughout his life) reveals his own conviction that the question of the book is just as cyclical as life itself.

In *Posolon'*, through the vital relationship established between people and nature, a dynamic liaison involving both the individual and the universe he lives in, embedded in the Russian soil (an animate, feminine, fertile being), Remizov builds a protective circle around a people's condition of soul and spirit.

Chapter II

Leimonarion[1] – The Old World Seen through New Eyes

Aleksei Remizov's system of values and beliefs leaves a deep imprint on all his writings. His worldview revolves around the battle between good and evil, which is emotionally based on the author's conviction that the action of forces beyond human control or volition determines human existence. Remizov perceives these forces as evil, wasteful, and always irrational, an attitude considered by some critics as "heretical" or Manichaean (Keldysh 10). Ivan Il'in describes Remizov's phase before 1905 as a period dominated by an "embittered, drab image of life" (98), seen by the writer as a playground for evil forces.[2] In addition, Remizov was baffled by the futility of those supreme forces, which made possible the inversion of the semantic oppositions: 'good' is supplanted by 'evil,' as seen in the last legend of *Leimonarion*, "On the Passion of the Lord" (*O Strastiakh Gospodnikh*), as well as in the third one,

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[1] Articles in English on Remizov use at least two variant spellings of this word (*leimonarium, leimonarian*), therefore some etymological clarification would be helpful here. The word λειμωνάριον in Old Greek is a diminutive for leimôn > "any moist, grassy place, meadow"; the word was later used frequently as a metaphor for "any bright, flowery surface, as a blooming face or a peacock 's tail." *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott in 1843 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform>. *The World Universal Encyclopaedia*, ed. Petros Dimitrakos, vol. 2 (Λ-Ω) (Athens, 1932: 1588), gives the following definition for λειμωνάρια (sing. leimonarion > pl. leimonaria): "a religious book that talks about the lives and achievements of saints or martyrs."

[2] Il'in pointed out that the influence of Sologub or even E.T.A. Hoffman's taste for the macabre is evident in this stage of Remizov's evolution, but the writer would work his way out from this phase by directing his attention toward mythology and folklore (*Leimonarion* and *Posolon'* came after his novel *Prud* [*The Pond*, 1905], considered to be decadent).

"The Wrath of The Prophet Elijah" (*Gnev Il'i Proroka*). This qualitative inversion – cosmos into chaos – was rather common in Russia's decadent period (Smirnov 21-5).

The first aim of this chapter is to find in *Leimonarion* connections between the pre-Petrine and Remizov's contemporary world.[3] The second aim is to situate Remizov's religious legends in the cultural context of the beginning of the twentieth century. The intended parallel between the two worlds (old and new) proposes a new view on Remizov's legends; it will demonstrate that their mythological nature (*mifologichnost'*) becomes a form of public consciousness, a way to understand natural and social reality. In Remizov's understanding a myth is not a fictional device; for him, it rather stands as the most striking reality (see his annotations to *Leimonarion* and *Posolon'*).

The mythological nature of *Leimonarion* can be said to embody an ancient tradition, which Remizov intended to bring back to life. This return to origins possesses a precise motivation for Remizov: his writings are the fruit of a lifelong endeavour to celebrate Russianness. For all that Remizov's achievements are best known in the area of stylistics, the content in his works is no less remarkable. He is not fortuitously called a "seminal writer" (Slobin xiii). Along with Andrei Belyi (1880-1934), Remizov initiated new

[3] In his article "The Problem of Old Russian Culture" (1962), Florovsky asserts that the time of Peter the Great was regarded as a chronological demarcation between 'old' and 'new' in Russian history, therefore pre-Petrine Russia is seen as 'the old world' in this chapter. Sona Aronian declared in 1992 that Remizov is well known for his "virtuosic linguistic flights from pre-Petrine chancellory language to twentieth century *zaum'*, a futuristic 'trans-sense' language, and for moods and themes ranging from deep decadent despair to the child-like naïve pastoral" (119).

experimental forms in prose by encouraging the presence of myth in his writings, a fact that had its effect on the future development of modern Russian fiction. His *Leimonarion*, a collection of apocryphal legends, is a telling example in this sense. The "transfusion of myth into literature," as explained in the article "Literatura i mify," generally occurred through the graphic arts, rituals, folk feasts or religious mysteries in ancient times, and through folklore, philosophy or aesthetics in our time (*Mify* 2, 58). Charlotte Rosenthal pinpoints the essence of Remizov's early writings, when she emphasizes that for him "folklore was a means by which to explore essential truths, not through logical or scientific discourse, but through alogical, analogical, and symbolic means" (109).

In *Leimonarion*, Remizov sees mystification as the main element of the fantastic and multifarious world of the common folk. He values that mystical side of the Russian soul, which is also a source of inspiration to other writers, including Gogol', Dostoevskii, Belyi, and Sologub. Remizov's critics have approached the collection of apocryphal legends in various ways. In her introduction to *Alexei Remizov: Selected Prose*, Aronian cites Gorodetskii's evaluation of *Leimonarion* at the beginning of the last century: "Remizov had captured the Russian spirit of the originally Byzantine legends; he had, in his use of Slavic roots for neologisms, given expression to a «national idea»; and his work would serve as a laboratory for new ideas and art forms in the coming decade" (3). Obatina maintains that the *Leimonarion* collection may be considered an example of Remizov's search for "new forms in realism, forms that spread their roots in the old tradition and wisdom of ancient

times" (Obatina, *Tsar'*, 6). On the other hand, Rosenthal considers Remizov's *Leimonarion* to be a part of his "contribution to modernist prose" because "he shaped folkloric materials to suit his own sensibility" (109). *Leimonarion* can hardly be classified in accordance with literary conventions and readers, as well as scholars, attempting to grasp the author's message, should consider various aspects involved in this work.

The first edition of *Leimonarion* (1907), consisted of six legends: "*O bezumii Irodiadinom (Kak na zemle zarodilsia vikhor')*" ("On Herodias's Frenzy, or How the Whirlwind Came to Be on Earth"); "*O mesiatse i zvezdakh i otkuda oni takie (Khristova povest')*" ("On the Moon and the Stars and Where they Came From: A Tale of Christ"); "*Gnev Il'i Proroka (Ot nego zhe sokryl Gospod' den' pamiati ego)*" ("The Wrath of the Prophet Elijah, From Whom the Lord Concealed His Day of Commemoration"); "*Otchego nechistyi bez piat i o sotvorenii volka (Slovo Egoria, Volch'ego pastyria, Nikole Ugodniku)*" ("Why the Devil Has No Heels and the Origin of Wolves, as Told by Egor, Wolfherd, to St. Nicholas"); "*Veshchitsa, imen kotoroi dvenadtsat' s polovinoiu (I"iavlenie)*" ("The Thing Whose Names Number Twelve and a Half: A Testimonial"); "*O strastiakh Gospodnikh (Tridneven vo grobe)*" ("On the Passion of the Lord: Three Days in the Grave)." Uzhankov points out that Remizov borrowed his title, *Limonar', sirech' Lug Dukhovnyi*, from the Christian ascetic Johannes Moschus, who travelled to Palestine and Syria in the late 6th – early 7th century and wrote a book entitled *Leimonarion or*

Pratum Spirituale (*The Spiritual Meadow*), translated into Old Russian as *Limonar'*: *Lug dukhovnyi* (*Sochineniia* 2, 373).[4]

Literary criticism generally regards the component texts of *Leimonarion* as religious legends or apocryphal stories. In his 1994 article "*Limonar'* kak opyt rekonstruktsii russkoi narodnoi very," Koz'menko analyzes the second version of Remizov's collection (*Otrechennye povesti* [*Rejected Tales*]), published in 1912 in the seventh volume of Remizov's eight-volume collected works, a version rewritten and expanded by the author. There is also a third collection based on apocryphal stories, *Stella Maria Maris* (Paris, 1928), written in the form of spiritual verses, which have the same artistic undertaking as the previous collections, "to reflect the spiritual universe of the pre-Petrine people" (Koz'menko 26).

This analysis will restrict itself to the first version of *Leimonarion* (1907) because it captures Remizov's turn-of-the-century struggle and his shift away from decadent writings.[5] Remizov's *Leimonarion* is a collection of religious legends, but his legend introduces a new experimental literary form: he usually combines into a single story (or fictional retelling of a legend) not merely mythological subjects or characters, but also literary genres. Here we find folk poetry, prose, and theatre at the same time, an aspect that may challenge the reader's ability to grasp the text. The analysis to follow will treat religious legend in its established parameters: a story situated in the real world, and related to a surprising or mystical event. Remizov's experimental adaptation of the genre consists of slicing up the plot and inserting in it new

[4] Gracheva also points out this borrowing (*Remizov*, 53).
[5] Typified by his novel *Prud* [*The Pond*, 1905].

narrative episodes. For instance, in "On Herodias's Frenzy" the author interrupts the plot of the legend to insert Christmas carols, which later prove to be symbolical refrains.

Afanas'ev regarded legend as a special genre that should not be confused with tales or other genres (Pukhova). The cardinal distinction, he asserts, falls between the characters of a legend and those of a tale: a legend usually employs characters from the Scriptures (ibid.), while a tale draws its protagonists from a fantastical world of make-believe. This might be the reason why Remizov published his *Posolon'* collection separately from *Leimonarion*, even though it came out in the same year (1907). Legends are told as true, with many features that root them in a specific time and place and lend them the air of verisimilitude; but many legends are 'true' mainly in a symbolic sense, in that they are a true expression of popular views (*narodnye vozzreniia*) at a given time and place. A legend is considered to be a mythological story because it may reveal the opinion of simple, unsophisticated people on such basic notions as life and death, past and future, the real and the unreal. The legends in *Leimonarion* may be regarded as reflections of certain aspects of the national soul. As a palaeontologist of the Russian soul, Remizov sensed an immense interest in that fantastic world of the Russian folk, a world that could be rebuilt using various sources, primarily folk tales, legends and national myths. The preservation of mythological elements in a people's consciousness may be explained by taking into consideration their constant belief in 'something' eternally unknown. No

matter how much science opens up the potential for knowledge, there will always be a 'mystery' in a people's way of comprehending life.

Legends are very sensitive to social change; thus, it is crucial to understand them in the cultural, political and social context in which they appear. Every successive historical period adds to and subtracts elements from a legend in order to keep pace with the cultural needs of the time. Therefore, one must try to grasp the meaning of Remizov's legends in the cultural and social context of his time. The following analysis is intended to be useful in precisely that way. There are a few studies of Remizov's *Leimonarion*, mainly in Russian,[6] but the most comprehensive work seems to be that of Gracheva. Although it probably cannot be directly demonstrated, she speaks about the 1905 Russian revolution as possibly being mirrored in *Leimonarion*'s apocryphal stories (*Remizov* 47-70). Gracheva asserts that Remizov's great effort to understand the Old Russian way of thinking is based on his genuine belief that this paradigm might be essential in assessing Russian contemporary thought (67).

One of the first questions that may be raised by the reader of *Leimonarion* concerns Remizov's choice of subject matter. He definitely did not start and end his collection with randomly chosen legends. Remizov's *Leimonarion* has a cyclical character. It starts with Christ's birth and ends with his resurrection (the sixth legend); therefore, birth, life, death and resurrection are presented to the reader not only as seen by the Christian

[6] Rosenthal wrote an article in English on *Leimonarion* and *Posolon'* in 1986; see also Schilling (1983), Burke (1987) Gracheva (1988, 2000, 2001), Pigin (1989), Koz'menko (1994), and Tyryshkina (2001).

religion, but primarily as interpreted by the common folk, who preserved pagan customs and intermingled them with Christianity. The result partakes of dual faith, *dvoeverie*. Pagan tradition, under the massive pressure of Christian ritual, was pushed aside by the humanist power of the latter. This bidirectional impact was a process rarely conscious or intentional and popular customs were passed on as a complex interweaving of Christian and pagan motifs. Both Remizov's *Leimonarion* and *Sunwise* underline this Christian – pagan syncretism. Compare, for example, the myth of Christ's resurrection (similar to some extent to the pagan myth of the Phoenix, resurrected from its own ashes) with the resurrected world burnt by Elijah's fury, in *Leimonarion*'s third legend. In each case, the reader faces a symbolic new beginning. Thus, *Leimonarion*'s message may be related to Remizov's call for a new start in Russian art, a start based on the ancient Slavic values by regaining the initial condition of soul, Russianness.

Let us take the first legend of *Leimonarion*, "On Herodias's Frenzy or How the Whirlwind Came to Be on Earth." Why did he combine the birth of Christ, a Christmas carol, King Herod and Herodias in a few pages? This mixture is not a fortuitous act in Remizov's writing; there are certain "signs of formal experimentation," as Rosenthal explains (104).[7] In his annotation to the legend, Remizov gives the reader the impression that he is a stage director. His comments not only offer explanations, but also treat various fragments of the legend as scenes to be played on stage. Yet what one faces

[7] Antonella d'Amelia also mentions Remizov's inclination towards experimentation with form ("Pozdnie" 104).

here is not a play, but a form of *vertep*,[8] an Eastern Slavic folk puppet show, combined with other folkloric materials, such as Eastern Slavic *koliadki* and Romanian *colinde* (Christmas carols).[9]

The story begins with the Nativity of Christ and its celebration with carols and *verteps*. "White flowers"[10] – the refrain of a Christmas carol – is a recurring motif throughout the legend. It may be associated with the idea of life and brightness, but it may also signify madness and death (the primary symbolism of the color white is innocence, beauty, and virtue, but white flowers, especially white lilies, could also be a symbol of death). There is a well-known Romanian Christmas carol that replicates this collocation – *Florile dalbe* (white flowers) at the end of each verse or stanza – but its symbolism is related to "apple blossoms," a sign of perpetual life, purity and wellbeing. It is believed that the refrain of the carol "Florile Dalbe" is an ancient magic incantation promoting the coming of spring (Evseev 278).

The next scene of "On Herodias's Frenzy" opens with the three magi – the wise men from the East – who brought gifts to the infant Jesus (also in Matthew 2:1). Tsar Herod feels himself to be deceived and ridiculed by the

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[8] Remizov uses this term in his annotations to *Leimonarion*. See a well-informed article about Russian *vertep* by Dimitrii Simonov at <http://dynamo.geol.msu.ru/personal/simon/vert/vertep.html>. He says that *vertep* is a metaphorical puppet theatre performing the mystery of the Nativity of Christ. The drama was played on two stages: on the upper level was represented the cave (*vertep*) where Christ was born; on the lower level were depicted Herod's palace, the massacre of Bethlehem's infants, Herod's death and his burial. The history of verteps goes back to the early centuries of Christianity. Vertep became something rare everywhere in Russia by the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

[9] For a comparative folkloric study of the various forms of Romanian Christmas masked and puppet shows, see Petru Caraman, *Colindatul la romani, slavi si alte popoare* [*Romanian, Slavic and Other Peoples' Christmas Customs*] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1983).

[10] '*Florile Dalbe*' is the Romanian collocation for "white flowers," widely used in today's carols. Its symbolism is close to the Russian: "Белые цветы - это невинность, чистосердие и добрые нравы" [White flowers represent innocence, purity of heart and good morals] (*Slovar' russkikh sueverii*, 490).

birth of Christ. He wants to order the execution of all the infants in his kingdom. Despite Herod's efforts, Jesus remains alive. Rosenthal explains that Remizov used the summary of a Russian folk puppet play, *The Death of King Herod*, published by Nikolai N. Vinogradov in 1905 (111).[11]

On the black hill of Herod's palace, a grand feast (*zhatvennyi pir*)[12] begins in celebration of the New Year. The beautiful Herodias, the Tsar's daughter, dances at the banquet. In the Gospel she embodies conniving womanhood. According to Matthew, Herodias (Erodiade) was King Herod's (Erode) sister-in-law, the wife of his brother Philip (Matthew 14:3-12). She hated John the Baptist for denouncing her adultery and asked Herod to arrest the holy man. Herodias wanted John dead; therefore, she insisted that her daughter Salome dance for King Herod Antipas. In exchange, the girl was to claim John the Baptist's head. The plan worked: Salome performed her dance, Herod offered John's head to her, and this is where the Gospel ends. In Remizov's legend, Herodias is King Herod's daughter, who in the initial legend is Salome. The ambiguous aspect of the subject leads us to believe that only what Herodias symbolizes is important for Remizov. The author created only one character, Herodias, who plots, dances and demands John's head. The name of Herodias's daughter, Salome, does not appear in the Gospel, she

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[11] N.N. Vinogradov, "Velikorusskii vertep," *Izvestiia Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka i slovesnosti Akademii nauk* X. 3 and 4 (1905), cited in Rosenthal 111.

[12] 'Zhatvennyi pir' translates literally as "harvest feast." The Byzantine Empire used a year beginning September 1st, but they did not count the years from Christ's birth, but from the creation of the world, allegedly dated on September 1st, 5509 BC. Since around 1600, most countries have used January 1st as the first day of the year. <http://www.tondering.dk/claus/calendar.html>. Peter I introduced this change in Russia (the Julian calendar) on 1 January 1700.

is virtually "a non-person" (Knapp 96), and perhaps for this reason Remizov did not mention her name.

In *Leimonarion*, Herodias's heart was a well (*krinitsa*) "full of red and drunken wine" (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 8). Her eyes were as sharp as arrows and she could find her way in the wilderness. There, in the desert, she caught sight of John the Baptist and knew he was the only man she wished to marry. She secretly went to the Jordan River, had herself baptised and fell in love, but her love was spurned. In revenge, Herodias asked Herod for John the Baptist's head. Her request saddened Herod (this is also mentioned in all three synoptic Gospels). The black hill, the king's territory, was shaken by a warning, but "the king's power is purer than the sound of copper and harder than iron," thus he had to keep his promise (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 9). The head of John the Baptist is brought in on a silver platter. Yet, when Herodias sees his head before her, she begins to regret her horrible sin and kisses it. "Herodias gave it her first and last kiss" (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 10). The cold lips throbbed under her kiss; a terrible wind started blowing from the saint's mouth, sending a "frenzied breathing from the wilderness" and blowing the famous dancer into the air, where she is condemned to wander eternally. The whole palace on the black hill was shaken by this wind. A malicious witch with her sisters, one worse than the other, climbed the black hill, entered the palace and started to dance the *volynka* – the dance of the

devils.[13] Herodias was condemned to suffer the eternal punishment of dancing forever like a wild whirlwind in the wilderness.

This description is actually enhanced in the reader's imagination through powerful imagery. Analyzing apocryphal characters in *Leimonarion*, Koz'menko mentions the closeness between verbal and visual, i.e. between the words employed in the narrative and a character's image, created by the description itself. By way of support he cites Likhachev, who noted that "Old Russian literature and the graphic arts practically made use of a common system of symbols and allegories; both in literature and painting most of the subject was not actually represented, but rather implied and abbreviated in the same way as in heraldic representation" (27).[14] In Remizov's legend, this visual representation helps us in understanding the legendary images: for example, the author constantly uses a particular modifier to define a protagonist or a place, as *krasnaia panna* (beautiful lady) for Irodiada or *chernaia gora* (black hill) for Herod's citadel.

Remizov blends the motifs of two apocryphal subjects (the Nativity of Christ and the death of John the Baptist) with pagan symbols (*zhatvennyi pir*, *volynka*) that encircle Herodias and Herod. Yet the reader is given a warning in the very title of the legend, which combines Christian and pagan images: the first half of the title is related to a religious legend and the part in brackets

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[13] The term *volynka* is more commonly applied to an ancient folk music instrument found in Eastern Europe under different names. It seems that the name of the devilish dance suggested by Remizov might be performed to this instrument's music. It is made of a whole animal pelt (usually that of a lamb or a goat), thus it may be that the 'volynka' has a sacred killing at its origin (*Slovari i entsiklopedii* <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz/6182>).
[14] D.S. Likhachev, *Izbrannye raboty v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Leningrad: Khudozh. Lit., 1987) 90. Cited in Koz'menko 27.

("How the Whirlwind Came to Be on Earth") to a very popular folk tale. Henryk Baran affirms that by overlaying pagan and Christian motifs this legend becomes a characteristic example of Russian dual faith and that Remizov's approach should be considered realistic, in that he made use of external sources,[15] which reflect the true spiritual life of the Russian people within social reality itself (186). By emphasizing Remizov's use of legends and other folkloric sources told and retold over the centuries, Baran aimed to point out that the Remizovian text is not only a work of fiction, but a text based on people's real experiences, modified and conserved on a oral basis.

Gracheva observes that the main factual sources of Remizov's first legend were Veselovskii's "Legends of Herod and Herodias and Their Reverberations in the People's Mind" and "Romanian, Slavic and Greek Christmas Carols" (*Remizov*, 54). Yet, Remizov finds his own unique way to interpret Herodias's love for John the Baptist. Through the inspired use of various motifs, such as "white flowers" or "the beautiful maiden Herodias" ("*krasnaia panna*") that eloquently contrast with "the black hill" (were Herodias actually lives), he presents the reader with a clear picture. Also, the bold use of the colour 'red' via the dual meaning of *krasnaia* ('red' and 'beautiful') should be noted.

Pagan and Christian symbols clash in a struggle whose outcome is difficult to predict. This fight plays out in the well-articulated scheme of white

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[15] Such as A.N. Veselovskii, *Razyskaniia v oblasti russkogo dukhovnogo stikha* [Research on Russian Spiritual Verse] (1883), E.V. Anichkov, *Vesenniaia obriadovaia pesnia na zapade i u slavian* [*The Ritual Song of Spring in the West and Among the Slavs*] (1903-5), A.V. Tereshchenko, *Byt russkogo naroda* [*The Everyday Life of the Russian Folk*] (1847-8) and others (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 35-9).

– red – black. Red is combined with white (Herodias – John – love),[16] then black is combined with white (Herod – John – death),[17] and white merges with black in some inanimate combinations, such as "on the *black* hill, there are three *white* castles" (*Sochineniia* 2, 6). How the scheme resolves itself is for the reader to decide, although the terrestrial/celestial opposition may favour the 'white' side, as if this side were expected to rise again from ashes. The 'white – red – black' scheme reappears in the third legend (see page 56).

In a balance reminiscent of Gnostic ideology, Remizov sees the personifications of good and evil as equal forces. The world of *Leimonarion* departs from the harmony and spiritual comfort found in Slavophile, Tolstoyan, or populist ideologies; here disquietude reigns. There is an endless fight between good and evil forces, power passing back and forth between the victors, who might be either pagan or Christian figures or both. Remizov seeks answers for himself and for the cultural and social problems of his day. With Russian culture at an impasse, the writer started to see the resurrection of the national myth as a means of revival[18] and hoped he was not alone in this endeavour. Remizov wanted to embody and represent realistically the abstract idea of Russianness in his writings. This idea was regarded not necessarily as an issue of identity, but rather as a life pattern. All his life Remizov was obsessed with his Russianness and the need to express it in writing took shape in his northern exile. Later he found himself unable to

[16] "Белая тополь, белая лебедь, красная панна." [A white poplar, a white swan, a beautiful (red) maiden.] (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 8)
[17] "О, безумие и омрачение нечестивых царей" [O, the madness and the darkening of impious kings] (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 9).
[18] Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 2, 608-9.

utter his thoughts in a language other than Russian, even though he knew German and French very well and was an excellent translator. In his late years, in Paris, he admitted that, despite a vocabulary measuring in thousands of words, he was neither able to define his love for Russia, nor state what it meant to him.[19]

In November 1941 Remizov wrote in his diary "dancing begins with the name of *Rus'*," filling the other side of the page with eleven drawings (Gracheva, "Dnevnik", 192). Thus, if dancing begins with the name of *Rus'*, then what does the dancer Herodias actually stand for? "The beautiful maiden Herodias – irrepressibly rushes about, forever transformed into a whirlwind, a wild whirlwind – cursed dancer..." (*Sochineniia* 2, 11). Does Remizov's Herodias, as a symbol of turmoil and a figure of eternal damnation, represent Russia after the 1905 revolution? Gracheva insists that: "Russia's contemporary situation at the time was associated with a wild whirlwind" (*Remizov*, 56). This association however, needs to be clarified – just what does the 'whirlwind' actually symbolize? According to Cirlot, its "spiral or helicoid movement expresses the dynamism of the three-dimensional cross – that is, of space itself" and stands as a symbol of "universal evolution" (372). In this legend, Remizov promotes his goal of national resurrection through the way he employs fragments of myth in a narrative that achieves its completeness in the context of *Leimonarion*.

[19] There was often something mysterious in the *Rus'* – Remizov relationship. Nina Berberova recounts in her autobiography: "Once... I asked [Remizov] how could he live without Russia when Russia meant so much to him? In a muffed voice he answered: *Russia has been a dream*. And it seemed to me that in his eyes tears welled up" (265).

In "On the Moon and the Stars and Where they Came From: A Tale of Christ," a short introductory sentence and a short conclusion describe a circle around the cosmological content of the legend:

> Ты видишь те зеленые луга, зеленые с белыми цветами. Не от цветов белеют луга, белеют от чистых риз Господних. [You can see those green meadows, green with spots of white. Not from the flowers are they so white, but from the pure chasubles of the Lord.]
>
> And at the end:
>
> Ты видишь те серые горы, не по себе они серые, серы от дел человеческих. [You can see those grey hills, they are not grey of their own accord, but were made grey by the doings of men.]" (*Sochineniia* 2, 12-3)

The storyteller goes back in time, tells a story about Christ and the Virgin Mary, and then comes back to the present with the concluding part. Yet there is a third story, included in the second one, where Christ recalls the *Bogoroditsa*, his Mother, and his infancy. This third story constitutes, in fact, the main body of the text and has a gnoseological character, in that it asserts certain 'truths' about the genesis of the moon and stars: that they emerged from the golden thread used by Mary to crochet a golden chemise for Christ, which was stolen by the falcons and spread all over the sky. This ring structure includes the old story and, at the same time, the old world. The beginning of the story implies that there is a storyteller and a listener at the very moment of narration. Gracheva asserts that the central tale is based on a Romanian folk song, cited by Veselovskii in his *Razyskaniia v oblasti russkogo dukhovnogo stikha* (*Research on Russian Spiritual Verse*, 1883) and adapted by Remizov (56).

The boundary between past and present is marked by a short sentence: "*Blestel zolotoi mesiats, sverkali drobnye zvezdy*" (The golden moon was

glittering, dotted stars were shining). The next sentence ("You can see those grey hills...") belongs to the present time of narration. The contrast between past and present is replayed in the sharp distinction between evil and good people ("*zlye i dobrye*"). The old/new dissimilarity is evident here: 'old' is aligned with 'bright' ("*dotted stars were shining*"), while 'new' is related to "*those grey hills.*" Gracheva maintains that the golden thread made by Mary serves as an allegorical bridge in time,[20] making the tale relevant to the world of Remizov's contemporaries, and that the subtle inversion "*zlye i dorbrye*" (instead of '*dobrye i zlye*') stresses the tragic position of Remizov's generation (*Remizov*, 58).

During his exile in Vologda, where, we recall, he first conceived *Leimonarion*, Remizov deliberately distanced himself from revolutionary activity, considering its violence a global evil (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 6, 653). Thus *Leimonarion* marks or at least coincides with a turning point in Remizov's thought, the moment when he realizes that revolutions and the use of violence cannot bring about a better world. As he writes in "On Herodias's Frenzy": "Oh, the recklessness and darkness of impious kings. There's no moderation and no end to their cruelty" (*Sochineniia* 2, 9). From here, he moved to a new phase in his existence by beginning another kind of exploration: the 'secrets' of ancient people. How did they preserve their myths through the centuries? More importantly, how did myths preserve the popular memory throughout the centuries? *Leimonarion* testifies to Remizov's discovery that a better world should not be sought in a better

[20] Cirlot says that "time is usually symbolized by a sheen as of shot silk" (54).

religion. Paganism and Christianity are regarded as equals; either can serve as a key to achieving an exemplary world. People should choose from among the experiences of their lives, should learn from them, and should also adapt them to fit their needs. These transformations, crystallized by people in texts (by continuously rewriting the old legends) are a mirror of their worldview, and this is what drew Remizov to them. The endeavour to comprehend his own Russian roots and to learn how to immortalize his thoughts through writing, increased Remizov's interest in folkloric sources, both religious and pagan. Thus, the literature describing saints' lives and achievements 'forbidden' by the Church (*apocrypha*), captivated his attention and *Leimonarion* is the outcome of his work within this field.[21]

The third legend of *Leimonarion*, "The Wrath of the Prophet Elijah, From Whom the Lord Concealed his Day of Commemoration," falls into three parts, as Remizov points out in his commentary. The legend begins with the description of the wages of sin, which usually leads to ruin. Then the reader is given a short map of the path to the Garden of Eden. At the end of this path, under the tree of life sits the Virgin Mary, with the "book of those who are alive and those who are dead" in her hands; next to her sits the Apostle Peter, with the keys of Eden at his belt. The text then introduces the Eden/Hell antithesis, supported respectively by contrasts between white, luminous, shining, and dark, miserable and sorrowful. The colour red (the blood, the river of fire) added to black and dark encircles a "malicious and fierce Beast"

[21] In Vologda (1901 - 1902) Remizov met P.E. Shegolev (a former student of A.N. Veselovskii and a well-known historian afterwards), and this friendship had a great influence on the author's future work, as Shegolev provided him with many apocryphal texts (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 6, 653).

(*zloi i liutyi Zver'*), the centre of Hell. Both black and red are inferior, terrestrial colours within the alchemical order, while white and gold are superior, celestial colors (Cirlot 60). After a description of the torments of Hell comes a strange appeal: "Earth! Be my Mother. Do not hasten to turn me into ashes!" (*Sochineniia* 2, 14). This prayer is repeated at the end of the legend, circumscribing dark and terrible descriptions of the torments of the damned. The invocation seems to coincide with the present time of narration, like the prayer of someone who has managed to come back from the torments of a faraway hell.

Judas occupies centre stage in this legend. He is shown to be rejected by God, sent to the infernal regions and driven by the perpetual desire to betray again. He contrives to get to the tree of life, where everybody is asleep, and then to steal the golden keys of Heaven's gates from the Apostle Peter. Judas enters the gates, steals "the sun, the moon, the daybreak, the throne of God, the font of Christ, the flowers of Eden, the Cross and Chrism" (15), and carries them all to Hell. These actions constitute a reversal of conventional values: light and joy have moved to Hell and total darkness to Heaven.

In the spirit of modernism, Remizov draws on numerology. The beginning of the twentieth century had a unique obsession with charting a mathematical path to spirituality and it seems that Remizov was interested in this practice as well.[22] By enumerating all the sinners dancing in Hell, Remizov aims towards an inventory of all existing sins. All seventy-seven ailments and forty disorders are said to dance with joy, whilst "death alone

[22] Remizov was superstitious; he considered his own dreams as certain signs and was convinced that ancient complex ideograms bore unknown secrets.

somersaulted immortal." The symbolism of two numbers Remizov uses here, *four* (40 = 4+0 = 4) and *five* (77 = 7+7 = 14 = 1+4 = 5) might be considered. 'Four' symbolizes the earth, the terrestrial space and man's place in it; it is associated with tangible achievement and with the Elements. 'Five' stands as a symbol for man, health and love, and for essence acting upon matter; 'five' comprises the four limbs of the body plus the head which controls them, and the four cardinal points together with the centre (Cirlot 233-4). Therefore, both Man and Earth should be seen as earthly, while only "*One*" – "the mystic Centre" – is eternal (ibid. 232).

"Who will retrieve the keys stolen by Judas?" asks God in His dark Heaven. The only one to answer the call is the Prophet Elijah. He asks for God's thunder and lightning to fight against the darkness: compare "the Prophet Elijah rose like a fire" (Ecclesiasticus 48: 1-11). By contrast, in Remizov Elijah's action is motivated by personal revenge: his parents were murdered by the devil. Remizov emphasizes this by repeating one sentence: "The embittered heart wreaks its revenge" ("*Mstit ozhestochennoe serdtse*"). The stolen items are given back to Heaven, but Elijah cannot end his quest here. It seems that he is determined to turn everything into ashes. The Virgin implores her son, Christ, to ask the Prophet to put an end to his fighting. Elijah remains the master of the skies,[23] whilst Judas remains forever banished to Hell awaiting the Day of Judgment. The legend closes with a plea

[23] A folk belief in eastern Orthodoxy says that there will always be thunderstorms on St. Elijah's Day (20 July/ 2 August) and that one should never venture out of doors on that day (*Mesiatseslov*, 172).

for life (or resurrection): "Earth! Be my Mother. Do not hasten to turn me into ashes!" (22).

This is a "story of penance and learning," Remizov explains in his commentary. The legend relies on the belief that an eternal, spiritual element within mortals will rise – be resurrected – from the body and exist in a higher spiritual realm. Belief in life after death predates Christianity, as seen, for example in the Osiris myth. In the new, resurrected world a sense of good and evil will be instilled, thus people will stop on their journey through the field of perdition and recall the first, forgotten values in a new spiritual field: *leimonarion*.

The fourth legend is "Why the Devil Has No Heels and the Origin of Wolves, as Told by Egorii, Wolfherd, to St. Nicholas." In his commentary, Remizov tells the reader that the source of this "Discourse" (*Slovo*) is a Ukrainian legend about the origin of wolves. The tale is set in the time of St. George (*Egorii*) (third century) and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker (*Nikola Ugodnik*), who have lost their way in the woods and decide to set camp for the night.[24] Nikola asks Egorii to tell him how the devil came to be afraid of wolves. The legend then moves to another time frame, that of the fourth day of the Creation of the World, when God asked Adam to name all the plants and animals, and Satan came to scoff at Adam by making a clay companion for him. Satan wanted to create a being in the likeness of God, but bearing inside it a satanic heart. God smote this clay creature with his crozier, and a

[24] The continuous dialogue between past and present is also emphasised by the structure of this legend: there is a storyteller and a present time of narration, which includes in it the 'olden days' and the actual tale.

wolf sprang from it and began chasing Satan. The Devil fled and sought refuge in a tree, but the wolf managed to bite off his heels while he was climbing. From that day forth Satan has feared wolves. Thus, the tale not only accounts for the origin of wolves, but also ascribes to the Devil some measure of responsibility for the creation of this ferocious animal. Why then is St. George considered the Herder of Wolves? Gracheva asserts that St. George's power over wolves comes from the idea of taming (*Remizov*, 60). For the Russian peasant, St. George was the protector of cattle. His day (23 April/ 6 May) signals the beginning of spring and also the renewal of the holy Russian earth. Many fertility rites are connected to Egorii[25] and his day occasionally coincides with Palm Sunday or Easter.

The real fascination of this short legend lies in its intermingling of pagan and Christian motifs. At work here is the ironic logic of the common people's humour regarding the differences between man and woman in a primitive society. Where according to Christian doctrine woman was created to perform a 'service' role – to be man's helpmeet and companion – the popular imagination adds that woman's conception as an 'evil' creature was intended but thwarted by the intervention of good forces. Having placed woman next to man, Remizov leaves it to the reader to decide how the story might end. Considering the position of women in Russian society at the time Remizov wrote his legend (1905 - 1907), the witty, deceitful but equally deep-

[25] "Егорий землю отмыкает (Egorii unlocks the earth); Егорий с водой, а Никола с травой (Egorii comes with water, Nikola with grass); На Егория скотину выгоняли в поле вербой, срезанной и освященной в Вербное воскресенье (On Egorii's Day the cattle are driven into the field with a willow branch cut and blessed on Palm Sunday)" (*Kratkaia entsiklopediia* 583).

sighted eyes of the Russian woman portrayed here stand out against all the negative connotations. The feminine character is actually absent in this story, but the reader is able to sense its soft presence in the folk logic, richly preserved by Remizov his work. Aside from the names of the two saints, the victory of good over evil forces, and their identification with God and Satan, this apocryphal tale does not include very much Christian lore. The main point seems to be the correlation of the opposition God/ Devil with the complementary pair man/ woman, both related to Remizov's society and time.

The action of the fifth legend, "The Thing Whose Names Number Twelve and a Half (A Testimonial)" is set in Gadoiad,[26] a country of glass, where king Gog and his queen Magoga live in happiness. One day an army of gnats invades Gadoiad. The king and his army defeat them in battle. Tsar Gog throws the gnats' leader in jail, but *staryi komar* (the old gnat) constantly asks for the king's blood. The gnat is tortured to death. Enter *Veshchitsa* (The Thing), a demonic creature who has twelve and a half names, each pointing to an aspect of evil (Remizov enumerates these names at the end of his tale). She appears from behind the "frosty mountains" to ask for the blood of the Tsar's children. Yet the Tsar does not listen to Veshchitsa, allowing sorrow to consume his realm. Tsar Gog will eventually lose his children, search for them, never to find them again. Then he will have another son, but

[26] In Hebrew *Gad* means 'fortune', 'luck.' It is possible that the author fused this word with the Russian '*ad*' (hell). *Gog* is the name of a king and *Magog* the name of his alleged kingdom; these names are mentioned several times throughout chapters 38 and 39 of the Book of Ezekiel, and once in the Apocalypse (20:7). In antiquity, the name *Gog* was used to vaguely designate any northern population. *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>.

Veshchitsa, the Impure Spirit, manages to steal this one too. Everyone is in agony. The king asks for God's mercy, begging Him for strength to overpower Veshchitsa. But the powers of God and the Devil are equal here, thus God does not answer Gog's appeal. Gog did not understand that he ought to have given the blood Veshchitsa was asking for, because what was asked of him was actually a sacrifice that eventually would have saved all the others, just as Christ sacrificed himself for the salvation of all humankind. Tsar Gog however lived in a "country of glass,"[27] alluding to his worthlessness, specifically his lack of worthy learning; thus he overlooks Veshchitsa's omens. Remizov shaped this character as an allegory for modern man, who, because is unaware of the ancient world's rules, will pay with his life for this ignorance. Yet Gog was happy with his country of glass, because glass does "not conceal the circumstances of a real existence; thanks [its] lightness [...] there is created a new image, one opposed to the heavy impenetrability of the old world, full of rigid rules and unfairness" (d'Amelia, "Stekliannyi" 566).

The king and his brother-in-law, Sisinii,[28] leave the castle and start looking for Veshchitsa. On horseback, Sisinii falls into a long and deep sleep; during this time the king encounters Death and dies. Thus it is left to Sisinii to

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[27] Since glass was the raw material used to imitate precious stones, it was often seen as something of no value; at the same time, the discovery of the architectural potential of glass and then its development was the symbol of a new era. The Crystal Palace in London's exhibit, a prototype for many cities of glass, was brought into the Russian avant-garde both by Chernyshevskii's utopia and Dostoevskii's anti-utopia. It seems that, along with his contemporaries (Zamiatin, Khlebnikov, Maiakovskii), Remizov made use of this utopian idea in his work (d'Amellia, "Stekliannyi," 113-4). Furthermore, Remizov's glass country, then, equates newness with worthlessness, and brings both into the (anti-)utopian present. Chevalier and Gheerbrant emphasize in their dictionary of symbols that certain glass jars have a metonymical value because they can be hermetically sealed, thus the glass takes on the value of its contents; in many legends or stories, a glass container is transformed into a demonic or divine spirit (Vol.3, 265).

[28] One of forty-five Christian martyrs (319 – approximate year of death). <http://www.vedu.ru/BigEncDic/>.

find the devil and ask her: "Who are you, where are you from, and what are your names?" "I am Satan's wing, I am Veshchitsa..." Thus Sisinii finally learns all the "twelve and a half" names of Veshchitsa, which are the "essence" of everything. Furthermore, as the devil said, he who writes down all twelve and a half names and carries them with him all the time will be immune to the devil's power (29).

In his annotations to the tale, Remizov cites as his source a Byzantine legend on the devil Gallo and a Hebrew legend on Lilith, Adam's first wife. Naveh and Shaked consider the occurrence on Aramaic magic bowls and amulets of a long-lived legend in which Smamit (Magoga in Remizov's tale) suffers because of the murder of her children by Sideros (111-22 and 188-97). Running to hide in the mountains, Smamit receives an offer of help from three persons, *Swny, Swswny* and *Syngly* (apparently, the source of the name Sisinii). Half-heartedly, she lets them in her tower, but the evil Sideros enters with them and kills her newborn child. The helpers chase Sideros to the middle of the sea, where he is forced to vow that he will abstain from killing a mother or her child whenever the names of the helpers are invoked. Naveh and Shaked mention that the story appears extensively in Greek, Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Rumanian, Slavonic, late Syrian, Arabic and Hebrew. In the Greek version quoted by Naveh and Shaked, the evil child-killer is tied up by the saints and forced to reveal his names, which will be used in defence against him. The wicked one says:

> My first and special name is called Gyllou; the second Amorphous; the third Abyzou; the fourth Karkhous; the fifth Brian; the sixth Bardellous; the seventh Aigyptian; the eighth Barna; the ninth Kharkhanistrea; the tenth Adikia; [the eleventh ...]; the twelfth Myia; the half Petomene. (Naveh and Shaked, 118)

All these legends seem to be based on ancient magical sources (as is the incantation), exploited for the same general purpose, which is the protection of women in childbirth and newborn babies. Remizov seems to have extended the protective purpose of the tale to a broader application, with the intention of reviving a magical incantation that would eventually save his generation from a breakdown.

The legend that ends Remizov's collection, "On the Passion of the Lord (Three Days in the Grave)," starts on the holy Mount Golgotha, the site of Christ's crucifixion and, according to Remizov, of Adam and Eve's grave. The author draws some connections between his legend and previous stories related to the Tree of Knowledge and what happened to it after the Flood; the Tree of Knowledge branched into three parts, one was a sign of Adam, the second of Eve, and the third [the middle part] of God (43). Remizov also explains the origin of the collocation "Lebanese Cross" (*levanitov krest*): it is said that God's part of the Tree of Knowledge was found on the coast of Lebanon after the Flood, and that Christ's Cross was made from it (43).

When Remizov read "On the Passion of the Lord" at Viacheslav Ivanov's Tower (the well known Symbolist salon) during the week before the Easter of 1907, Ivanov cried, "This is blasphemy!" Remizov, already suffering from depression, was cast even lower and left in silence with his wife (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 6, 664). It seems that Ivanov did not

understand the pain that suffused Remizov's writings, nor could he appreciate the humour of his fantasies. Nevertheless, Remizov treated his 'spiritual' censor in the same way he used to deal with all his censors: "he 'cosmetically' rearranged his legend without in fact altering its inner meaning" (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 69), that is, he reworked the scenes where the devils appear and gave it an end open to the possibility of Christ's resurrection.

The story revolves around one subject: what made Christ's death on the cross the supreme sacrifice? Most often emphasized is the agony of the ordeal, which was not exclusive to Jesus. Remizov seems to ask: what is it in the crucifixion of Christ that makes it so inimitable? According to Remizov's legend: "From where they hammered the nails, blood flowed copiously; from where they tied the girdle, sweat poured; from the place they set the crown of thorns, tears gushed" (*Sochineniia* 2, 30). Remizov explains in an endnote: "Blood is the wine. Sweat is the myrrh. Tears are wheat" (ibid. 44)

The tale evokes Christ's sacrifice for people, but in Remizov's version God abandons Christ as he took on his shoulders the long list of human sins. Satan, the Prince of Darkness (*Satanail – kniaz' t'my*), and his army of devils rejoiced to receive him. In such conditions, Death appears as a "wonderful young bride" who "comes out of the blue sea" (31); she represents the end of suffering and, consequently, Christ's salvation. On the evening Christ died, Remizov writes, his disciples Joseph and Nicodemus came to take him, alluding to the Gospel:

> And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to

> Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. (John 19: 39-41)

Remizov departs from the Gospel account by adding his uncanny epilogue: Satan and his army of devils enter the sepulchre and start defiling Christ's body in unspeakable ways. The dismemberment is rendered in symbolic terms: "His flesh – to the earth, His blood – to the fire, His bones – to the rocks, His breath – to the wind, His eyes – to the flowers, His veins – to the grass, His thoughts – to the clouds, His sweat – to the dew, His tears – to the brackish sea" (*Sochineniia* 2, 32). Then, from Mount Golgotha, the Virgin's [Mother of God's] lamentation spreads throughout the entire world (*raznosilsia po miru plach Bogoroditsy*). If in the third legend, "The Wrath of Elijah the Prophet," it was the Mother of God who intervened to stop Elijah from setting fire to the whole world, in this last legend she is portrayed as an eternal light. The importance of this character (*Bogoroditsa* [Mother of God] – the eternal Mother – Mother-Russia) in the symbolic world of the author is immeasurable, but this might be subject of another essay.

Remizov's legend ends with the third day after Christ's death and the announcement that Christ has risen from the dead. Gracheva asserts that, compared with the other legends of *Leimonarion*, "On the Passion of the Lord" represents the most abstract expression of Remizov's cosmogonical and eschatological thought (*Remizov*, 63). Remizov indeed includes in this last legend all the ideas employed in the previous five, and the final battle between good and evil comes to be expected by the reader. The author situates the two

opposed parties, the Devil (*Satanail*) and the crucified Christ, face to face: "and their eyes met each other as king to slave, brother to rival, king to king, brother to brother, Rescuer to one in need of rescue" (*Sochineniia* 2, 31).

Leimonarion is not an imitation or a stylization of religious legend. Remizov strove to grasp the old pagan and Christian principles, to penetrate their archaic logic, and from it to create his own legends, as vehicles of his own reflections on the upheaval affecting Russian socio-political life and the arts at the beginning of the twentieth century. By describing Remizov as "a bearer of tradition," Sarah P. Burke emphasises that all borrowings used by the author in his work pursue the double goal of self-expression and the continuation of what he considered the 'true' Russian line in literature, the tradition of Gogol' and Dostoevskii (169). Burke adds that Remizov's notions of what is "truly Russian" are well documented in his diaries, letters and autobiographical works, such as *Podstrizhennymi glazami* (*With Clipped Eyes*, 19), *Iveren'* (*The Splinter*, 1955), "Dnevnik 1941 goda" ("Diary of 1941", 2003) and others. In a letter to Blok of 27 October 1908 Remizov confesses:

> When I read, I see no one and I hear nothing, I see only my book and I hear only my voice, saying Russian words. And because I love Russian words, I love saying them. So that, as you may see, I have to read since this is what I like, only that at the same time, as I leave various soirées, I sense an unpleasant taste, as if I have done something I should not have done. [...] People who attend these soirées know very well, deep down in their souls, what they came for. And when they hear, let's say, my Russian words, they remain totally indifferent (*sovershenno bezrazlichny*) to their sound, just as they would have remained indifferent to Dostoevskii's, Tolstoi's or Pushkin's words. (Mints and Iulova 86)

Remizov emphasizes here, through repetition of the phrase "Russian words" how miserable he feels that his contemporaries should be interested in anything other than the sound of his "Russian words."

Leimonarion, an enchanted world of magic and make-believe, startled its first readers primarily through its use of language. In this sense, Shakhmatov and other literati of the time were excited about *Leimonarion* and *Posolon'*. Still, when Remizov, on Shakhmatov's advice, entered the contest for the Pushkin Award of the Royal Academy of Science in 1912, he lost; the president of Academy wrote the following on his copy: "this was not written in Russian" (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 73). Paradoxically enough, after almost a hundred years since Remizov's death, Slavists around the world have written many pages demonstrating precisely the opposite and exploring Remizov's work to grasp its inner aspect and to reveal the Russianness preserved within it.

Chapter III

Besnovatye[1] – Exploring the Line Between Sacred and Secular

In Aleksei Remizov's view, Old Russian literature and folklore are interdependent. Consequently, he devoted a vast part of his work to rewriting old literary pieces, aiming to bring them back to the modern reader in an enriched form. Russian scholars have written extensively on the subject of Remizov's association with Old Russian tales and stories, comparing his renditions with their mostly anonymous prototypes.[2] A.M. Gracheva observes that Remizov chose to rewrite some of the more important tales in Old Russian literature, those that were not only highly appreciated by the seventeenth-century readers, but also equally attractive to the twentieth-century public ("Drevnerusskie," 110).

"Savva Grudtsyn" and "Solomoniia" are two tales from Old Russian Literature of the mid-seventeenth century, with themes probably adapted from Byzantine demonological writings. The idea that good and evil forces are equal

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[1] Aleksei Remizov. *Besnovatye: Savva Grudtsyn i Solomoniia* [*The Demonic: Savva Grudtsyn and Solomoniia*]. Paris: Opleshnik, 1951.

[2] R.P. Dimitrevna, "Povest' o Petre i Fevronii v pereskaze A.M. Remizova" (1971). A.M. Gracheva wrote a few articles on this subject: "Povest' A.M. Remizova *Savva Grudtsyn* i ee drevnerusskii prototip" (1979), "Povest' o Bove Koroleviche v obrobotke A.M. Remizova" (1981), "Drevnerusskie povesti v pereskazakh A.M. Remizova" (1988); they are included in her book *Aleksei Remizov i drevnerusskaia kul'tura* (2000). See also A.V. Pigin, "Povest' A.M. Remizova *Solomoniia* i ee drevnerusskii istochnik" (1989); M.V. Koz'menko, "*Limonar'* kak opyt rekonstruktsii russkoi narodnoi very" (1994); M.N. Klimova "*Tragediia o Iude, printse Iskariotskom* A.M. Remizova i ee literaturnyi istochnik" (1995); A.V. Pigin, "Drevnerusskaia povest' o bese Zerefere v pereskaze Alekseia Remizova" (2003).

informs both texts, which points to Bogomile influences,[3] added at some point on the manuscripts' route, from Byzantium to Russia, through Bulgaria (Riazanovskii 126). The tales not only treat ideal Christian behaviour, but also depict the *modus vivendi* of that time. Remizov declares that what sets both "Savva Grudtsyn" and "Solomoniia" apart from the literature of the time is the presence of *besy* (demons) as active, key characters, whereas in other literary productions, such as the lives of saints, they are mentioned only as [instances of] impersonal evil (*Sochineniia* 2, 78).

It was only in the second half of the seventeenth century that the devil became an important, aesthetically interesting character in Russian literature (Harkins, 524). Before then, the fictional hero was unknown and the active characters were mostly historical figures (Likhachev, ch.8). Thus, the demon enters literature along with the common folk and other fictional heroes, who bring with them all their superstitions, fears, and beliefs. Moreover, these new characters introduced another new feature to the literature of the period – namelessness (*bezymiannost'*), as a means of generalization: *molodets* (the young fellow), *nebogatyi chelovek* (the poor man), *nekii kupets* (a certain merchant) etc. (Likhachev, ch.8). This anonymity extends to demonological characters, for whom terms such as *nechistyi* (the unclean one), with all its derivations, are used instead of names. Riazanovskii maintains that Old Russian demonology has its own unique *besy*, including such distinctive variants as "*bogomerzkaia pogan'*" (filth repugnant unto God), an obvious hybrid of early Christian and Slavic pagan figures (126). In his "Savva

[3] A heretical Christian sect founded in Bulgaria in the tenth century by the priest Bogomil, whose teachings came from dualistic Gnostic and Manichean beliefs.

Grudtsyn," Remizov gives a name – Viktor Tainykh – to its central demon, adding to this character's personality. The name *Tainykh* is a derivative of *taina* ('mystery'), which makes more evident the mysterious origin of Viktor.

The original "Savva Grudtsyn" and "Solomoniia" were both written at a turning point in the poetics of Old Russian literature, when the rise of individualism produced as a corollary the notion of private destiny (Likhachev, ch.8). However, "fate is not something inborn to humans," Likhachev argues, and this notion accounts for many contradictory situations. This is why in the tale about Savva Grudtsyn, the scholar continues, "Savva's fate takes on the appearance of a demon tempter, who goads the hero into harmful deeds" (ch.8).

Some of the innovative elements introduced in "Savva Grudtsyn" by its anonymous author(s), in the absence of a good command of the new literary methods, have decreased the intelligibility of the text. Marcia Morris asserts that "the anonymous author of *The Tale of Savva Grudtsyn* faced considerable difficulties in maintaining consistency while weaving a pragmatic strand into an essentially didactic tale" (212). Remizov aims to provide his reader with a more intelligible narration, and he also pays special attention to developing his characters more consistently. In the case of "Savva Grudtsyn," Remizov alternates "the abstract manner of narration, typical of Old Russian literature, with concrete narration, characteristic of modern literature" (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 191). He individualizes some characters by giving them names and changes Stepanida's fate (she dies in Remizov's tale). These amendments, Gracheva asserts, remove the contradiction in the original text, between

subject and statement (*Remizov*, 191). Morris also refers to this contradiction when she insists that "there are a number of instances where the logic which should tie sequences of events together is broken," and that Remizov "fleshes out considerably" his characters and confers on all of Savva's actions a plausible motivation (204).

Along with stylistic analysis, Morris makes a helpful comment concerning the prominence given to the opposition holy/ unholy in Remizov's reworking. She asserts that Remizov's demon, taking advantage of Savva's weakness, "plans to establish a reign of unholy terror over Holy Rus'" (205). There might seem to be a facile analogy here with the socio-political reality of Remizov's time of writing in the 1940s (the 'unholy' supremacy of the Communists over the holy Russian land). His emotional reaction to political circumstance should be taken into consideration when analyzing statements like "*podnialas' iz propada nepropadnaia Rus'*"[the imperishable Rus' rose up from perdition] (*Sochineniia* 2, 82).

Remizov recounts how, throughout his childhood, oral tales of *besnovatye* (the demonic) "amazed" him during Sunday liturgy, at the Simonov monastery of Moscow (*Sochineniia* 2, 79), where the tales were probably read in the final *pouchenie* (homily) part of the service. Many years later, during his northern exile, Remizov encountered these tales again[4] and, began studying them. From here to the first 1951 publication of "Savva Grudtsyn" in Paris is a long stretch, which shows Remizov's continuous

[4] "I heard about Savva Grudtsyn and Solomoniia in their homeland, in Velikii Ustiug. If I consider only my encounter with these names, then going into exile was well worth it!" (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 79).

involvement with themes from Old Russian literature. "Russkaia povest' XVII v. o besnovatoi Solomonii" first appeared in 1929 in Remizov's reworking (in the Prague journal *Volia Rossii*). The writer appended it to "Savva Grudtsyn" (*Besnovatye: Savva Grudtsyn i Solomoniia*) only in 1949, when he was working on the fourth redaction of the tale about Savva (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 202-5). This was when Remizov refined his notion of *besnovatyi*:

> Бесноватый то же, что раскованный, – усиленный ритм речи и движения в подхлестывающем танце под потусторонний или, точнее, изсторонний свист. [Demoniac is the same thing as uninhibited, it is that intensified rhythm of speech and movement in a forced forward dance, which starts when a whistle from the world beyond us, or rather, the world without, is heard. (*Sochineniia* 2, 79)

There are two recurring ideas throughout Remizov's writings based on Old Russian Literature and folklore. The first concerns the gap between good and evil, situated beyond human physical experience; the second addresses the disparity between *this* and *the other* world, which might also be perceived as a disparity between secular and sacred. As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, Remizov's attraction to dichotomies might be explained by his dual, almost Gnostic, view of the world. For instance, referring to Remizov's "Solomoniia," Pigin remarks that the "earthly" (secular) and the "celestial" (sacred) are poles apart, "supported by a stable system of leitmotifs: darkness, beast, whistle, shout, blood, blaze, water, the numbers five and seven, point to the earthly category; while brightness, stars, silence, cornflowers, belong to the celestial category" (116). Pigin's inventory draws a logical distinction between *this* and *the other* world, vividly represented by Remizov. In "Solomoniia," the human world is divided from the demonical realm by a permeable boundary

and Remizov pays attention to the protagonist's crossings from one side to another, noticing "what a variety of answers this symbolic text provides" (*Sochineniia* 2, 142).

The fact that Remizov often illustrates his ideas underscores his eagerness to grasp the struggle between these opposing categories. The author recalls in his commentary how he first worked on drawings of Solomoniia, and only then began writing the tale itself (*Sochineniia* 2, 79).[5] The above-mentioned oppositions constantly expand to include others, such as ancient/ modern, attainable/ unattainable, young/ old, reality/ fantasy, et cetera. The message of "Savva Grudtsyn," Remizov says, is that "there is no love without sacrifice" and that, "in the name of that same love, people should be humble, or simply admit their smallness" (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 205). The opposition between secular and sacred is highlighted by "the antinomy between earthly and heavenly love," which remains one of Remizov's "unsolved, and also unsolvable, philosophical dilemmas" (*Remizov*, 205).

Remizov started his work on *Besnovatye* right after completing *Povest' o dvukh zveriakh* (*A Tale of Two Beasts*),[6] yet another theme he discovered during his exile in Ust'-Sysol'sk. To underline the continuity of Remizov's writings, Gracheva shows how close the two books are at the level of ideas (*Remizov*, 188-9); she stresses, that is, the central notion of a strict dichotomy between *this* and *the other* world. In *Besnovatye*, the writer searches for a

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[5] "Соломонию, ее видения я сначала нарисовал, так мне легче было представить весь ее изворот. И по рисунку пишу" [Solomoniia, I first drew her various forms; that way it was easier to picture all her twists and turns. Now I write from the sketch.] (*Sochineniia* 2, 79).

[6] Remizov explains that the first source of this tale is *Panchatantra*, from the oldest Sanskrit set of *Five Books*, which tells of humans who lived among the beasts (*Sochineniia* 2, 73).

balance in ancient thought. In a modernist way, Remizov's open-minded reader is invited to explore, to be aware of the fight between these opposites, and to develop his own understanding of the complex relationship that exists between sacred and secular.

Both tales, "Savva Grudtsyn" and "Solomoniia," are literary "pronouncements of culpability, uttered by some stray souls" (Remizov *Sochineniia* 2, 78). Remizov believes that "in people's consciousness, fate expresses itself by way of various representations of sin" (Pigin 118). Indifference and lack of respect for life in general and for the multitude of natural resources people have[7] is seen by Remizov as the main cause of all human suffering. This comes close to the late Tolstoi's rejection of property and dream of universal brotherhood. When Patricia Carden compares the two writers, she affirms that "Remizov and Tolstoy are drawn together by their fascination with the magical and privileged world of childhood" (207). While Tolstoi's desire was to re-establish a patriarchal world which had in fact never existed, Remizov reveals the wish to remain forever in childhood, to live in a perpetual state of celestial play (214). Thus, for Remizov, childhood represents pure beginning, a sacred time, as opposed to the time of adulthood, a profane time. This is the case of both Solomoniia and Savva Grudtsyn, who spent their childhood and youth in a sinless world. Leaving the sacred space of their childhood home launches them into a space where humans grow to be dominated by passion, envy and the desire to be masters of their own fate.

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[7] This is what Prokopii, in Remizov's rendition of "Solomoniia," encounters on his travels (136-7).

In "Savva Grudtsyn" Remizov emphasizes the trajectory of the recurrent motif "*ia voli khochu!*" (Freedom is what I want!) (*Sochineniia* 2, 84, 100 and 109), and we find it in Solomoniia as well, "*khot' by odin den' bez etogo shuma*" (if there were at least one day without this noise) (133). Both tales conclude that people are not masters of their destiny.

While seventeenth-century versions of "Savva Grudtsyn" commence with a "historical treatment of the disturbances which occurred in early seventeenth-century Muscovy" (Morris 203), Remizov's tale starts with a nine-line introductory paragraph about Velikii Ustiug, the region where Savva's father, a wealthy merchant, lives. The author then abruptly turns to Savva, to his education, feelings, and the way he perceives life. This introductory part draws many associations between the protagonist and Remizov himself. Savva has read not only the lives of saints and kings, Byzantine stories and novels, but also Shakespeare. At the age of nineteen Savva entered his father's business and embarked on a trading venture along the river Volga. He felt rather uncomfortable about the transition from bookish pursuits to the merchant's life. Savva arrives in Orel Solikamskii, where he meets his father's good friend Bozhen, and falls in love with Stepanida, Bozhen's wife. This love flourishes rapidly until Annunciation Eve, when Savva unintentionally insults the young woman, and she rejects him. Shortly thereafter, Stepanida lets her husband know about Savva's attempts to seduce her, and Bozhen throws Savva out. Savva, feeling alone and miserable, signs a blood pact with Viktor, a

character bizarrely appearing out of nowhere, who later proves to be a demon.[8] Viktor wins Savva's assent by promising to restore Stepanida's love, but in exchange asks him to renounce his faith in God. The day after the pact is signed, Bozhen invites Savva back into the house as a guest, and Stepanida once again loves him as she did before. One evening, Viktor takes Savva on a strange journey throughout Satan's land, vividly depicted by Remizov. In this devilish realm "frenzy and avidity come over Savva" (97); he then returns to Bozhen's house and kills Stepanida for no particular reason. It turns out that it is actually Viktor, embodied in Savva, who committed murder. The next day, Savva and Viktor begin a whirlwind tour of Russia. The demon's whistle instantly moves them from one place to another. Savva and Viktor journey from Orel to Kozmodemiansk, through Pavlovo, Shui, and Moscow, and then on to Smolensk. In Shui, Savva joins the army to participate in the battle of Smolensk against Polish troops ([in the] Polish-Muscovy War of 1632-1634). Viktor wins for Savva the favour of all his superiors, but in Smolensk Savva meets a man who knows his father, Boyar Shein, who urges him to return to his father's home.

Viktor and Savva arrive for the second time in Moscow. Falling ill, Savva confesses his sins to a priest, whereupon demons start tormenting him. A dream gives him strength: the Virgin appears before him, promising him forgiveness, should he leave the secular world behind. After agonizing but unsuccessful efforts to cast the evil spirits from his body, Savva is liberated and

[8] Remizov chose the term *demon*, defined in Greek mythology as an abstract representation of an indeterminate and shapeless divine force, malevolent or (rarely) beneficent (*Mify* 1, "Demon," 366).

Iurodivyi Semeon, with his eyes full of tears, takes him out of this world: "*I iz etogo sveta uidem!*" ("And we'll leave this world!") (*Sochineniia* 2, 120). Thus Remizov's reworking of the tale takes Savva from a blessed childhood spent in the sacred space of his parents' home, through a secular territory of love and the temptations of power specific to adulthood, to a sacred space promised by *Iurodivyi* Semeon. In Old Russian variants of the tale, as opposed to Remizov's ambiguous ending, Savva attains his salvation in a monastery.

Recalling his work on "Savva Grudtsyn," Remizov assigns a pivotal role to "the uttering of the word 'blood'" (*Sochineniia* 2, 80). Two key plot moments of "Savva Grudtsyn" are crucially linked to blood and also to the fact that blood is perceived as belonging to the secular category. The first occurs on Annunciation Eve, when Savva rejects Stepanida (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 86),[9] and the second coincides with Savva signing the blood pact with the demon Viktor. The Stepanida – Savva confrontation reveals the balance Remizov introduced between the moral values of the two characters. While the Old Russian versions of the tale are not too clear in explaining why Viktor and Savva should suddenly have embarked on a journey throughout Russia, Remizov inserts a reason in his recasting of the tale: Stepanida is murdered (Gracheva, *Remizov*, 191). The demon used Savva's hands to kill her, though his motivation remains obscure. For enlightenment the reader should return to the moment when the word 'blood' appears in Remizov's tale for the first time; it implies that Stepanida also made use of dark forces to punish Savva for having rejected her. In that earlier episode, Stepanida comes to Savva's

[9] "И первое, что ему бросилось в глаза: на простыне кровь" [And the first thing that leapt to the eye: there was blood on the bedsheet] (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 86).

bedroom on Annunciation Eve, but Savva, respecting such an important religious holiday, asks that she do no more than lie down beside him. Stepanida fails to understand Savva's plea for a moment of reverence and feels rejected. The first thing Savva sees on his bedsheets right after she leaves is a blood spot, which suggests that Stepanida was experiencing menstruation, traditionally considered to be an unclean period for women, hence the taboo on entering a church, or touching holy things for eight days. On Annunciation Day, only a few hours after the incident, Stepanida brings three cups of red wine (symbolically considered a substitute for blood)[10] to the lunch table, one for herself, one for Bozhen, and one for Savva. While Stepanida looks with a jealous love at Savva, he drinks his cup of "love-potion"[11] to the dregs and says: "My father has so many sorts of wine, but I have never tasted such a strong wine before!" (*Sochineniia* 2, 87).

The incident alludes to Stepanida's newly made pact with the devil, implying that she has dropped her own blood into Savva's cup of wine, wishing to tie his fate to her own. Shortly thereafter, Savva undergoes a sudden change of heart and finds himself irresistibly drawn to Stepanida. She is said to be "entirely inside him, with her bones, flesh, and blood" (*Sochineniia* 2, 88). The town's sorcerer, Komar, diagnoses Savva's condition as a case of "witchcraft." Stepanida's blood, he says, "is dancing inside him, and blood cannot be removed" (*Sochineniia* 2, 89). Compare the belief still extant among Russian Old Believers: a girl can use her menstrual blood to tie her fate for seven years

[10] See *Slavianskaia mifologiia*, "*Krov'*," 263.
[11] Remizov uses the same expression, "love-potion" ["чаша приворотной любви" (87)], as the anonymous author of the seventeenth-century version of the tale (Harkins 519).

to that of her beloved, "but this is an unclean practice,[12] he who makes this binding possible, is a doer of evil." Because nothing guarantees happiness once the seven years have passed, the practice is to be avoided. It seems that Stepanida also exploits dark forces, which argues for her share of the guilt. In this reading, Savva's culpability in signing a pact with the demon is minimized: troubled by the "love-potion," he is unable to read the contract signed with his own blood (92).

Morris maintains that Remizov uses the disparity in age between Bozhen and Stepanida "as a basis for modernizing the *Tale*. In his version Stepanida is much more of a victim of events rather than their instigator" (Morris 214). This statement might be open to dispute though. Look closer at the moment when Savva meets Viktor for the first time and prepares to sign the pact with his own blood (at the demon's suggestion). Hearing the word 'blood' recalls to Savva's mind "the bloodstain on the bedsheet" (*Sochineniia* 2, 92). The demon reads Savva's mind and tells him: "Кровь покрывается кровью!" [Blood should be covered by blood!] (92), demonstrating Viktor's knowledge of Stepanida's "love-potion." She is the first to make use of blood and evil forces.

In Remizov's tale, Viktor uses Savva's body to stab and kill Stepanida. This is arguably the first overt revelation that Savva is possessed, to the point that he hardly is able to feel the difference between himself and the demon:

Звездная ночь.

[12] Interview recorded in 1998 in Romania, during an expedition organized by The Community of Romania's Russian Lipovans; the interviewee, Tatiana Podgoreanu, was born in 1939 in Braila.

Но когда выпрыгнул из окна и очутился на улице, звезды пропали. Ему показалось, кто-то еще следом за ним спрыгнул. Над головой свирепо крутила метель.
«Метель, - подумал он, - это метель крестит и хлещет!»
Дороги не видно, а идет.
Он ли это или тот другой шел по полю с ножом.
[Starlit night.
But when he jumped out of the window and found himself in the street, the stars had disappeared. He felt as if somebody else had jumped out behind him. The snowstorm whirled wildly above his head.
«Snowstorm, - he thought, - this snowstorm crosses and whips!»
He cannot see the path [before him], but on he goes.
Was it he or that other being walking through the field with a knife.] (*Sochineniia* 2, 98)

Viktor and Savva travel across Russia for a reason, to present Savva Grudtsyn to the people as their 'true' tsar. Morris emphasizes the resonance introduced by the recurring motif of *samozvanstvo* (imposture) in Remizov's tale (215). The demon plants in the public mind a false image of the demonic Savva who becomes a powerful warrior renowned all the way from Smolensk to Moscow (*Sochineniia* 2, 108-9). The first instance of imposture was perpetrated by Viktor, when he introduced himself to Savva as his fellow countryman ("*ia tozhe iz Ustiuga*"),[13] the second by Savva, as prompted by the demon. Even though Savva feels both seduced and terrified by Viktor, he accedes to all the latter's demands. Savva is aware that Viktor possesses him, but he lacks the strength, or perhaps the motivation to resist. The power he needs to take a different path comes from without, from someone well established in the sacred world, a "fool-in-Christ."[14] *Iurodivyi* Semeon is the only one able to see Viktor in his real, devil's form. Gracheva maintains that

[13] Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 90.
[14] "*Iurodivyie – eto nashe – russkoe – eti vyrodki chelovecheskogo roda*" [Fools-in-Christ – that's ours, our Russian thing, those outgrowths of the human race] (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 458).

only the fourth redaction of "Savva Grudtsyn" (1949) forefronts "Savva's psychological conflict as well as the two magical heroes of the tale, Viktor Tainykh and *Iurodivyi* Semeon, who are in fact the two antithetical hypostases of Savva (*ego dvoiniki*)" (*Remizov*, 203). Semeon, at their first meeting, warns Savva:

> Брат Савва, – услышал Савва голос, – я плачу, мои слезы по твоей душе. Савва, кого ты называешь братом, и ты думаешь, это человек? В пропасть ведет тебя. На тебе кровь. [...] Савва почувствовал, как там у него где-то в пустом его сердце вдруг открылся и ключом бьет прозрачный источник и всеми каплями до капельки подымается единым рыданием. Пусть и душа продана, и руки в крови, но эта зарыдавшая боль осветила и опамятовала призрачную пустоту сердца, отравленного любовью.
>
> [Brother Savva, – Savva heard a voice, – I'm crying, my tears are for your soul. Savva, he whom you call brother, do you think he is a human being? He is ruining you. You have blood on you. [...] Suddenly, somewhere in his empty heart, Savva felt a crystal clear spring gush forth and rise, drop by drop, to the very last drop, into a single sob. His soul may be sold and his hands in blood, but this sobbing swell of pain, lit up and brought back to mind the ghostly emptiness of a heart poisoned by love.] (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 101-2)

Semeon and the Mother of God rescue Savva at the end of Remizov's tale. The battle for Savva's soul between Viktor and Semeon is actually waged inside the soul of the protagonist himself, in Gracheva's estimation (203). Likhachev, who sees in the demon the personification of Savva's fate, asserts that "the demon appears when Savva loses self-control and is held captive by his passion. [...] The demon is the creation of his own desires" (131). Yet, in Remizov's reworking it is more obvious that Savva explores the boundary line between the sacred and the secular worlds (represented by Semeon and Viktor, respectively). It was his first meeting with Semeon that made Savva aware that his soul had been sold. When Savva returns to Moscow after his delirious confession (*Sochineniia* 2, 111-3), Viktor terrifies him with the pact signed in

blood: "А есть такое, чего ничем не сотрешь: кровь! Смотри: твоя кровь!" [But there is something that nothing can erase: blood! Look: your blood!] (*Sochineniia* 2, 113-4).

Nonetheless, Savva is rescued, the pact is rescinded, and the last gruesome description of the demon Viktor contrasts with the positive ending of the tale. This contrast extends the opposition between the sacred and the secular. While the two are evenly balanced throughout the tale, at the end the sacred triumphs over the secular. Even though tempted by Viktor in every possible way, Savva chooses to beg for forgiveness. Remizov emphasizes how easy it is to cross the line into the demonical realm (signing the pact), and opposes this ease of passage to the difficulties encountered on the way back, which is open only to those who choose a spiritual life over material comfort.

Note how Remizov situates this universal discord among Russians, an extremely pious people at the time: "Мы русской веры, как же нам без Христа, истинного Бога! – отозвался по-старинному Савва." [We are of the Russian faith, how can we live without Christ, the true Lord! – Savva replied in the old-fashioned way] (*Sochineniia* 2, 92). In those few opening lines of the tale, talking about Russia after the Time of Trouble, the author says: "...и поднялась из пропада непропадная Русь, русская над прямыми и кривыми..." [...and from perdition arose imperishable Rus', Russian for the righteous and the false alike...] (*Sochineniia* 2, 82). In his rewriting of "Savva Grudtsyn" Remizov penetrates into the soul of that old "imperishable Rus'" and strives to help move her spirit out of peril.

Remizov's tale "Solomoniia" introduces another *iurodivyi* figure, Prokopii, who appears in the second part to exorcise the main character, Solomoniia. The version of "Solomoniia" used by Remizov was written in the mid-seventeenth century by the priest Iakov (*Sochineniia* 2, 141). Pigin examined 130 copies of "Solomoniia," 63 from the seventeenth century, 64 from the eighteenth, and three from the nineteenth (Loiter 74). The tale consisted initially of two parts, the torments of Solomoniia and the story of her recovery, but Remizov breaks this structure by giving us only one narration, dominated by the monologue of an omniscient author (Pigin 117). "The Priest Iakov kept the old faith, but the gift of love for the common Russian language possessed by Archpriest Avvakum was not granted to him, therefore he wrote the tale about the miraculous recovery of the possessed Solomoniia (...) in a bookish and quite convoluted style" (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 141). Iakov's version lacks true pathos, poetry, and "he is not aware of the symbolism this tale bears" (142), elements that, along with a rich folkloric basis, are emphasized in Remizov's reworking. The tale abounds in fantastic material, vividly depicts how many outrageous devils take advantage of Solomoniia, how she gives birth to eleven little devils, and how she manages eventually to escape from Satan's realm. In addition to its scarcely credible plot, Remizov reveals, "Solomoniia" is a rare example of "a tale where the phallus assumes a variety of guises only to torment its victim" (*Sochineniia* 2, 141).

Solomoniia's psychological conflict and also the representation of the tug of war between *this* and *the other* world are played out in the plot. *This* world is the one Solomoniia, her family and all people live; *the other* one is the

world of St. Theodora and the fools-in-Christ. The old tale says that Solomoniia had the misfortune of being baptized by a drunken priest, which deprived her of divine protection and doomed her to terrible agony thereafter (*Bol'shaia entsiklopediia*). Remizov omits this invalid baptism entirely; in his reworking, Solomoniia is fourteen and lives with her parents in the district of Erg. Her father is a priest at the local Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Veil. As a girl, Solomoniia was inspired by St. Theodora's vita and dreamt of becoming a nun and "dedicating her life to God" (121), but her father married her to the shepherd Matvei, a man much older than she. Solomoniia undergoes terrible sufferings at the hands of demons, and misery caused by the divergence between her spiritual leanings (her wish to follow the path chosen by St. Theodora) and marriage. From her wedding night on, Solomoniia is tormented and possessed in most bizarre ways by a horde of unnamed demons. These demons are bluish in color, shameless in their behaviour and constantly driven by lust. At the end of the honeymoon Matvei sends Solomoniia back to her parents, to their dismay: "*doch' vernulas' – porchenaia*" ("our daughter has come back – spoiled") (*Sochineniia* 2, 123).

The demons continue to visit Solomoniia at her parents' house. Her behaviour becomes strange; she walks around naked, frightening everyone. Iaroslavka, a character from Satan's realm, visits her during the night. *Iaroslavka* is the opposite of *Bogoslavka*, who is St. Theodora (*Bogoslavka* is an epithet applied by Remizov to this saint): *iar* + *slavit'* > "glorifier of the abyss" and *bog* + *slavit'* > "glorifier of God." Solomoniia gives birth to eleven demons and is taken to the land of Satan shortly thereafter. Her parents and

neighbours search for her everywhere, before finally giving up, believing she must have died. In the land of Satan, Iaroslavka trains Solomoniia:

> Светя ей, встретила Ярославка.
> «Соломония, – сказала она, – я должна научить тебя именам».
> И стала называть демонические имена.
> А Соломония заучивает.
> Нелегка показалась наука: были такие – не выговоришь, и такие – сказать срам. Но Соломония все отчетливо запомнила. И на проверке каждое произнесла легко, как свое: все семьдесят.
> [Iaroslavka met her, lighting her way.
> «Solomoniia, – she said, – I have to teach you the names.»
> And she began to list the names of devils.
> And Solomoniia memorized them.
> It wasn't an easy task: some of them were impossible to pronounce and others – shameful to say. But Solomoniia committed everything precisely to memory. And when they tested her, she pronounced each name easily, as if it were her own: all seventy.] (*Sochineniia* 2, 128)

Iaroslavka tells Solomoniia that she is doomed and would do best to live in this realm, where Satan is praised as "the father of everything" (127). Solomoniia also learns that she will perish should she divulge the names to her father, but she is still free to leave Satan's land if she wants to visit her parents. She is then escorted by a group of devils to Earth and manages to escape. Since she was believed to be dead, her parents welcome Solomoniia as someone coming from the world beyond. She recites all the demonical names to her father, who anathematizes them in the sanctuary of his church. Five years after her wedding, Solomoniia's health begins to decline; everyone believes that her end is near. But she has a dream: *Bogoslavka* (St. Theodora) advises her to go to Ustiug. Solomoniia complies, and takes up residence in Ustiug, close to the Church of the Miracle Worker *Iurodivyi* Prokopii. After a brief period of pious living, she returns home, only to be tormented by demons again, and then is

sent by her father back to Ustiug. Solomoniia shouts out gibberish and no one understands her.

> Демонические имена, врезавшиеся в память, из памяти проникли в сердце, жили в ней и с ней нераздельно, как птицы и звери. Это демонические имена – семьдесят – лешие, водяные, огневые – ядом войдя в кровь ее сердца, слились в одно имя, и она ощутила его в себе, как тогда после ярой ночи: синий – голова змея – перевертывается в ней – до самого сердца.
>
> [The demonical names, engraved into her memory, from her memory penetrated into her heart, lived inside her and inseparably with her, like birds and animals. These were the demonical names – seventy – of spirits of the woods, water, and fire – they had entered her heart's blood like a poison, fused into a single name, and she sensed it inside her, as after that frenzied night: the blue one – the head of a snake – rolled over inside her – and all the way up to her heart.] (*Sochineniia* 2, 133)

Five years later, *Bogoslavka*-Theodora shows herself for a second time and starts recounting her sufferings to Solomoniia. The latter understands this misery better now, because she can see her own agony in the saint's story. Theodora tells her that few can observe a truly pious life; the temptations of luxury and fornication are too strong. Then Matvei, Solomoniia's husband, dies and Solomoniia's health begins to improve. According to some Slavic beliefs, a devil may "slip into a room and take possession of a young bride on her wedding night when her husband leaves the door ajar and unprotected by the sign of the cross" (Ivanits 47). This, apparently, is the source of Solomoniia's troubles. In the original seventeenth-century versions her suffering is more often than not traced to Matvei, an otherwise largely absent character. Futhermore, Prokopii is able to rescue Solomoniia only after her husband's death (Pigin 118). The news of Matvei's death is brought from Erg to Ustiug on the eighth of July, Prokopii's saint's day. This local miracle worker, "willingly giving up all of his worldly belongings, has freely taken upon him all the frailty

and misfortune of the world" (*Sochineniia* 2, 136). Prokopii appears to Solomoniia in a dream, telling her that her anguish will disappear in three hours:

> И три серебряных звезды засветились в васильках:
> «Муке твоей три часа».
> И Соломония всплыла на поверхность сна.
> Голос сквозь зуд:
> «В ней семьдесят бесов и еще придут семьсот».
> Другой наперерез:
> «Чтобы двенадцать попов и читать двенадцать псалтырей».
> И третий глухо – из-под:
> «Три часа».
> [And three silver stars lit up in the cornflowers:
> «Three hours are left of your suffering.»
> And Solomoniia rose to the surface of her dream.
> A voice through the buzz:
> «There are seventy demons inside her, and another seven hundred will come.»
> Another one cuts in:
> «There should be twelve priests and twelve psalms read.»
> And a third, dull – from below:
> «Three hours.»] (*Sochineniia* 2, 137-8)

After Prokopii has set Solomoniia free, the text emphasizes the word *clean*, as a synonym for 'free': "*Teper' ona svobodna i chista*" (She is clean and free now) (*Sochineniia* 2, 139). In Russian folk belief, the term *unclean* ('*nechistyi*,' '*nechistaia sila*') is one of the most frequently encountered epithets of the devil. According to Ivanits, Dal' lists over forty variants of this usage (38). In this context, *nechistyi* (unclean) extends well beyond its basic meaning of 'unsanitary.' There are many objects and certain places in and around the house that are 'unclean' by definition (such as the bathhouse (*bania*), the slop-basin (*poloskatel'nitsa*), the attic (*cherdak*), the cellar (*pogreb*) and also certain animals or insects, believed to be messengers of the 'unclean force.' In this reading, Solomoniia's cleanliness means she has crossed

over into the realm of the sacred. Compare also *chistyi* (clean) and *sviatoi* (holy) as opposites of *nechistyi* (unclean) and *poganyi* (impure).

The apparent aim of the old version of the tale, shocking in its details, was to inspire fear of demonic possession and perhaps to strengthen people's faith in God. Undoubtedly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Remizov's rewriting did not have the same motivation. Pigin asserts that the key to understanding this modern rewriting lies in St. Theodora's second appearance to Solomoniia; this passage conveys Remizov's understanding of human psychology, his notion of "active forces," "willingness and unwillingness," and the rules that govern human life (Pigin 118). If the subject of possession and all demonological descriptions are in and of themselves rather fantastical, as Remizov says in his commentary (141), then the inner message of the tale was valuable enough to deserve the author's consideration. Remizov's message to the modern reader, embodied in St. Theodora's words, is a warning against the loss of Russian spirit, which is incarcerated in the Communist realm just as Solomoniia was held captive in Satan's land.

Solomoniia is Satan's prisoner (*Polonianka! Polonianka! – Sochineniia* 2, 130); yet her detention has nothing to do with the devil's will, but with her own destiny. One of the philosophical refrains of Remizov's tale is that "people are not masters of their own destiny" (Pigin 118). Solomoniia failed to dedicate her life to God. Obsessed by the impossibility of following her fondest wish, she becomes an innocent victim of circumstances. Before marriage she is "clean and chaste," rare spiritual gifts (*Sochineniia* 2, 121). Yet she is destined to ten years of anguish even though the reader can hardly understand why. There is a

possible parallel with the sacrifice of the *Spasitel'* (Saviour), whose innocence was offered to evil spirits in exchange for human salvation (see Remizov's legend "On the Passion of the Lord [Three Days in the Grave]" in the second chapter of this thesis). The initial message (a warning against the loss of Russianness) might be woven with the Biblical lesson of sacrifice. Any moment of happiness, however small, requires a sacrifice. On this invisible rule is built the *iurodivyi* motif, both in "Savva Grudtsyn" and "Solomoniia." Holy fools had to sacrifice all of their material belongings and leave the secular world in order to gain access to the sacred realm. It is most likely that the description of Prokopii reflects Remizov's own values:

> Жажда правды толкала его в жизнь: он чувствовал, что во имя этой правды он может и должен сказать и не только то, чего не надо делать, но и о том, что следовало бы делать, чтобы просветить свою жизнь.
> И когда этот бродяга, появляясь всюду там, где был грех, посмел непрошеный встреваться в дела, обличая, - ведь и духовно и житейски он был гораздо выше, он понимал все изворотьі человеческой лукавой мысли! – ему дана была презрительная кличка: юрод – урод – выродок – дурак.
> [A thirst for the truth pushed him into life: he felt that in the name of this truth he could and must speak, and not only of what one should not do, but also of how one should act in order to enlighten his life.
> And when this vagrant, who appeared every place a sin had been committed, dared to barge into his affairs, exposing them – after all, he was both spiritually and in lay terms far above that, he understood all the twists and turns of crafty human thought! – was given the degrading moniker: *iurod* – *urod* (ugly creature) – *vyrodok* (monster) – *durak* (fool).] (*Sochineniia* 2, 136)

Remizov routinely prefers the appellative *iurodivyi* to Prokopii's more conventional designation *ugodnik* (from *ugodnik Bozhii*, one who fulfils God's wish) or *sviatoi* (saint); this suggests that the author felt some affinity for his protagonist. Remizov constantly searched for an "artistic holy foolishness" (*khudozhestvennoe iurodstvo*), he sought to create a kind of writing free of

rules, which earned him the label of "the wizard fool" (*iurodivyi vedun*) of Russian literature (Il'in 98-9). The two contrasting sides of Remizov's personality, his "bitterness about the world"[15] and his "joyfulness of spirit" (Koz'menko 341), helped characterize him as a buffoon. "His appearance resembles that of a little devil who pops up unexpectedly from toy boxes, scaring children" (Voloshin).[16] Similarly, Siniavskii maintains that "Remizov has not only one, but several masks, which show up in several complex, intricate and sometimes whimsical combinations" (27). For all their diversity, each of these characterizations points to a profound sensitivity in Remizov, which in turn allows the writer to experience his own life, his own view of Russia and its people in a variety of ways.

As Remizov often maintains in his commentary and in his autobiographical prose, he did indeed bring a unique vision of the world to his work.[17] The Old Russian tale about the possessed Solomoniia inspired Remizov, so that he sketched the plot in a series of drawings and then produced a text informed by his own sense of the secular/ sacred dichotomy. To gain entry into the sacred world, Solomoniia had to work for a better understanding of *this* world. Only after years of agony was she able to fathom St. Theodora's message. Her fate follows a path through torment to consciousness. Savva's destiny traces the same trajectory, from falling in love

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[15] "[...] весь мир лежит среди соблазнов" [... the whole world lies amongst temptations] (Remizov, *Sochineniia* 2, 134).

[16] M. Voloshin, in his article "Liki tvorchestva: A. Remizov. *Posolon'*" published in the periodical *Rus'* (5 April 1907), says that Remizov reminds one of a spontaneous spirit, of a fairy-tale creature, coming into the light from a dark cranny (quoted in Rozanov, part II, online text).

[17] Compare Remizov's confession in *Sobranie sochinenii* 8 (*Podstrizhennymi glazami* and *Iveren': Zagoguliny moei pamiati*) 279, 345, and 416.

to abandonment, from a taste of power to 'promotion' to the rank of *samozvanets*. Only after experiencing these ordeals and vicissitudes of fortune was Savva finally ready to understand why *Iurodivyi* Semeon shed tears for him. *Iurodivyi* Prokopii, *Iurodivyi* Semeon and Remizov himself, it turns out, are one of a kind. The author weeps for a world that proves to be far from his dreams, but his is an active sorrow, one that struggles to understand even as it mourns. This, perhaps, is Remizov's most enduring achievement.

Conclusion

Aleksei Remizov's literary world is challenging enough to defy any exhaustive analysis. Nevertheless, it has proven possible to appreciate just how significant a role Russianness plays in the early works that mapped out its territory. As was shown in this thesis, Remizov's abstract compositions must be approached on symbolic terms. Regardless of the genre designation as tale, apocryphal legend, fairy story, or description of a ritual, Remizovian adaptations present a point of view beyond their ostensible subject matter. For example, a legend in which Herodias is the main character is not necessarily about Herodias, but perhaps about Russia and its people.

A Remizovian text demands a highly knowledgeable reader, whose competency must include, but is not limited to, Russian history, the Russian avant-garde, folklore and the archaic idiom. Remizov's literary language has been widely discussed and found by Ginsburg to contain very difficult, yet perhaps translatable parts, but it also features elements that are "utterly impossible" to translate and as such omitted in her rendition (23). This is why Remizov is so little known outside Russia. Deeply Russian, rooted in the Russian past and its religious thought, but also a person living in the twentieth century, Remizov dedicated his efforts to saving a fraction of what he saw as his people's Russian essence. Thus, translated work, and a readership beyond his native culture were matters of relative indifference to him. "Translators would constantly complain: still, what do they care? [...] They have to cope

somehow, because in two different languages there is no identical intonation [i.e. music of words] or syntax" (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 267). The writer says that people were always angry with him for this, his Russianness ("*za eto moe russkoe*"), because his writings seemed to them to be deliberately incomprehensible (*Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 267).

In Remizov's early writings, Russianness is not opposed to the West (and not in any connection with it), as appears in major writers like Dostoevskii or Tolstoi. For Remizov, the Russian spirit is in danger not so much of being eclipsed by other nations, as of being lost by its own people. Russianness, like everything related to the human spirit, consists of opposites, of good and evil in equal measure. Thus, *Leimonarion* does not seem to be concerned with the origins of evil; rather it accepts that evil must exist as the necessary other half that shapes its opposite. Duality is natural; the writer leaves us with the impression that he enjoys it, which leads to a central attribute of Russianness, its dual faith. The simultaneous belief in myth, rite, demons, superstitions, and God, does not diminish the piety of the common folk, quite the opposite. Russians, as the writer sees them, live in a world that blends together old superstitions and beliefs, holy Christian thoughts, and pagan values. This world is not only one full of spiritual resources, but also a demanding place, filled with unwritten rules waiting to be followed (such as what to do on specific holidays, what to touch and what not to, how to use holy water, how to collect different plants for medical, but also magical use, et cetera). Remizov's contemporaries had lost interest in those rules; this loss of tradition, to the writer's way of thinking, sapped the very core of Russian spirit.

The stories, tales and legends of *Leimonarion*, *Posolon'* and *Besnovatye*, had survived for ages through oral transmission. Constant adjustments to their themes reflected changes in Russian reality and belief systems, leaving Remizov a generous assortment of variants from which to chose a subject for re-working.[1] The author selected familiar characters from the ancient world and inserted them into the modern frame of thinking, creating bizarre scenes, inserting rhymes and refrains, all presented through an innovative use of language. The result was both a fusion of and a contrast between old and new. The juxtaposition achieves its impact by reversing expectations (one example could be from *Leimonarion*: the tsar Gog living in his realm of glass). Yet the oppositions old/ new, sacred/ secular, good/ evil, strike a balance of their own, one tending to cyclicity of the sort encountered in *Posolon'*. It is this perfect liaison between the Russian land, its people, their language and their spirit that Remizov evokes many years later: "My *Posolon'*, you see, is not an invention, fabrication; it is something that came by itself, it is the breath and the colour of the Russian earth, its words. [...] I will not create, no doubt, a second *Posolon*'" (*Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 279).

Remizov thought of Russianness neither as based on imperial or national identity, nor as determined by historical or geographical factors. Toward the end of his life, he declared that his sense of Russianness, for all the unique philosophical conviction behind it, was not strong enough to translate

[1] In his annotations to *Leimonarion*, *Posolon'* or *Besnovatye*, Remizov reveals what source (or sources) he uses for his rewriting. These annotations show that Remizov's interest in research was constant and the attention he paid to linguistic, folkloric and mythological studies, as well as to Old Russian culture cannot be neglected. See also Iu.V. Rozanov's article "Nauchnaia kniga v tvorcheskom soznanii Alekseia Remizova" (2003).

directly into words his ideas (*Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 278). He thought of Mother Russia (*Rosseia matushka*) as a dream, and wrote in his 1941 diary that "dancing begins with the name of *Rus'*" (Gracheva, "Dnevnik", 192). Yet Russia is also *kostromskaia babushka*, from *Russia in the Whirlwind*, or a character from *Posolon'*, Kostroma (in the homonym game description of the spring section), who had stored inside her ugly wrinkles the precious wisdom, but also the primitive raw strength and fears of the Slavic soul.

Imps or demons play a special role in Remizov's Russian world. He himself was often portrayed as a little devil, water sprite (*vodianoi*) or forest spirit (*leshii*) (*Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 383). The writer expressed disappointment that Dostoevskii was the last writer to use devils and demons in his works.

> After Dostoevskii, all the demons described by Gogol' scattered and hid in their burrows, laughing at pitiful, arrogant people who shift from one to another their human abominations. In our time people are acting on their own hook, being responsible for themselves – what an amusing picture! – and in literature, not a word of demons. (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 6, 299)

Yet art and literature at the beginning of the century were strikingly interested in demonical and infernal themes (Sologub's *Melkii bes* (1905), A.V. Amfiteatrov's *Mertvye bogi* (1913), the collection *Satanism* published in Moscow (1913), Blok's poetry, Vrubel"s *The Demon*, 1901). Remizov made his own contribution to this trend. From his story "Chiortik" (The Little Devil, 1907) to *Besnovatye* (1951), he tries to portray, both in writing and drawing, how God and good spirits contrast with all those devils and demons; he strove to explain how he could see and feel a world invisible to other eyes. Remizov saw the act of writing itself as having demonical origins; his interpretation is

close to the perception of the Silver Age writers who believed that the artist is a mediator between the world of appearances and the world of the spirit (Gracheva, "Remizov i Andreev," 48).

Remizov's works written in emigration – starting with *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'* [*Russia in the Whirlwind*, 1927], the novels *Uchitel' muzyki* [*The Music Teacher*, 1949], *V rozovom bleske* [*In A Rosy Glow*, 1952] and *Ogon' veshchei* [*The Fire of Things*, 1954] – are all products of his "unceasing remembrance of Russia" (Remizov, *Izbrannoe*, 6-7). Remizov writes with the firm belief that the memory of older times will return to Russia. His fear that something of this memory might be lost is comparable to a child's apprehension of losing his mother. Remizov is worried that the spiritual part of his *Rosseia matushka* might be lost.

If Remizov had written everything during his German and French exile, his feeling for Russia could be attributed to nostalgia. Yet the themes discussed here date to his childhood and his northern exile (1896-1905). The inspiration should rather be traced to the writer's sense of bonding with his native land, a connection highlighted by his contemporaries, as Zinaida Gippius testifies:

> What makes Remizov, the writer with the 'uncanny style,' stand out, is his ability to blend in with a very real and very mysterious side of the Russian spirit, a side we don't even know how to approach. Remizov does not describe it, he speaks, and his words are uttered from inside it, as if he himself were in there [in the Russian spirit]. (Cited in Obatina, "Polemicheskii dialog," 198)

Remizov's self-assigned mission to protect Russianness did not always stand him in good stead; often it hindered the publication of his stories. Briusov, in the capacity of editor of the journal *Vesy*, explained why he chose not to publish Remizov's "Shurum-burum" (written in Vologda): "it does not

suit us; on our grey, [...] this Russian of yours is like a patch, a piece of golden brocade" (Remizov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 8, 473).

Even though Remizov was a "complicated and unpredictable persona" (Kolbasina-Chernova 322), his versatility allowed him to maintain a unity of purpose. The three chapters of this thesis demonstrate how, using different themes and different literary genres, the writer pursues one broad concern: Russianness. As has been shown, the theme permeates not only his literary language, but also the content of the works discussed here. In *Leimonarion* Russia is kept together by her people and their belief in salvation; in *Posolon'* Russia is all about folklore, joyful games for all ages, tales and rituals; in *Besnovatye* Russia is saved by the simplicity and purity of the *iurodivye*, the Holy fools.

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