

## SUMMARY

When discussing the national problems of Čiurlionis' work, we should not forget several important factors in his intellectual biography. First of all, a great part of his studies and creative life was spent outside of Lithuania. From 1894 to 1907 he studied and lived in Warsaw. This period included studies at the Leipzig Conservatory (1901–1902). Only during 1907–1908 did he briefly live and work in Vilnius, from where there began the trips of various duration during 1908–1909 to Saint Petersburg that influenced the last stage of his creative evolution.

A close connection with his native world of nature in Dzūkija and an exalted view of its beauty were an important factor that influenced Čiurlionis' development as a national artist. Most of the leitmotifs described in his letters and depicted in his artistic works – leitmotifs that exalt the beauty of nature – are directly associated with the landscapes of Dzūkija that were close to this artist's spirit. Reflections in his letters about the beauty of the natural world around man are also always exclusively connected with Lithuania.

Moreover, Čiurlionis' worldview and his main attitudes about life and art, which were connected with his national self-identification, were formed under the conditions of a “springtime of nations” and of one of the most important transformations in the Modernist history of Western art while French Fauvism, Cubism, and the German Expressionism of the *Brücke* (Bridge) group were being born. Čiurlionis' work, which he created against the background of these radical shifts in art, was inevitably connected not only with universal tendencies in European culture, but also with regional and national ones in the development of Eastern European art – tendencies that emerged in the civilizational space of the defunct Commonwealth of Both Nations. Here, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time, different linguistic traditions existed, whose contradictions emerged in the civilizational space of the former multicultural and multireligious Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL).

For the process of Čiurlionis' re-Lithuanianization, after the official abolition of the ban on a press in the Lithuanian language, the year 1906 became a distinctive turning point, when several important events in his intellectual

biography changed places, attesting both to his fellow Polish students and to the Lithuanians around him his entirely clear choice of a national identity. In a letter of January 7, 1906, to his brother Povilas, he wrote words that emphasized his national identity: "I have resolved to devote all of my past and future works to Lithuania. We are learning the Lithuanian language, and I am preparing to write a Lithuanian opera." (Čiurlionis, 1960, p. 192)

Invited to participate in the First Lithuanian Art Exhibition in Vilnius, Čiurlionis immediately became involved in its organization. Here, he exhibited most of the pictures that had been shown in 1906 at the Warsaw Art School exhibition in Saint Petersburg and that had helped establish his status at the school as its most talented representative. These were 33 works that included the cycle *Pasaulio sutvėrimas* (Creation of the World), *Audra* (Storm), the triptych *Rex*, and eight fluoroforts. This exhibition received abundant and conflicting assessments in the publications that appeared in the different languages of the diverse nations in Vilnius. The responses that appeared in them attested that in the cultural life of Vilnius Čiurlionis was already understood as a significant new figure famous for his unusual pictures.

This ceremoniously opened exhibition was indeed the significant beginning of the development of modern Lithuanian national artistic culture. It excited the small Lithuanian cultural and artistic elite and promoted the concentration in Vilnius of Lithuanian artists scattered in various countries and in the cities of the Russian Empire. This process was crowned with the establishment of the Lithuanian Art Society, which elected Čiurlionis as its vice-president.

Having settled in the historical Lithuanian capital Vilnius and possessed by noble feelings of national identity, the highly introverted Čiurlionis plunged into the movement for national rebirth. The involvement of such a brilliant personality of many-sided talent in the movement for Lithuanian national rebirth was very significant, for Čiurlionis' professionalism and rigorous approach to the most diverse aspects of artistic quality raised him to such a level.

In November 1907 he became acquainted with a passionate supporter of Lithuanian culture – the young writer of rare beauty Sofija Kymantaitė. Deep feelings immediately formed between these two talented people. Thus was born a unique duet of spiritually close people in the modernization of Lithuanian cul-

ture. Both felt this spiritual closeness, kindred worldviews, values, and thinking, and they subordinated their lives to the movement for national rebirth.

A great deal of attention and energy was demanded of Čiurlionis by preparations for the Second Lithuanian Art Exhibition, which began in late January 1908 and of which he was the main organizer. He responsibly regarded the commission given him and rigorously selected on the basis of professionalism the pictures, sculptures, and architectural projects provided for the exhibition.

Unlike the first exhibition, this second one was opened modestly in Vilnius in the spring of 1908, but compared to the first one, it was better attended. For this exhibition Čiurlionis provided his first two pictorial sonatas – *Pavasaris* (Spring) and *Saulė, Zodiako ženklai* (Sun, Signs of the Zodiac), two triptychs – *Raigardas* and *Mano kelias* (My Road), the eight-picture cycle *Žiema* (Winter), and various individual pictures. Later, this exhibition was moved from Vilnius to Kaunas, where it was opened by the Governor of Kaunas, Pyotr Veryovkin, who was the brother of Wassily Kandinsky's close comrade-in-arms in Munich, Marianne von Werefkin. This exhibition indeed became an important phenomenon in the cultural life of Lithuania, in its two main ethnographic cities, because it demonstrated the artistic potential of a renascent country.

Connected with this exhibition were Čiurlionis' true rise as a phenomenal painter and his becoming the leader of a new generation in Lithuanian art – the one who received the most attention and discussions. His musical pictures – puzzling, unusual, and filled with volatile imagination and flights of fantasy – stood out from the milieu of other, more everyday pictures by contemporaries who were more closely connected with principles of Realist and Symbolist aesthetics. Assorted surveys of this second exhibition as well as brief or exhaustive reviews were written by various Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, and Litvak authors.

The multifaceted growth of Čiurlionis' professionalism during the Vilnius period of his creative evolution was also reflected by his gradual entrance into the most mature stage, in terms of plastic form, of his evolution as a painter – the so-called “sonatic” stage, at which time were born wonderful pictures that represented a qualitatively new interaction of painting, music, and original syncretic artistic thinking connected with synesthetic abilities. Although

viewers of these unusual pictures with their sonatic, abstract, and metaphysical approach are often primarily struck by their musicality and by a cosmopolitanism better known to contemporaries, a system of symbols and artistic images proceeding from Neoromanticism, Symbolism, and nascent Modernism, some of Čiurlionis' pictures were also influenced by the legends, motifs, and symbols of archaic Baltic and Lithuanian mythology, which clearly distinguished this Lithuanian artist's pictures from those of his contemporaries. In this respect, one of the clearest features of Čiurlionis' sonatic painting, which outwardly appeared cosmopolitan, was their *national* quality, which was obvious to the more discerning foreigners who assessed his work.

Čiurlionis theoretically grounded his orientation to the sources of Lithuanian folk art in articles devoted to music and fine art. For example, in „Apie muziką“ (About Music) he maintains that the national tendencies that unfold in the folk music of every people are later taken over and established by composers who have grown up under the influence of the musical traditions of a specific people and who as sons of their fatherland acquire from their fathers, together with their blood, love for their songs, often even themselves unaware of this (Čiurlionis, 1960, p. 297). He believed that the time would come when Lithuanian composers of new generations would draw inspiration from the treasury of folk music and create significant new works.

Thus, after growing up in a linguistically and culturally Polish environment, Čiurlionis, influenced in Warsaw by the ideas of the springtime of nations, joined a small group of patriotically disposed Lithuanians. During the brief journey of his life, the Vilnius period of Čiurlionis' creative evolution was not long, but the passionate love he developed for the nationally committed Sofija firmly tied him to the Lithuanian movement of national rebirth. During this Vilnius period, the resolve to form a marital bond with his beloved Sofija gradually changed Čiurlionis' view of life. Seeing the cultural milieu of Vilnius from the inside, this engaged couple understood that the cultural space here was too small for Čiurlionis' spontaneously unfolding talent and that even growing local recognition could not guarantee the possibility of a stable family life. Thus, Čiurlionis and Sofija more and more often made bold plans for trips to Paris, where his closest friend, Eugeniusz Morawski, had emigrated and was

already living. However, a letter in which he wrote about his impoverished life in Paris corrected Čiurlionis' plans. Thus began the last stage of his creative evolution, which was connected with journeys from Vilnius to the nearer Saint Petersburg, where he hoped to find a stable source of income, to participate in significant exhibitions and in concerts of his music, and to achieve longed-for recognition.

### From Vilnius to Saint Petersburg

An important factor in Čiurlionis' technical mastery and professional growth was his travels of various duration, beginning in 1908, from Vilnius to Saint Petersburg. After Warsaw, Leipzig, and Vilnius, Saint Petersburg was the last important cultural and artistic center that Čiurlionis went to in order to find a more stable source of income. During the late first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian artistic life had indeed become a contradictory phenomenon that stood out for being chaotic, encompassing the coexistence at the same time of various artistic movements and groups that had formed at different times as well as an increasingly bitter struggle for influence in the cultural life of the empire.

In Saint Petersburg, Čiurlionis did in fact form important ties with members of the group World of Art, and he began to display his work at exhibitions of the most influential art societies of that time in the Russian Empire. Although in both painting and music he achieved maturity with incredible speed and created a distinctive style, his unusual innovative confrontation with the Neoromantic tradition in art had difficulty finding a way to recognition.

Since long ago, art historians have discussed the possible influence on Čiurlionis' work of the Russian milieu of World of Art. However, in order to be objective, it is not worthwhile to excessively emphasize this influence on such an original artist as Čiurlionis was because the influences that formed his aesthetic ideals and creative principles were many and various. Moreover, we must not forget that Čiurlionis arrived in Saint Petersburg from Vilnius as a painter who had already completely formed his artistic style. And finally, we are, after all, speaking here only about the very brief, final, so-called Petersburgian period of his creative path, which lasted little more than a year – from August

1908 to the end of his last trip to the imperial capital in late December 1909. Still, to tell the truth, in the pictures Čiurlionis created at this time it is not possible not to notice the connections with what attracted the followers of World of Art – refined artistic style, archaism, the reinterpretation of the artistic styles of the past, quests for artistic interaction, Japanism, decorativeness, symbolical convention, stylization, ornamental structures, and expressive lines.

As before, while working much in Saint Petersburg, Čiurlionis consistently continued improving the plastic implementation of his ideas as he sought the consummation of his musical cyclical artistic style. In the late pictures that Čiurlionis painted in Saint Petersburg, his tendencies indeed grew toward technical mastery, decorativeness, and restrained colors – what we clearly see in his pictorial masterpieces *Jūros sonata* (Sonata of the Sea) and *Rex*. However, in his last works of 1909 his main vision is consciously conveyed decoratively. Alexandre Benois and Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, who valued his work highly, made efforts to help get him exhibited at prestigious exhibitions of Russian artistic societies and to find him artistic commissions that guaranteed a more stable income. According to Mikalojus Vorobjovas, he was even to receive an offer from the head of the Moscow Art Theater, Konstantin Stanislavsky, and the last time he arrived in Saint Petersburg, through the intercession of a World of Art group, it may be said, it was already agreed that Čiurlionis would be the artist of this Moscow theater. However, this promising plan could not be carried out because a severe illness befell him.

Čiurlionis' participation in the Sixth Exhibition (1908–1909) of the Russian Artists Union with three pictures and in the Seventh (1909–1910) with nine coincided with a long since deepening crisis in the artistic life of the Empire and with a growing confrontation between the Saint Petersburg and Moscow branches of this artists' union and the increasing differences between their aesthetic principles. The various peripeties in this conflict are reflected in Čiurlionis' letters to Sofija.

After the Russian Artists Union split up, when Čiurlionis was already ill, at almost the same time there opened up exhibitions of these two confrontational groups that claimed a dominant position in the modernizing process of the artistic development of the Empire. In Saint Petersburg this was the first

exhibition of the reborn World of Art union, which lasted from December 29, 1910, to February 6, 1911. A year later, in Moscow, a second exhibition, of the Knave of Diamonds, likewise took place from December 2 (15), 1911, to early January of 1912 and was fiercely attacked by art critics.

Because Čiurlionis was ill, there was no one to provide his pictures for the first exhibition of the reborn World of Art movement. Thus, at the last minute, only one picture created in 1909 was hurriedly included in this exposition – a painting in restrained, subdued, pale brownish brown colors and closer not to his sonatic, but rather to his metaphysical painting, *Raitelis* or *Preliudas* (*Vyčio preliudas*) [The Horseman or Prelude (Prelude of the Knight)]. Most probably because of its exceptionally restrained colors, it did not attract any particular attention from either viewers or critics. However, this picture did not escape the notice of the discerning Alexandre Benois. In an article devoted to the World of Art exhibition and published in January 1911 in the newspaper *Rech* (Speech), not yet knowing anything about its creator's illness, this thoughtful critic valued this picture highly and declared that it was the most significant one in the entire exhibition. He wrote:

I think that of all the pictures in the exhibition this one is the most spiritual, most inspiring page.... As always in Čiurlionis' works, the subject remains a mystery. Who is this "transparent" horseman who silently gallops in space with an uplifted punitive whip? What are the city, the rows of cities, the layers of palaces and temples shining through one another? And there is no desire to explain this riddle. Any explanation, it seems, violates the mysterious silence of a vision whose prophetic nature is, to me, obvious. (Benois, 1911, No. 13, I, 14 (27))

The fact that a famous artist and the most authoritative art critic in the Empire, Alexandre Benois, constantly exalted Čiurlionis' exceptional work also forced the leaders of the Russian avantgarde to heed his words – people who, as we will show later, took over from this Lithuanian painter's pictures important ideas as well as closely related features of artistic style.

Many of the features of the musical, sonatic, and metaphysical painting of Čiurlionis' second period of seeking new forms of artistic expression and of his late third period – features that perplexed adherents of classical art – impressed the Russian avant-garde, which tended toward a cult of novelty, with their interpretations of unusual themes and fantastic motifs, with their unexpected compositional solutions, manner of painting, and futuristic visions. Čiurlionis' pictures were also spiritually close to the futuristic Russian avant-garde in their juxtapositions of different systems of artistic images, in their bold innovative experiments in the fields of form and of spatial and chromatic relationships, and in their tendency to dematerialize reality. These innovative features of Čiurlionis' painting mainly enchanted the leaders of the new avant-garde generation. Incidentally, in a letter of November 30, 1909, to Sofija, when writing about the opportunity to participate in a Soyuz exhibition, that is, of the Russian Artists Union, Čiurlionis connected himself to the invitation of “other young new extremist painters.” (Čiurlionis, 1973, p. 141)

The fact that Čiurlionis, upon arriving in the northern capital, joined Saint Petersburg's World of Art and was exalted by its members had both positive and negative consequences for the later spread of his work and ideas in Russia. These consequences became especially clear after his posthumous exhibitions, in the organization of which along with the exaltation of Čiurlionis' genius a special role fell to the members of the World of Art group and to the associated circle of artists and art critics who had gathered about the journal *Apollon*. The more radical leaders of the avant-garde – Nikolai Kulbin, Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, Mikhail Matyushin, Mikhail Larionov, and others – sought to dissociate themselves more and more clearly from the exceptional influence of World of Art in the increasingly modern artistic life of Russia at that time. Thus, Čiurlionis, whose works enchanted both the World of Art and the futuristic Russian avant-garde, which had rebelled against it, ended up between these two different spheres of influence.

As soon became clear, however, immediately after Čiurlionis' early death, which shocked the people who knew him, his trips to Saint Petersburg gave the results that, although delayed, he had dreamt of; Čiurlionis' glory as a genius rapidly spread throughout the Russian Empire. The refined members of

the World of Art group and that part of the Empire's artistic elite that, while Čiurlionis was still alive, had intuitively grasped his exceptional talent were the first to react to this artist's unexpected death.

Thus, the few enthusiastic admirers of Čiurlionis' talent, in the forefront of whom were Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, Alexandre Benois, Sergey Makovsky, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Valerian Chudovsky, Nicholas Roerich, and other leaders in Russian culture and art at that time, broke down the barriers to recognition of his work. The high value that the artistic elite of Saint Petersburg placed on Čiurlionis' work was not in vain; barely a few years had passed after this Lithuanian artist's untimely death when the first powerful wave of Russian interest in his work emerged – a wave inspired by the texts of these and other authors.

#### M. K. Čiurlionis' Ties With the Russian Avant-garde

At the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Čiurlionis appeared at the prestigious exhibition halls of Saint Petersburg and Moscow with unusual pictures that interested the avant-garde, a time of great changes was beginning in Russian art after long decades of stagnation and a moderate process of modernization. At that time, the powerful influence of the Realist aesthetics of the *Peredvizhniki* (Wanderers) in Russian artistic life with its emphatic literary quality evoked a reaction from the most influential new supporters of the Russian Artists Union, the World of Art, and the Moscow Artists Society.

Moreover, at that time Russian painting was rapidly changing thanks to the growing activity of new avant-garde groups that knew Čiurlionis' quests and discoveries and that spread at art exhibitions with incredible speed. In light of the new quests and discoveries of avant-garde artists, what had seemed innovative and progressive only a few years earlier now became an altogether usual and mundane phenomenon to rapidly evolving artistic consciousness. This process of the rapidly growing dynamism of, in Nietzsche's words, "the transvaluation of all values" and of the sensation of flowing time also inevitably affected the discoveries of the supporters of the World of Art and of the Moscow Artists Society – discoveries that had recently enchanted with the newness of their art forms but quickly exhausted their creative potential – and fostered the spread

of new avant-garde artistic groups, among which the Youth Union, the Knave of Diamonds, and the Donkey's Tail became dominant.

The cradle of the Russian avant-garde was Saint Petersburg, where during the last years of his life Čiurlionis went four times and where he usually moved about in the milieu that was influenced by new artistic currents, by the World of Art group, and that was then connected with the rapid modernization of Russian art. At the beginning of the avant-garde movement, its main ideologue, inspirer, and patron was Nikolai Kulbin, who in Mikhail Matyushin's words "felt tremendous respect for the West and its culture" (*Rusų futurizmas*, 2009, p. 505). Opened in 1908 in Saint Petersburg at Passage on Nevsky Prospekt, his exhibition Contemporary Currents became a genuine source for the Russian avant-garde because, among the different groups presented here for public attention, there was also one he himself had formed – *Trikampis* (*Δ. Meninė-psichologinė grupė*) [Triangle (*Δ. An Artistic-Psychological Group*)], whose participants began to intensively spread the new attitudes of avant-garde art at exhibitions in Saint Petersburg and Vilnius, in whose art world Čiurlionis was already famous for his innovative pictures.

After 1909, especially after his trip to Vilnius, where his group's only picture exhibition outside of Saint Petersburg was organized, Kulbin was already not only interested in Čiurlionis' work but was also influenced by it. Kulbin's main object of artistic interest was the beauty of the natural world shining in all possible colors, and the genre that he, like Čiurlionis, preferred in painting was the landscape, which, as in this Lithuanian artist's pictures, was depicted in an atmosphere of constant change. He was enchanted by conveying these metamorphoses of the natural world, by their colorfulness, musicality, and sincere emotionalism. This painter's best qualities are primarily revealed in his most colorful landscapes: *The Sun Above the Slavyanka River* (1909), *Crimea* (1910), which is filled with Čiurlionis' spirit, *In a Sunbath* (1916), and others. He sought, as it were, to immortalize frozen moments of the wonderful beauty of nature. To do so, he relied on a palette of pure, unmixed, clear colors and astutely employed the effect of a dramatic juxtaposition of subtle and contrasting chromatic musical tones. Usually dominant is an emotional spontaneous manner of painting; he employed free, expressive, small brushstrokes; in the

composition of his pictures he renounced the dominant role of contour lines. In Kulbin's pictures, as in those by Čiurlionis, we can see the effect of East Asian *non finito* aesthetics and of the significance of empty space.

In an article entitled "N. I. Kulbin's Exhibition," the art critic Olga Bazankur wrote about an original exhibition of 84 pictures and drawings organized in 1912 by this first leader of Russian avant-garde art influenced by Čiurlionis: "A certain gentleness and sincerity clearly permeate all of Kulbin's works, and this beautiful soul reflected in them compels us to leniently assess various technical flaws. A philosopher who strives to clothe his worldview in forms and colors, as Čiurlionis sought 'to paint music' – that is Kulbin." (Bazankur, 1912, p. 3)

Kulbin had a soft tolerant nature and strove for balance among the ambitious leaders of avant-garde art, but against the background of rapid developments in the new art of the Russian Empire, he could no longer, with his compromises and aesthetic eclecticism as well as Vrubelism, satisfy the more radical members of the Triangle group. Thus, in April 1909, this group was abandoned, with a great show of feeling, by Mikhail Matyushin, Elena Guro, Eduard Spandikov, Iosif Shkolnik, and Savely Schleifer.

After Kulbin, the second leader of the avant-garde in Saint Petersburg was Matyushin, who assumed the initiative in the development of avant-garde art in the imperial capital and who, as an artist likewise close to Čiurlionis, trod a complex evolutionary path. Like Čiurlionis, he was a person of universal artistic interests: an artist, a musician, a composer, and an art theoretician who was likewise interested in the problems of the interaction of the arts and of the phenomenon of color. After graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, he moved to Saint Petersburg, where from 1882 to 1913 he played first violin in the orchestra of the imperial palace and also from 1894 to 1908 studied at various private art schools.

While studying at Elizaveta Zvantseva's studio, where he was taught by representatives of the World of Art, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky and Léon Bakst, he learned about Čiurlionis' musical pictures that combined painting and music. Matyushin and his second wife, the subtle poet and painter Guro, took over from Kulbin a democratic openness toward different forms of artistic expression. This was reflected in November 1909, when in Saint Petersburg Maty-

ushin, Guro, and others established the Youth Union (*Союз молодёжи*), which became an important factor in the consolidation and rapid development of the forces of the Russian avant-garde. From 1909 to 1914, they organized seven exhibitions as well as several publications and theatrical shows.

Active and constantly expressing himself with new undertakings, Matyushin soon emerged as one of the most influential leaders in Russian avant-garde art. After founding the new group *Zorved* in 1912 and most probably inspired by pictures at a posthumous Čiurlionis exhibition depicting huge cosmic spaces, Matyushin began developing a distinctive theory of cosmism and pictorial space. Like Čiurlionis, after speaking about the existence of a fourth space, he placed man at the center of majestic space in pictures with a cosmic theme.

In the unified competitive field of avant-garde ideas and creative principles, the most talented leaders sought to expand their personal influence or that of the group they represented. Thus, in the catalogues of many prewar exhibitions of 1909–1914 and in their reviews in the press we constantly encounter the same names not only of the Youth Union but also of other representatives of avant-garde groups associated with it – primarily, Matyushin, Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich, Kliun, and Tatlin.

A powerful, qualitatively new wave of Russian avant-garde art emerged in 1910 and revealed itself with full force immediately after Čiurlionis' death, during 1911–1914, primarily after a series, organized by representatives of the World of Art, of posthumous exhibitions that inspired the appearance of publications by influential Russian art critics who exalted the work of the Lithuanian artist. Rapidly gaining fame for pictures permeated with ideas of the interaction of the arts, the solitary Čiurlionis ended his creative activity when he unexpectedly became ill in late 1909.

Although he was not a member of any specific artistic group, Čiurlionis with his sharpened sense of the flow of dynamic time, his original cosmic visions of the future, and his ideas permeated with the interaction of the arts was perhaps closest with his musical pictures to Futurist Russian artists. However, unlike the rebellious Russian avant-garde, the modest introvert Čiurlionis with his dislike of public attention did not organize scandalous, provocative actions and manifestos. Likewise, unlike the Futurists, who disavowed tradition in

their manifestos and sought to reject its burden, Čiurlionis regarded tradition with respect as a necessary segment in the development of culture and art, as something that provokes innovation. A penchant for a constant quest for new forms of artistic expression and for experimentation was one of the most characteristic features of this artist's personality and of his creative process – one that explains his entirely natural contacts with various trends in Modernist art. This feature of his creative work is aptly noted by the outstanding connoisseur of Modernist art and curator of many exhibitions at the Pompidou Center in Paris Serge Fauchereau, who maintains: “Čiurlionis liked experiments far more than we can imagine.” (Fauchereau, 2021, p. 40)

Čiurlionis was close to the Futurist Russian avant-garde in many of the features of his creative work and in the fantastic visions of the future created by his volatile imagination. They were connected by innovation, maximalism, and special attention to the latest achievements in science and technology. They shared an attraction to esotericism, to the irrational aspects of existence and creative work, to experiments, to the radical reform of traditional art forms and artistic language, and to quests for new forms of artistic self-expression. They also had in common special interest in the geometricization of art forms and in quests in the fields of composition, perspective, the musicality of color, and the dematerialization of reality. The creative work of both the Futurists and Čiurlionis was oriented toward the future; hence followed a similar effort to convey in their pictures movement and dynamism that reflected the spirit of a new epoch. The avant-garde was also close to Čiurlionis in its attraction to ideas about the interaction of the arts, to the spontaneous diffusion of energetic impulses in their work, and to unusual solutions in composition and color as well as in its disregard of settled rules in its quests for new forms of artistic expression. In literary texts, Čiurlionis and the Futurists violated syntactical forms, and like stream-of-consciousness writers, they ignored commas.

After Čiurlionis' sudden early death, this painter's brilliance and the value of his creative legacy were primarily exalted by those who had “appropriated” him, as it were – the members of the World of Art group in Saint Petersburg. At first, when avant-garde art was being born, they were regarded positively by representatives of the new art because they opened the eyes of the avant-garde

to the achievements of Western modern art. Later, however, when the aesthetic and creative principles of the avant-garde in Moscow were becoming radical, while those of the World of Art were, on the contrary, becoming conservative, this earlier positive relationship changed. The obvious patronage of Čiurlionis by the World of Art, the exaltation of his brilliance, and Benois' sharp criticism of the work of the avant-garde in Moscow inevitably provoked the reaction of individual artists in Moscow and their more reserved view of Čiurlionis, who had been "appropriated" by *Mir Iskusstva* and canonized as a genius – even though in reality Čiurlionis had a very critical view of the work of many members of this group, considering it outmoded, retrograde, and not meeting the demands of the times. "Such," in his view, "is Somov, the biggest fish, a real Beardsley, only colorized, and others imitate either Vrubel or the old schools and draw their inspiration there. They lack, as it were, daring and faith in themselves." (Čiurlionis, 1975, p. 63) This quotation attests that Čiurlionis identified himself with another generation of Western modernists and Russian avant-gardists, one close to him in its quests.

One of the most active leaders of the Futurist avant-garde in Moscow, who threw down the gauntlet to Kulbin in Saint Petersburg and later to Matyushin, was in this other Russian center of new art an organizer of various groups, exhibitions, and actions and the creator of a distinctive trend in Abstractionism called Luchism or Rayonism – Mikhail Larionov along with his comrade-in-arms Natalya Goncharova. They actively participated in the many exhibitions of various groups and movements and closely associated with Benois and Dobuzhinsky; thus, they knew well their views about Čiurlionis' work.

Benois was the one who recommended to Diaghilev that he invite Larionov on a trip to Paris in 1906 and later, in 1913, both Goncharova and Larionov to Switzerland and France to design decorations and costumes for the shows of the Ballets Russes. Because authorities like Alexandre Benois, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Sergey Makovsky, and Mstislav Dobuzhinsky single-mindedly exalted the special talent of the Lithuanian artist, Larionov, who attentively followed exhibitions and developments in art, was well acquainted with Čiurlionis' work. According to the German art historian Franz Roh, he was even prepared, at the commission of the French Ministry of Artistic Affairs, to write a monograph devoted to Čiurlionis' work (*Kultūra*, 1928, Nr. 2, p. 96).

Indeed, the architect Algirdas Mošinskas, who had studied the history of art and architecture at the Sorbonne, announced on January 29, 1928, in a letter from Paris, that the French Ministry of Artistic Affairs (*Ministère des Beaux-Arts*) had commissioned the Russian artist Larionov to write a series of books about Russian art. In this series, a greater amount of space was intended for reproductions, and less – for texts. Larionov intended to devote one volume of this series to Čiurlionis and asked for help collecting material about him (F 93, ap. 1, b. 23, l. 60). This information immediately provoked a reaction from the curator at that time of the M. K. Čiurlionis Gallery, Paulius Galaunė, who in a letter of February 7, 1927, sent to Larionov in Paris, favorably responded to his plan to prepare a monograph devoted to Čiurlionis' work and provided information about his pictures along with a promise to send photographs. Galaunė also indicated several important works in Lithuanian about Čiurlionis' work (F 93, ap. 1, b. 23, l. 153–154). What interests us more, however, is not Larionov's intention, which remained unfulfilled, but that he, in his mature concept of Luchistic painting, moved along the path marked by Čiurlionis.

Larionov's most intensive stage of organizational activity and creative work began in 1910, when he became one of the main participants in two important groups of Russian avant-garde art – the Knave of Diamonds (*Бубновый валет*, 1910–1911) and the Donkey's Tail (*Ослиный хвост*, 1912–1913) – and the progenitor of Luchism (Russian, *лучизм*), or Rayonism (French, *rayonnisme*), which was evolving in the direction of Abstraction.

We should remember that Larionov exhibited Luchistic pictures for the first time at a World of Art show in Moscow in the autumn of 1912, when ten months had passed since a huge retrospective posthumous Čiurlionis exhibition in Moscow. This exhibition and a similar one in Saint Petersburg evoked a widespread response in society and among artists. Precisely then, in the texts of the leading art critics of the Empire – those of Benois, Makovsky, Ivanov, Chudovsky, Lopatin, and others – the foundations were being laid for a profound analysis of Čiurlionis' work and for his cult as a genius.

Indeed, soon after Čiurlionis' posthumous exhibitions in Saint Petersburg and Moscow during 1912–1913, Larionov began forming his theory of abstract Luchistic painting, the main aesthetic principles of which he explicated in a

book of modest scope – *Luchism* (1913). Avoiding obvious allusions in his material to Čiurlionis' work, which had recently become widely known and was being discussed in detail by leading art critics, he did not mention his name anywhere even though his book and increasingly abstract painting devoted special attention to the central problems, typical of the latter's work, of the interaction of the arts, to the musicality of painting, to the "sound of musical colors," and to colorful orchestration with them (Larionov, 1913, p. 11).

Exhibited at this show and at a later one called *Target* and enriched with playful torrents and lines of colorful rays of light, Larionov's more or less abstract Luchistic paintings of 1912–1913 are reminiscent of individual pictures by Čiurlionis suffused with rays of the sun, stars, or a candle. Indeed, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were few artists whose work had such a clearcut motif of diffusive torrents of rays of sunshine and light as we see in his painting. Motifs diffusing torrents of rays emerge in many of Čiurlionis' pictures, of which the most characteristic are *Rytas* (Morning, 1903–1904), *Saulėtekis* (Sunrise, 1904), *Regėjimas* (Vision, 1904–1905), *Tiesa* (Truth, 1905), *Bičiulystė* (Friendship, 1906–1907), *Žuvys* (Pisces) from the cycle *Zodiakas* (Zodiac, 1906–1907), *Praeitis* (Past, 1907), *Andante* from *Sonata Nr. 2* (*Pavasario sonata* [Sonata of the Spring], 1907), *Andante* from *Sonata Nr. 5* (*Jūros sonata* [Sonata of the Sea], 1908), and *Scherzo* from *Sonata Nr. 7* (*Piramidžių sonata* [Sonata of the Pyramids], 1909).

In his book *A Diary of My Encounters*, a member of the Russian avant-garde who had associated with Larionov for many years in Russia and France and knew him well maintained that one of Larionov and Goncharova's most important achievements was the creation of "thingless" Luchistic pictures that are dominated by linear images filled with interwoven wandering lines and evoking a sense of dynamic rays transfused with an element of colorful spots and colorful chaos. And he also observed that "justice demands that we note that in 1907 the Lithuanian painter Čiurlionis was already attempting to move away from "thingishness" and to convey in a picture a disembodied, abstract symphony of colors, lines, and forms. In this sense, Čiurlionis must be considered a progenitor and pioneer of Abstract painting." (Annenkov, t. 2, 1991, p. 213–214)

At first, Larionov's individual pictures, for example, *Portrait of a Fool* (1912), like Čiurlionis' *Drugiai* (Butterflies, 1906), were not yet completely

abstract. However, in the work of both artists the tendency to dematerialize reality unfolded with equal speed, only in Čiurlionis' pictures this process took place five or six years earlier. We see this by comparing dematerialized pictures of similar style, for example, Larionov's *Glass* (1912) and the second and fifth pictures of Čiurlionis' eight-picture cycle *Žiema* (Winter, 1906–1907). Only in most of the works in this cycle Čiurlionis, unlike Larionov, gives a greater role, along with spontaneous lines, to abstract geometrical and arabesque forms.

Larionov's increasingly abstract pictures also connect him with Čiurlionis through their musical names and his quest for musicality, but the manner of painting is different. In comparison to the Lithuanian painter's calm pictures begotten, as it were, by deep meditation, Larionov's canvases are more expressive with darker and richer colors. These differences in style are obvious when we compare Čiurlionis' cycles of clear sonatic paintings that sensitively convey their musical nature with a picture by Larionov with a musical name – *Nocturne* (1913–1914). When this picture with unusual dark brown colors is compared to Čiurlionis' works, we are immediately struck by the expressiveness of the painting style, but it is also connected by the less noticeable thoughtful use in the visual system of the picture of various symbols and decorative details, for example, of images reminiscent of the sun in the upper part of the picture and, farther to the right, of various stylized animals.

In 1913, at the abovementioned show Target, Larionov likewise exhibited a four-picture cycle reminiscent of the compositional structures of the Lithuanian painter's sonatic cycles – *Seasons*, consisting of *Winter*, *Spring*, *Summer*, and *Autumn*. The difference in the interpretation of this theme and in its compositional and plastic solution was influenced by these artists' creative potential as well as by the creative path they had earlier trodden. Filled, like Čiurlionis, with powerful creative energy, Larionov constantly burned with new ideas and boldly changed his manner of painting, seeking more adequate forms of artistic expression for his ideas and undertakings. Both of them were interested in the ideas of esotericism (Larionov especially those of Pavel Ouspensky), cryptography, non-European cultures, and folk art. During their Luchistic period, the abstractions of Larionov and, to a lesser extent, of Goncharova were connected with Čiurlionis not only by an interest in the spontaneous diffusion of rays of

light, in the intuitiveness of pictorial expression, emotionality, and musicality, by an attraction to the interaction of painting and music, by cyclical thinking, and by interest in folk art and the art of Eastern nations (Chinese and Japanese landscape painting) but also by an attraction to abstract pictorial expression that was interwoven with an attraction to the traditions of folk art along with an understanding of their importance and their exaltation.

No less interesting are the entirely unexplored ties with Čiurlionis' work of another eminent leader of the avant-garde, one of Polish origin, and the progenitor of Suprematism, an influential trend in Abstract painting – Kazimir Malevich. The Russian avant-garde spoke about these ties, and they were stressed by an authoritative connoisseur of Malevich's painting and written texts – Jean-Claude Marcadé.

I would like to draw readers' attention to a significant fact in Malevich's intellectual and creative biography – that he alone, like Čiurlionis, among the great representatives of Russian avant-garde art in our field of study did not undertake the journey to Paris that had become almost a ritual for artists seeking new forms of artistic expression. My profound conviction is that this fact influenced these two artists of exceptional talent in their fall, with qualifications, from the developmental highway of Modernist art, in their clear expressions of individualism, in the originality of their thinking and creative work, and in the distinctive paths of their turn to Abstraction.

A while after the exhibition *Target*, Malevich broke off his ties with Larionov, who had long been his guide, and set off on a path of his own that crystallized his vision of abstract painting. Enchanted by theosophical ideas about a supreme spiritual work of art and by the achievements of Cubism, in the milieu of the abovementioned avant-garde groups he painted Cubo-Futurist pictures, increasingly laconic in composition and form, and purposefully moved toward one of the most radical manifestations of Abstraction – *Suprematism* (Latin *supremus* – highest). “Suprematism,” he maintained, “is the beginning of a new culture.” (Malevičius, 1916, p. 27)

After becoming enchanted with the aesthetic principles of Cézanne, the Cubists, and the Cubo-Futurists, Malevich, like Čiurlionis, occupied an aesthetic position like that of the Romantics, Nietzsche, and Wagner in his own

vision of a true universal art that combines within itself not only different forms of artistic expression but also life and philosophy. Thus, he did not treat Suprematist painting, that is, the highest form of painting, as a narrow instrumental style but instead regarded it as a universal philosophy for understanding the world and life. Not by chance, in the journal *Supremus*, which he founded to establish and spread this undertaking, he planned to publish, in the spirit of Čiurlionis' universalism, texts devoted not only to fine art but also to Suprematist music, poetry, and philosophy. So that the practical implementation of his undertaking might truly be professional, Malevich enlisted for its realization composers, poets, and representatives of other fields of art. Thus, Malevich is linked to Čiurlionis by a view of the highest art forms as that which combines in a unified whole the principles of painting, music, poetry, and philosophy and begets the new highest forms of Suprematist painting.

No less important when the problems of Suprematist painting are considered are Malevich's thoughts about the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' artistic work – thoughts generally neglected by students of Čiurlionis but recorded by his pupil Anna Leporskaya in her diary. This important document for the history of Modernist and especially Abstract art was first published only in 2004.

After fifteen years had passed since Čiurlionis' death, in the autumn of 1926, Malevich returned in his thoughts to an analysis of the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' work. He did so by starting with a discussion of the subtleties of conveying holistic forms in painting. In his opinion, these forms can be illusory or not illusory. In the modernizing tradition of Western art, according to Malevich, there was a gradual weakening of the role of illusoriness. And finally, in many of Cézanne's Postimpressionist canvases this illusoriness of art forms disappears, and other vital sensations and factors appear in his pictures expressing the substantial essence of painting. As soon as the Cubists encountered the rendition of holistic forms, this sensation displaced all other less significant pictorial aspects, that is, it demanded such materiality that in their pictures there appeared inserts, reliefs, counter-reliefs, etc. (Malevič, 2004, p. 323)

In his chapter "Solstice" (Russian *Солнцеворот*), Malevich maintained that "artists and he created their works the way they felt. All objects, ideas, and images were only a form of expressing these sensations. Therefore, Čiurlionis

and Vrubel primarily painted their sharpened sensations. During the period of expressionism (Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich) – they painted bathers heating themselves and cleaning their hands and feet. Here, apart from painting they also sought to convey expression.” (Malevič, 2004, p. 323)

In another part of this book, in a chapter with the significant title “Thingless Systems” (Russian *Беспредметные системы*), Malevich again returns to a discussion of Čiurlionis’ distinctive creative style marked by sharpened sensations. “After these pure sensations,” he writes:

there appears an attraction to materiality – for example, to a pear. However, this is not a pear, but only its contours (silhouette). Čiurlionis likewise saw not an object, but only its contours (silhouette), similarly as how the silhouette of a camel in the clouds is not a camel. A pear likewise becomes something entirely different (like Don Quixote fighting with windmills). Sometimes this leads to a strange psychology – of a fantastic nature. (Malevič, 2004, p. 324)

Here, Malevich aptly notes the psychology, filled with humanistic motifs, that follows from this Lithuanian artist’s early stage of literary symbolism and that is typical, for example, of the pictures *Tiesa* (Truth, 1905) and *Bičiulystė* (Friendship, 1906–1907), and he speaks about the significant growth of the fantastic component typical of Čiurlionis’ painting, which radically changes in the late metaphysical pictures that emphasize the materiality of the architectural objects being painted. Most probably wanting to accentuate his own radical originality, this progenitor of Suprematist painting completely ignores the Lithuanian painter’s dematerialized pictures.

Like Čiurlionis and Kandinsky, Malevich outgrew the symbolist stage that had earlier dominated his work and from whose influence he later sought to liberate himself during his Suprematist period. One of the greatest connoisseurs of Malevich’s work, the translator of many of his texts, and the author of works devoted to his paintings, Jean-Claude Marcadé researched, in his article “Malevich the Symbolist,” the ties between the Symbolist period of his creative evolution during 1907–1908 and the later Suprematist stage of his creative development.

He presented various aspects in detail of Russian Symbolism and Malevich's Symbolist painting, drawing attention to the obvious connections between his works and pictures by Vrubel and Čiurlionis. (Marcadé, 2008, p. 124)

Discussing this influence of Čiurlionis and Vrubel on Malevich, he concisely describes the new "psychosurgical method" developed by the author of the black square on June 16, 1926, in Leningrad at the presentation "About the Theory of the Supplemental Element in Painting." This leader of the Russian avant-garde connected his main goal with eliminating those causes that stifled his student-painter's imagination and that did not allow him to reveal in his visual consciousness his true path – "a defined system." (Marcadé, 2008, p. 116) Indeed, in his texts Malevich presents himself as a witness to his creative evolution as a pupil after maintaining that this educational method of "a supplemental element" was practically applied with his participation in 1920.

According to Marcadé, the behavior of the progenitor of Suprematism was not expressed only through the artistic means typical of Cézanne's painting because his creative process was always influenced by Vrubel and Čiurlionis, who in their creative path succeeded in avoiding the powerful influence of Cézanne on the development of many trends in Modernist art. Afterwards, Malevich evolved through stages that emphasized flexible curves and that played an important role on the later path of his creative development. Thus, the influence on Russian avant-garde painters of pictures by Vrubel and Čiurlionis, which were formed without the powerful influence of Cézanne's painting, was weakened by the Cubist appearance of the same sensations that seemed mystical and cosmic. Thus, too, although often connected exclusively with the diffusion of the rationalist analytical and synthetic tendencies of Cézanne and Cubism, Malevich, in his vision of abstract Suprematist painting, did not avoid the influence of psychological and theosophical ideas. (Malevich, 1993, p. 155–156)

Thus, with these fragments, after a decade had already passed since his Suprematist theory and the creation of the black square that gave it meaning, Malevich increasingly understood that he belonged to the avant-garde in contrast to the Symbolist tradition powerfully influenced by psychologism. In Symbolism, he considered the leading figures to be Vrubel and Čiurlionis, whose style he classified as the "old manner of painting." Although he seems to have

clearly understood that Čiurlionis had advanced in the direction of dematerializing reality incomparably farther than Vrubel, he did not accentuate this fact.

Ivan Kliun was a passionate follower of Čiurlionis, as he himself acknowledged in autobiographical studies, Malevich's closest friend as well as a friend of Tatlin's, and one of the leading representatives of Suprematism. In 1910, he became one of the founders of the Moscow Salon Society, at the first exhibition of which, enchanted and inspired by Čiurlionis' pictures, he displayed his own fantastic musical cycle – *Musical Tales* (Kliun, 1999, pp. 50–51; Schindler, 2018, pp. 25–27). However, Čiurlionis' influence, connected with special attention to the problems of the interaction between color and sound, was more widespread in his work; it can be felt not only in other portraits created at this time and in pictures depicting unearthly beings, in *Portrait of the Artist's Wife* (1910), and in *Tale* (1910) but also much later in the untypical *Suprematist Composition* (1920) with Čiurlionis' subtle muted colors and amoebic forms.

In the avant-garde milieu, the conviction was also alive that the creative idea of the Constructivist Tatlin like that of the visual composition and silhouette of his unrealized project *Monument to the Third International*, known as *Tatlin's Tower* (1920), was likewise drawn from the silhouettes of the towers seen in many of Čiurlionis' pictures – shooting skyward, surrounded by spiral lines, and variegated with puzzling signs (Milner, John, 1983). All these highly talented leaders of the Russian avant-garde were well known to Kandinsky, who directly associated with them and who, during the period of his return to Russia, was also influenced by Čiurlionis.

Increasingly oriented to Neoclassical aesthetics, work by the members of the World of Art eventually lost its relevance for the avant-garde, and Čiurlionis – despite his connection with Benois' circle, which had systematically criticized them, and his influence on Kulbin, Matyushin, Kandinsky, Larionov, Goncharova, Kliun, Malevich, Tatlin, and other members of the Russian avant-garde, with the Great War, the changing ideological situation in Soviet Russia and in the USSR that replaced it, and the growing reaction against the Russian avant-garde and other forms of artistic expression alien to Socialist Realism – along with the problems of his relationship with the Russian avant-garde inevitably fell into oblivion.

Interest was reborn only in the 1960s with the beginning of an understanding that not only did Western art influence the Russian avant-garde, but members of the Russian avant-garde also affected the development of Western Modernist art in such movements as Abstractionism, Constructivism, Futurism, Metaphysical Painting, Dadaism, and Surrealism. This fact motivated scholars in various Western countries to take a greater interest in the Russian avant-garde and in the works of Čiurlionis, who was associated with it and in whose evolution there emerged many connections with Abstractionism, Futurism, Metaphysical Painting, and Surrealism.

### The Contacts Between Larionov's Luchism and Čiurlionis' Painting

We will remind the reader that Larionov first exhibited a Luchistic picture at a World of Art exhibition in Moscow during the autumn of 1912, when ten months had passed since Čiurlionis' huge retrospective posthumous exhibition in Moscow, where 161 of his works had been exhibited. This exhibition and a similar one in Saint Petersburg provoked a widespread response in society and among artists. Precisely at this time, in the texts of the leading art critics of the Russian Empire, the foundations were being laid for a profound analysis of Čiurlionis' work, while in Larionov's brochure *Luchism* (1913) the aesthetic principles were being formed for a theory of abstract Luchistic painting. Here, Larionov sought, like Kandinsky, to ground his theory of Luchism, which exalted an abstract form of artistic self-expression, with the latest achievements of contemporary science by attempting to find support for his theory in such diverse sources as the theory of radioactivity in physics and the ideas of mathematics and mystical philosophy.

Relying on Pavel Uspensky's esoteric doctrine about a mysterious "fourth dimension" of existence, Larionov began in an expressive spontaneous manner to paint pictures enriched with lines and a torrential diffusion of rays of light. Some of these images still preserved features of traditional figure painting, while others were completely abstract. Torrents of rays collide on this painter's canvases, and their collisions provide, as it were, energetic impulses for the birth of new rays. When looking at the most characteristic pictures in

this style – *Luchistic Landscape* (1912–1913), *Blue Luchism* (1913), and *Red and Blue Luchism* (1913) – we form an impression that the artist lacked light, as it were, and was occupied with a quest for new sources of light. Most probably, Larionov created his first works in this abstract artistic style in 1912 (although, while later fighting for priority in the birth of abstract painting, he sought, like Kandinsky, to claim that he began this work at an earlier date).

Displayed during the spring of 1913 at the Target exhibition, Larionov's partly and completely abstract Luchistic paintings, enriched with colorful torrents of light and playful lines, are reminiscent of individual pictures by Čiurlionis, which were suffused with rays of the sun, stars, and a candle and filled with puzzling content. Indeed, the works of few artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century exhibit such a clearcut motif of the torrential diffusion of rays of sunshine and light as what we see in those by Čiurlionis – from *Composition*, painted in 1903 at the beginning of his creative path, to his last cycle of sonatic pictures created in 1909.

Variouly interpreted motifs that diffuse torrential rays of light from the sun, the moon, stars, or a candle emerge in many of Čiurlionis' pictures, of which the most characteristic are *Rytas* (Morning, 1903–1904), *Saulėtekis* (Sunrise, 1904), *Regėjimas* (Vision, 1904–1905), *Tiesa* (Truth, 1905), *Bičiulystė* (Friendship, 1906–1907), *Žuvys* (Pisces) from the cycle *Zodiakas* (Zodiac, 1906–1907), *Praeitis* (The Past, 1907), *Andante* from *Sonata No. 2* (*Pavasario sonata* [Springtime Sonata], 1907), *Andante* from *Sonata No. 5* (*Jūros sonata* [Sonata of the Sea], 1908), and *Scherzo* from *Sonata No. 7* (*Piramidžių sonata* [Sonata of the Pyramids], 1909). Larionov, however, like Čiurlionis, Kandinsky, Kupka, Malevich, Russolo, and Klint, was greatly influenced by the ideas of theosophy and had little interest at that time in the substantive aspects of Luchistic painting. His main attention was focused on its formal plastic aspects: the relationship between the diffusion of light and color and color schemes, the expression of feeling, spontaneously overflowing torrents of colorful lines, etc.

Larionov, in asserting that the artist paints “not the object, but the sum of the rays emanating from it,” – much like the Futurists – concentrates the primary emphasis of his paintings on the interaction of dynamic flows of light energy, mobile lines, and color. Within this framework, tendencies toward the dematerialization of reality become evident, as depicted objects dissolve into

relations of light and chromatic interplay. In Larionov's canvases, there unfolds an energetic brutality of form inherited from earlier stages of his artistic evolution: sharp, angular lines prevail, often accompanied by dissonant color juxtapositions. By contrast, Čiurlionis's paintings are governed by a meditative stillness. His style is "softer," more musical and poetic, as if permeated by underlying musical structures and an all-encompassing sense of cosmic harmony.

Immediately after the retrospective exhibitions of Čiurlionis' paintings that were organized during 1911–1912 in Moscow and Saint Petersburg and that caused a tremendous uproar, there also appeared in later exhibitions new pictures by Larionov in his Luchistic style reminiscent of the Lithuanian painter's dematerialized works: *Glass* (1912), *Luchistic Landscape* (1912–1913), *Blue Luchism* (1913), *Red and Blue Luchism* (1913), *Red Luchism* (1913), and *Luchistic Composition, Predominantly Red* (1914). With their pale color scheme, entirely untypical of Larionov's earlier works, and their spontaneous play of lines, some of these pictures are very reminiscent of Čiurlionis' abstract paintings. Larionov's Luchistic period is likewise connected with Čiurlionis by the musical names of his pictures, for example, *Nocturne* (1913–1914), in which the gamut of colors is darker than the ones in the Lithuanian painter's pictures with musical names.

With their playful abstract lines, the canvases of Larionov and his faithful comrade-in-arms, Goncharova, in the Luchistic style – *Blue and Green Forest* (1912), *Landscape 47* (1912), *Yellow and Green Forest* (1913), and *Radiating Lines* (1913) – are probably similar to Čiurlionis' dematerialized pictures, but most of the works by this duet in the Luchistic style have darker, richer colors and stand out for their rougher expressionistic style. Painted in an expressive and spontaneous manner, the "thingless" pictures by this duet contain not only themes and motifs close to Čiurlionis but also features of his artistic style.

Like Čiurlionis' *Drugiai* (Butterflies, 1906), individual pictures by Larionov, for example, *Portrait of a Fool* (1912), are at first not yet completely abstract. However, the tendency to dematerialize reality took place with equal speed in the work of these two artists, only in Čiurlionis' pictures this process occurred five or six years earlier. We can see this fact by comparing pictures in a similar style, for example, Larionov's *Glass* (1912) and the second and fifth pictures in Čiurlionis' eight-picture cycle *Žiema* (Winter, 1906–1907). Unlike Larionov,

however, in most of Čiurlionis' works in this cycle a greater role, alongside spontaneous lines, is played by abstract geometrical and arabesque forms.

In his increasingly abstract paintings Larionov is also connected with Čiurlionis through their musical names and his quest for musicality, but these artists' manner of painting differs. In comparison to the Lithuanian painter's calm pictures, begotten, as it were, of deep meditation, Larionov's canvases are more expressive, with darker and richer colors. We clearly see these differences in manner of painting when we compare Čiurlionis' limpid cycles of sonatic paintings that sensitively convey their musical nature with Larionov's musically named picture *Nocturne* (1913–1914). When compared to Čiurlionis' works, this picture with unusual dark brown colors has a noticeably expressive manner of painting, while these artists are connected by the use, less clear in Larionov's system of images, of various symbols and well-considered decorative details in the space of a picture. Thus, in the upper part of the picture one image is reminiscent of the sun, and farther to the right, others convey various stylized animals.

When speaking about the pictures that brought Larionov international recognition, we should draw attention to the most important fact that the diffusion of rays mentioned in his pictures with this abstract bent that accentuates a Čiurlionian creative line fuses into a unified whole with a second more important abstract tendency, proceeding from the second stage of his creative evolution, to dematerialize reality. When comparing Larionov and Goncharova's most characteristic Luchistic pictures with the works Čiurlionis created during 1906–1907, we will easily notice their stylistic similarity, which attests to Čiurlionis' influence.

In 1913, at the Target exhibition, Larionov also exhibited a four-picture cycle reminiscent of the compositional structures of the Lithuanian painter's sonatic cycles – *Seasons*, consisting of the works *Winter*, *Spring*, *Summer*, and *Autumn*. The difference in the interpretation of this theme as well as in its compositional and plastic solution was influenced both by the creative potential of these artists and by the creative paths they followed. At this exhibition Larionov also exhibited pictures that grounded the Luchistic aesthetics he was developing. These works were not yet purely abstract because in them, as in individual pictures that Čiurlionis created during his second period in 1906,

for example, *Drugiai* (Butterflies) and the diptych *Rytmetis* (Morning), one can still discern the vague contours of specific objects.

Thus, Larionov's painting during his Luchistic period is connected with the Lithuanian painter's spontaneous pictures with their dematerialized reality during the second stage of his creative evolution. Like Čiurlionis, he is full of creative energy, constantly burns with new ideas, boldly changes his manner of painting, and seeks forms of more adequate artistic expression for his ideas and plans. Both of them are interested in esoteric ideas, cryptography, non-European cultures, and folk art. The abstract art of Larionov's and, to a lesser extent, of Goncharova's Luchistic period is connected with Čiurlionis by their attention to the spontaneous diffusion of rays of light, the intuitiveness of their pictorial expression, their emotionality and musicality, their attraction to the interaction between painting and music, cyclical thinking, their interest in folk art and the landscape painting of Eastern peoples (the Chinese and Japanese), and their attraction to abstract pictorial expression, which was intertwined with an attraction to the traditions of folk art, the importance of which they understood and exalted.

Briefly put, a "radiating" abstract picture in the Luchistic style may be defined as a plane into which are transferred rays emanating from objects. Intersecting in different directions and with a different rhythm, these rays-lines create a new harmony with the objects partly or completely disappearing. During late 1913 and early 1914, according to Andrei Nakov, Larionov's work already anticipated the images of Constructivist painting (Nakov, 1984, p. 5).

When discussing the aesthetic and artistic principles of Luchism, we have focused our main attention on Larionov's creative evolution and have pushed aside, as it were, his other half, Goncharova, who ended up in the shadows of our analysis although she was also constantly an organic part of the spread and sunset of Luchism. Together with Larionov, this artist of rare industriousness and creativity participated, even before World War I, in many significant art shows in Russia and abroad. She presented her works at a show of the Blue Horseman group in Munich, and together with Larionov and Čiurlionis, she was exhibited at shows of the Russian Artists Union and of the World of Art (1911–1913) and of the Postimpressionists in London (1912). In the autumn of

1913 in Moscow and in the spring of 1914 in Saint Petersburg, she organized huge personal exhibitions which presented more than 700 works created from 1900 to 1913.

Thus, Luchism was one of many short-term trends in abstract art developed by Larionov and Goncharova during 1912–1914 because, when the war began, other problems of survival arose, and their interest in creating abstract pictures was exhausted. In March of 1914, a final exhibition was organized reflecting the extinction of the Luchistic movement – No. 4 (Futurists, Cubists, Primitivists), at which without much ado the latest manifestations of Luchistic art were exhibited – so-called Pneumo-Luchism.

These ideas of Larionov's that exalted the importance of expressive spontaneous lines and of the phenomenon of color influenced Malevich's concept of abstract Suprematist painting. Here, unlike the revelation of the musicality of colors or Larionov's diffusion of a spontaneous spectrum, what becomes most important is the employment of the possibilities for the artistic expression of pure color. Larionov's Luchism also had a less significant influence on other representatives of the Russian avant-garde – Vladimir Tatlin, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Nikolai Punin, the last of whom valued him.

### Čiurlionis' Black Square and Malevich's Suprematism

No less significant are the little studied ties between the originator of Suprematism, Kazimir Malevich, and Čiurlionis' work. The Russian avant-garde talked about both of them, and they attracted the attention of one of the best connoisseurs of Malevich's work, the translator of many of his texts, and the author of works devoted to his art – Jean-Claude Marcadé. In his article “Malevich the Symbolist,” published in the book *Le Dialogue des arts dans le symbolisme russe* (Dialogue of the Arts in Russian Symbolism, 2008), he examined, exhaustively and in various aspects, the ties between the Symbolist Malevich's artistic evolution during 1907–1908 and the later Suprematist stage of his creative development.

Like Čiurlionis and Kandinsky, Malevich outgrew the Symbolist stage that had earlier dominated his work and from whose train of powerful influence he later sought to free himself when he joined the avant-garde movement. Discuss-

ing in detail various aspects of Russian Symbolism and of Malevich's Symbolist painting, Jean-Claude Marcadé drew attention to the obvious connections between his work and pictures by Mikhail Vrubel and Čiurlionis. According to this French art critic, even if "in Suprematism, strictly speaking, there is no Symbolism, there is still a symbolic charge" (Marcadé, 2008, p. 124).

Indeed, in his idealistic creative attitudes influenced by theosophy, artistic style, dominant motifs, color scheme, warm pastel colors, and tempera manner of painting, Malevich's Symbolist pictures of 1907–1909 from his so-called Yellow Series – *Prayer* (1907), *Woman Picking Flowers* (also called *The Secret of Temptation*, 1908) – his sketches for the fresco *Triumph of the Heavens* (1907), and other pictures, sketches, and drawings of his Symbolist period are reminiscent of Čiurlionis' works.

As seen by Marcadé, the behavior of the originator of Suprematism was not manifested only through the means of artistic expression typical of Cézanne's painting tradition because his thinking and creative process were always influenced by Vrubel and Čiurlionis, who on their creative path succeeded in avoiding the Cézannism that had a strong influence on the development of many trends in Modernist art. Incidentally, among the great Russian avant-gardists in our field of study, Malevich was the only one who, like Čiurlionis, did not undertake the journey to Paris that had almost become a ritual for artists seeking new forms of artistic expression. I believe this fact influenced the conditional fall of these two exceptionally talented artists out of the highways of development in Modernist art, their clearcut expressions of individualism, the originality of their thinking, aesthetic views, and creative work, and their distinctive paths when turning to Abstraction.

Malevich's evolution toward Abstraction was, as we have mentioned, influenced not only by the French artistic tradition but also by the artists who worked in the Russian Empire. Marcadé was entirely correct when he accentuated the influence of paintings by Vrubel and Čiurlionis on Malevich. It was indeed significant and was expressed in Malevich's pictures in various forms. At the beginning of his creative path, we see a more powerful influence by Vrubel, and later – one by Čiurlionis. Alone given the name of geniuses during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Saint Petersburg intellectuals and by people in the World of Art

milieu, who valued their work highly, these two artists who painted pictures with puzzling subjects were important authorities for painters who sought new, avant-garde paths of artistic expression.

Vrubel's influence on the Russian avant-garde spread more through interactions of plastic forms filled with powerful biological energy and through a tendency to resolve the painted figures of people and demons into planes and sharp lines, while that of Čiurlionis – through the stylistic purification of artistic interaction, futuristic visions, cosmism, diffused rays of sunlight typical of Luchism, and geometrical forms as well as through the tendencies of dematerialized painting toward abstraction enriched with arabesque structures and the play of meandering lines. One can easily be convinced of Malevich's contacts with Čiurlionis' work by comparing his colored Symbolist pictures in yellowish tones, graphic works, drawings, and, most importantly, the famous black circle and black square created during his Suprematist period. The obvious sources of these two paintings that achieved a cult status of exceptional importance in the history of Modernist art can be encountered much earlier in Čiurlionis' work.

Today, lacking documented sources, we can only speculate what pictures by Čiurlionis Malevich saw, and at what exhibitions, but knowing the enchantment of his closest friend Ivan Klyun with the Lithuanian artist's paintings, the enchantment of a friend six years his senior who, contrary to stereotypical views, during the early stage of Malevich's evolution influenced his friend's aesthetic tastes, we can be almost certain that he visited the great retrospective exhibitions organized at the apogee of Čiurlionis' fame. At these exhibitions, alongside paintings, individual graphic works were also displayed, which included one that was created in 1908 and is now most relevant to us – Čiurlionis' landmark picture *Vinjetė (Kompozicija)* (Vignette [Composition]), which depicts a black square and a black circle.

The obvious concurrence in this picture with Malevich's Suprematist concept of the dominant main artistic images of a black square and a black circle can hardly be considered an accidental phenomenon. Most probably, as often happens in the historical spread of important artistic ideas and motifs, *the idea Malevich discerned in Čiurlionis' picture and the obvious tendency to emphasize*

*fundamental geometrical structures and to geometricize directly connected purified primordial artistic forms served Malevich in the development of his own already mature ideas and creative principles.*

Not by chance, a Russian student of Čiurlionis, Galina Gubanova, drew attention to these connections in articles about the creative ties between Malevich and Čiurlionis – “Malevich and Čiurlionis on the Path of New Art” (2009) and “Čiurlionis’ Pink Square: Color and Symbol on the Path of Dematerialized Painting” (2011) – and in various papers at conferences. From her perspective, the significance of Čiurlionis’ creative quests in the formation of Malevich’s worldview and artistic language is quite important and merits scholarly attention (Gubanova, 2009, p. 44).

After a meticulous comparative analysis of various works by Čiurlionis and Malevich, this Russian art historian spoke about Čiurlionis’ indubitable influence on Malevich’s version of Abstractionism – Suprematism. Following up, as it were, on this art historian’s insights and her empirical comparative research, I would like to focus my main attention in my analysis of Čiurlionis’ influence on Malevich on other aspects of their work and worldviews connected with sacred geometry and theosophy. When analyzing this aspect of one of Čiurlionis’ most puzzling pictures, *Vinjetė (Kompozicija)* (Vignette [Composition], 1908), we see well-known prototypes of the black square and black circle that appear in works that Malevich created in 1915, and we indeed see many amazing similarities. The chronological priority of Čiurlionis’ picture in depicting these geometrical figures does not raise any doubts.

However, abstract tendencies to dematerialize reality and an expansion of geometrical forms and figures can be seen in Čiurlionis’ works and in other pictures – even in ones entirely foreign to his sonatic period in terms of color: *Fantazija* (Fantasy, 1907/8) in bright green with pink hues and *Laivai* (Boats, 1909/10) with even brighter pink colors. The first of these two pictures amazes with its diversity of puzzling forms and arabesque structures, while in the second one the main geometrical segments of the composition – a square, a circle, a triangle – are visually arranged on the surface of the canvas and so thinly painted over the image of boats floating in the air that they are even transparent. In Gubanova’s opinion, this flat world with an aura of magic and esotericism is

different from the one in which boats float – although magic but still boats. We see this technique in Malevich's works *Soldier of the First Division* (1914) with a blue rectangle and *Lady at a Tram Stop* (1914) with a reddish rectangle. Both rectangles are visually arranged on the surface of the canvas, closer than the three-dimensional world of collages behind them, existing beyond the bounds of this world (Gubanova, 2009, p. 63).

The most interesting in this aspect is a picture created in 1908 in horizontal form – Čiurlionis' *Vinjetė (Kompozicija)*, which is one of this Lithuanian artist's most puzzling works, permeated with sacred geometry and theosophical ideas. Here, the dominant elements in a system of artistic images are three black geometrical figures: a *triangle*, a *circle* at the center, and finally, the *black square* that became the focus of Malevich's Suprematist theory. These main elements in the composition of the picture are surrounded by various ornamental structures and meandering dynamic lines, and the black square – by two formalized decorative images, preferred by Čiurlionis, Malevich, and Larionov, of a radiating sun. The black square in this composition is placed in another larger square, in which it occupies only a quarter of the space. The dominance of these two squares in the spatial composition of this picture and their penetration into the upper – theosophically, highest and most spiritual – part of this composition confirm, as it were, the exceptional importance of the square in Čiurlionis' sense of the world, which was influenced by theosophy and sacred geometry.

When we compare the two pictures by Čiurlionis that we have discussed above with Malevich's Suprematist concept of three main geometrical figures, we can see that only one element is different in the latter instance, i.e., in place of a pyramid there is a cross. Quickly becoming popular, Malevich's painting, whose symbol was "The Black Square," was transformed in 1915 into the influential Suprematist movement of Russian avant-garde art.

When the problems of the genesis of Suprematist painting are examined, no less important are Malevich's thoughts about the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' artistic work – thoughts that have generally not been discussed by students of Čiurlionis but which were recorded by Malevich's pupil Anna Leporskaya in her diary. Important for the history of avant-garde and especially abstract art, this document was published for the first time in the second volume of the book

*Малевич о себе. Современники о Малевиче. Письма. Документы. Воспоминания. Критика* (Malevich About Himself. Contemporaries About Malevich. Letters. Documents. Reminiscences. Criticism), which came out in 2004.

Thus, when fifteen years had passed since Čiurlionis' death, in the autumn of 1926, Malevich returned in his thoughts to an analysis of the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' work. In the chapter "Solstice" (Russian *Солнцеворот*), Malevich maintained that:

artists and he created their works the way they felt. All objects, ideas, images were only a form of expressing these sensations. Thus, too, Čiurlionis and Vrubel primarily painted their sharpened sensations. During their Expressionist period [Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich] painted seated bathers steaming themselves and performing care and cleansing procedures on their arms and legs. Here, apart from painting, they also sought to convey expression. (Malevich, 2004, p. 323)

In the chapter of this book entitled "Thingless Systems" or "Dematerialized Systems" (Russian *Беспредметные системы*), Malevich again returns to a description of the distinctiveness of Čiurlionis' artistic style with its sharpened sensations – a style that he calls the old manner of painting. "After these pure sensations," he writes:

there appears an attraction to materiality – for example, that of a pear. However, it is not a pear, but only its contours (silhouette). Čiurlionis likewise saw not an object, but only its contours (silhouette), just as the silhouette of a camel in the clouds is not a camel. A pear likewise becomes something entirely different (like Don Quixote tilting at windmills). Sometimes there appears from this a strange psychologism – of a fantastic nature." (Malevich, 2004, p. 324)

Here, Malevich aptly notes the psychologism that proceeds from this Lithuanian artist's early stage of literary symbolism, and he speaks about the significant growth of the fantastic element typical of Čiurlionis' painting – a growth that in

his last pictures, for example, in *Piramidžių sonata* (Sonata of the Pyramids, 1909), is often connected not only with highlighting the beauty of purified primordial architectural forms drowning in mists but also with their dematerialization. Most probably wanting to accentuate his own radical originality, the originator of Suprematist painting ignores the pictures by this Lithuanian painter in this style.

In art, according to Malevich:

one line – the main one – is abstract, and the series of sensations that live in man .... Through this line we also sense geniuses – that is, those who were able to express new sensations. In us there now live mysticism, romanticism, and similar things, that is, 5–6 sensations on which we rely, but understandably, there are also those that are unknown to us. All the power of a “genius” lies in the ability to reveal these new, unknown sensations in how they are expressed. In this way, they will also jolt all of us. (Malevich, 2004, p. 324)

Malevich also makes his insights concrete in another thought that “the entire power of ‘genius’ lies in the discovery of these new, unknown sensations and their expression” (Malevich, 2004, p. 324). At the time when Malevich stated these words, if we bear in mind the context of his ideas, it is hardly worth doubting that these words were addressed to the genius of Čiurlionis.

Thus, in these fragments, written a decade after the creation of his Suprematist theory and of the black square that embodied it, Malevich understood more and more clearly that he was an artist with a different style in comparison to the Symbolist generation that was greatly influenced by psychologism and whose most brilliant painters in the powerful influence of their talent were, in his opinion, Vrubel and Čiurlionis. Although Malevich seems to have understood very well that Čiurlionis went incomparably farther than Vrubel in the direction of dematerializing reality, not wanting to lay bare the true sources of his *Black Square* and defending the supposed originality of his creative quests, he consciously chose not to accentuate this fact.

Thus, at the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Čiurlionis, having formed his own style as a painter, appeared at the exhibition halls

of Saint Petersburg and Moscow with unusual pictures that interested the avant-gardists, there began in Russian art, after long decades of stagnation, a time of great changes. What a few years earlier had seemed innovative and progressive became, against the background of the new quests of avant-garde artists, a usual and ordinary phenomenon. This rapid process of, in Nietzsche's words, a "revaluation of all values" and the growing dynamism of a sense of flowing time inevitably also affected the creative development of avant-garde groups recently enchanted by new art forms – Golden Fleece, Triangle, Blue Rose, Union of Youth, Knave of Diamonds, Donkey's Tail, and others.

From them there soon emerged in Russian avant-garde art two important trends evolving toward Abstraction – Larionov's Luchism and Malevich's Suprematism. In different ways, both of them pursued the tendencies developed in Čiurlionis' pictures of 1905–1906 – of dematerializing reality, of purifying forms, and of abstract expression. Thus, Čiurlionis pushed the Russian avant-garde toward developing the problems of the interaction of the arts, toward cosmism, and toward quests for new compositional solutions, and he helped Kandinsky, Larionov, Goncharova, Malevich, Klyun, and other Russian avant-gardists who followed them understand painting as the art of pure dematerialized forms.