

*Giulia De Florio*

*Teatr dlia detei* and Marshak's new theatrical works for children

*Teatr dlia detei* (1922) is the first published work for children by the poet, critic and translator Samuil Marshak (1887-1964). This collection of plays is the outcome of the most innovative ideas of the beginning of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> and it clearly shows, from the very beginning of Marshak's career in the literary field, his ability to understand children's need for true art.

Marshak wrote the plays together with the poet Evgeniia Vasil'eva-Dmitrieva (1887-1928)<sup>2</sup> while they lived in Krasnodar after the October Revolution.<sup>3</sup> The authors included in the collection three interesting articles:<sup>4</sup> Boris Leman's *School of Life* (*Shkola zhizni*), Aleksei Dmitriev's *The Actor*

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper takes its cue from my previous research on the Russian theatre at the beginning of the nineteenth century. My aim was to shed light on the vital theoretical environment in pre-revolutionary Russia, which paved the way for its further development. In that article, I also pointed out some general features of the collection of plays *Teatr dlia detei* by Marshak and Vasil'eva, which can be considered one of the first important works in the theatre for children. See G. De Florio, *Russian theatre for children and Marshak's Teatr dlia detei*, "Strenæ. Recherches sur les livres et objets culturels de l'enfance", n. 16, 2020. URL: <<http://journals.openedition.org/strenae/4336>> (last access: 20.07.2020).

<sup>2</sup> E.I. Vasil'eva-Dmitrieva is a poet of the early twentieth century, known in all the most important circles of the time as 'Cherubina de Gabriak', a pseudonym she invents together with her friend Maksimilian Voloshin.

<sup>3</sup> More detailed information about this first collection and the period in Krasnodar can be found in I.S. Marshak, *Teatr dlia detei 1920-1923*, in *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Marshaka*, B. Galanov, I. Marshak, M. Petrovskij (Eds.), Moskva, Detskaia literatura, 1975, p. 349-486. See also I. Kutsenko, *S. Ia. Marshak v Ekaterinodare-Krasnodare (1918-1922)*, Krasnodar, Adygeia, p. 474-520 and A.V. Bogdanova, *Detskii gorodok*, in 'Ia dumal, chuvstvoval, ia zhil...' *Vospominaniia o S.Ia. Marshake*, B.E. Galanov (Ed.), Moskva, Sovetskii pisatel', 1971, p. 128-146.

<sup>4</sup> S. Marshak, E. Vasil'eva, *Teatr dlia detei*, Krasnodar, Kubano-chern. otd. narod. obraz., 1922.

in *Children's Theatre (Akter v teatre dlia detei)* and Aleksandr Iunger's *The Artist in Children's Theatre (Khudozhnik v teatre dlia detei)*. The sixteen plays are split into two groups: thirteen plays for small children and three for young people. They are preceded by six prologues. In 1963, in a letter to S.B. Rassadin, Marshak indicates Evgeniia Vasil'eva as the author of *The Flowers of Little Ida (Tsvety male'noi Idy)* and *The Young King (Molodoi korol')*, whereas *The Fairy Tale about the Goat (Skazka pro kozla)*, *Petrushka* and *The Kitty's House (Koshkin dom)* are written by Marshak alone and all the others by the two of them together.<sup>5</sup> Some plays are written on original subjects, while others are drawn from already existing subjects, mainly Russian and foreign fairy tales or literary fairy tales, such as *The Flying Trunk (Letaiushchii sunduk)*, by Hans Christian Andersen.<sup>6</sup> The plots of the three plays for older children, *Phoenix the Bright Falcon (Finist iasnyi sokol)*,<sup>7</sup> *Tair and Zore (Tair i Zore)* and *The Young King (Molodoi korol')*, are borrowed from a Russian fairy tale, a Tatar folkloric epic and Oscar Wilde, respectively.

Two elements characterise the collection and the authors' approach to theatre for children: first of all, the plays are not merely a reproduction of folk or traditional material but bear some literary and personal imprint; second, they do not hide the 'magic' of the theatre, by showing what lies beyond it and piercing the barrier between the stage and the auditorium. The aim is to get the children involved in the *play* (in both its meanings – as a representation and a game) and, at the same time, to bring the world of art to them in order to make it part of their everyday lives. As noted by critic Nikolai Bakhtin, Marshak wanted

to link the theatre with children's lives so that children in the theatre would meet what they knew from their own lives and [so that they] would take away from the theatre the desire to follow in the footsteps of a play-theatre (*teatr-igra*) that was born out of game and, in the child's life, turns into a game as well.<sup>8</sup>

The articles of Leman, Dmitriev and Iunger also show how tightly connected the ideas of the contributors of the volume are: they all insist on the

<sup>5</sup> See S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 8, Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972, p. 477-478.

<sup>6</sup> On July 18, 1920, with the premiere of this play, adapted and staged by Vasil'eva and Marshak, the children's theatre of Ekaterinodar (Krasnodar) begins its existence.

<sup>7</sup> The original fairy tale collected by Afanas'ev is called *The Feather of Finist the Falcon (Pioryshko Finista iasna sokola)*.

<sup>8</sup> N. Bakhtin, *Recenziia na kn. "Teatr dlia detei" S. Marshaka i E. Vasil'evoi*, "Prosveshchenie. Pedagogicheskii sbornik", n. 2, Pietrograd, 1922, p. 228.

importance of fairy tales in the theatre for children and firmly believe that game (*igra*) is the basis of all further creative activities of human beings. By stressing the importance of improvisation, the need for new content and a new form expressed in a clear, synthetic and precise language, they ultimately set the objectives of the new theatre for children:

To awaken the creative imagination of the child, give him a number of beautiful fairy tale images, in which the eternal human ideals of goodness, justice and beauty would be embodied in front of him. To give what would be for a child spiritual content, a series of ethical standards, which then, in their games, they could turn into individual creativity: this is the task of the repertoire of such a theatre.<sup>9</sup>

Marshak's main concern is to foster a vision of the theatre for children as a place where imagination and freedom to play are, literally, given centre stage.

These first plays are dramaturgically less sophisticated; the author is not greatly concerned with following strict dramatic principles. The texts are not so much plays as character sketches (*skazki v litsakh*). Over the decades, Marshak's objectives change slightly: in his more mature works, he further develops both the plot and the ethical and moral values he wants to put at the forefront. It is not a rejection of previous ideas but rather a more refined way to connect pedagogical and artistic purposes, which underlines a deeper understanding of children's needs in the evolving context. In 1922, a theatre specially dedicated to children was about to open.<sup>10</sup> In 1927 and even more so by the 1940s and 1950s, plays for children were a well-established tradition: many theatres for young people had opened all over the country, and other important writers had turned to plays for children (such as Olesha, Shvarts and Gabbe). At the same time, Soviet ideology had become pervasive in this field, too, stressing the dominant pedagogical role of any form of art or culture for children, theatre included.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Marshak manages to foster his own artistic ideas and universal moral principles even within the rigid framework of the Soviet consensus. In the 1950s, he stresses again, thirty years or so after the publication of his first collection of plays, the key element of his work in the theatre, namely, the importance of games:

<sup>9</sup> B. Leman, *Shkola zhizni*, in S. Marshak, E. Vasil'eva, *Teatr dlia detei*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> See A. Z. Iufit (ed.), *Sovetskij teatr. Dokumenty i materialy*. Vol. 1: *Russkij sovetskij teatr 1917-1921*, Sankt Peterburg, 1968, p. 456; M. van de Water, *Theatre for Young People in Soviet Russia, 1918-1939: Ideology, Aesthetics, and Cultural Education*, "Strenæ. Recherches sur les livres et objets culturels de l'enfance", n. 16, 2020, URL: <<https://journals.openedition.org/strenae/4363>> (last access: 20.07.2020).

<sup>11</sup> See S.N. Lunacharskaia, *Teatr dlia detei kak orudie kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia*, Moskva, GIKHL, 1931.

I always found it interesting to make plays from children's games. Play-games. I reckoned: if the basis of any theatrical play is a game, then in the theatre for children play is doubly justified. I've included children's game techniques in all my plays.<sup>12</sup>

Let us now focus on the 'variations on the theme', which take place in the plays *Petrushka* and *The Kitty's House*.

### *Petrushka*: from folklore to modern times

*Petrushka* is one of the most popular characters of Russian folk culture, and Marshak could not overlook him. The puppet comedy about *Petrushka* was set in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century, though the character became popular in the country in the époque of Peter the Great. Improvisation has always been a key element in this kind of representation: the protagonist immediately puts himself on the same level with the audience and is part of it. *Petrushka* engages with the audience through naughty lines, trying not to miss any eccentric remarks from the spectators.

In this very spirit, Marshak creates his first *Petrushka*.<sup>13</sup> According to actress Anna Bogdanova, in the performance in Krasnodar, the text served merely as a canvas for verbal improvisations between the author – Marshak – and *Petrushka*, played by actor Dmitrij Orlov.<sup>14</sup> Here, unlike the folk source, *Petrushka* did not interact with the organ grinder (*sharmanshchik*) but with the author himself; in this way, Marshak inserted an authorial element in the folk tradition, showing at the same time his knowledge of the source.

In the 1922 print edition of *Petrushka*, the main characteristics of the folk hero remain, except for the vulgar expressions, which would not suit an audience of children. As Novikov observes referring to the traditional character:

*Petrushka* is not so much clever as cunning and dodgy, even aggressive. In a moment of danger, he is ready to remain in the background, but quickly gets a grip of himself

<sup>12</sup> B. Galanov, *Sobesednik*, in *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo Marshaka*, B. Galanov, I. Marshak, M. Petrovskij (Eds.), cit., p. 203.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, another version of *Petrushka* comes out in the new edition of *Theatre for Children* in 1927 (S. Marshak, *Teatr dlia detei*, Leningrad, Raduga, 1927). The two versions are slightly different; for instance, in the 1927 text, Marshak relates an episode with a tram that a year later will be included in the poem *The Absent-Minded* (*Vot kakoj rasseiannyi*). In the 1922 version, instead, there is a comic scene involving a bucket full of kasha. The tram disappears in the new *Petrushka the Foreigner*.

<sup>14</sup> See A.V. Bogdanova, *Detskii gorodok*, in *'Ia dumal, chuvstvoval, ia zhil...'*. *Vospominaniia o S.I. Marshake*, B.E. Galanov (Ed.), cit., p. 128-146. Bogdanova was Orlov's wife.

and again becomes vivacious and even rough, up to some vulgar words. He doesn't like foreigners; he doesn't like Germans and makes fun of them in every way.<sup>15</sup>

Marshak's *Petrushka*, too, is irreverent and funny, as 'the man with the screen' states in the first lines of the play:

Сейчас, детвора, я покажу сердечного друга моего, Петра Ивановича Петрова, а по-нашему Петрушку. Человек он хороший, собой красавец писанный, румянец во всю щеку, брови дугой, кудри шелковые. Один грех за ним есть: врать любит. Такие небылицы рассказывает, что и во сне не приснится. Вы ни одному слову его не верьте! И еще грешок за ним есть: хвастлив не в меру, пыль в глаза пускает.<sup>16</sup> Я, говорит, первый богач на свете, а у самого был в кармане алтын, да карман продрался... Я, говорит, весь свет объехал, а сам дальше нашего базара не бывал. Я, говорит, никого не боюсь, а покажи ему веник, – под лавку спрячется! Да не в том беда, что он трус, не всем же храбрыми быть. Беда в том, что он первый обидчик и забияка. Уж и колотили его за это, целого места на нем нет, а ему все не по чем! Всегда из воды сух выходит.<sup>17</sup> И что бы с ним не случилось, он долго унывать не любит. Постонет, побряхтит – и опять смеется. Вот за это-то его все и любят.<sup>18</sup> Да вы сами его увидите.<sup>19</sup>

He is a liar and a boaster, but at the end of the day he is a good fellow, does not bear grudges for long and always ends up laughing at himself and at the circumstances. Still, his doom is ordained, and he is punished for his numerous lies by the dog, who drags him away by the nose. The organ grinder openly states the moral, thus adding a pedagogical element to the play:

ШАРМАНЩИК. Жаль его, веселый был малый, а плохо кончил. Собака-то ведь злющая... Видели, как она его за нос потащила? Так и с вами будет, если врать будете! Берегите носы!<sup>20</sup>

At first glance, *Petrushka the foreigner*<sup>21</sup> appears very different from the previous version. As Sorokina correctly observes:

The plot and structure of the next play [...] were not as dependent on the folklore play as the previous one. Marshak builds the plot as a chain of events, gets rid of traditio-

<sup>15</sup> V.I. Novikov, *Petrushka v sovremennom mire*, "Obshestvennye nauki i sovremenost'", n. 5, 2006, p. 167-176, p. 169.

<sup>16</sup> This sentence is omitted from the 1927 version. Moreover, in that version, *Petrushka* is called Petr Ivanovich Uksusov, as in some folk variants.

<sup>17</sup> This sentence is omitted from the 1927 version.

<sup>18</sup> This sentence is omitted from the 1927 version.

<sup>19</sup> S. Marshak, *Petrushka*, in S. Marshak, E. Vasil'eva, *Teatr dlia detei*, cit., p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> S. Marshak, *Petrushka-inostranets*, Leningrad, Raduga, 1927. The play was first staged at the State Central Puppet Theatre 'S. Obraztsov' in 1950.

nal folklore characters (except Petrushka), and substitutes the latter with contemporary characters that reflected new social reality. Petrushka as a character also undergoes changes. He is no longer a conventional character without social background and age but a mischievous little boy and urchin. The verbal structure of this play no longer bears on the verbal structure of the folklore play as before.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, all the characters of the play change: here we have Petrushka's parents, the invalid, the ice cream seller, the police officer and others. The topographical references set the play in a specific space: Petrushka idles in the Summer Garden and wants to drown himself in the Obvodnyi Canal, where he goes and finds the man in panties taking a bath. Moreover, the invalid identifies himself as being 'from Leningrad' (*ia – leningradskii invalid*), making it the location where the action takes place. In the 1922 version, instead, Petrushka first of all says that he has just arrived from Piter.<sup>23</sup> As for the time of action, the manner of addressing people as 'citizen' ('grazhdanin') or 'comrade' ('tovarishch') clearly sets the action after the October Revolution. Trams and cigarettes, 'Troika', though not specific to the Soviet Union, depict a contemporary scenario.

Even if contemporaneity supersedes direct references to folklore, elements of folk tradition still come up in the play; this time, however, they are the result of a more conscious use of the vast folk repertoire of genres: when the two janitors water the kiosk where Petrushka is hiding, he desperately shouts:

Ох, беда, беда, беда!  
Очень мокрая вода  
Дождик, дождик, перестань,  
Я поеду в Аристань!<sup>24</sup>

This is a typical example of the spells and incantations, which are part of children's folklore and of Marshak's personal repertoire as well.<sup>25</sup> Thanks to their incisiveness and brevity, they formally preserve the energy and imme-

<sup>22</sup> S.P. Sorokina, *Petrushka v detskom teatre pervogo poslerevoliutsionnogo desiatiletiia (dve p'esy S.Ia. Marshaka)*, "Studia Litterarum", vol. 3, n. 3, 2018, p. 254-277, p. 255.

<sup>23</sup> 'Здравствуйте, здравствуйте, здравствуйте! Прибыл я из Питера, был там у кондитера, накупил кренделей, // заплатил сто рублей, сдачи дали пятак да в придачу тумак...'. S. Marshak, E. Vasil'eva, *Teatr dlia detei*, cit., p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1968, p. 242.

<sup>25</sup> There are many examples of such 'spells' in his personal works, but he also translates similar works from other cultures: "Дождик, дождик, до свидания! / Уходи скорей в Испанию, / Может, там нужны дожди, / А назад не приходи!". Ibid., p. 167.

diacy of the exhortation but, above all, “these ancient genres attract Marshak for they strive to exercise power over nature, to claim human ‘superiority’ towards it”.<sup>26</sup>

If *Petrushka* was largely in debt to what Marshak personally saw and listened to in his childhood in the Russian province, full of *balagan* and popular theatre, in *Petrushka the Foreigner*, the literary gradient is higher and the dialogues or monologues reveal a clear pattern in Marshak's appropriation of tradition: as Petrovskii observes, “he does not see in folklore what died in the past but what in it is still alive and can work in the present”.<sup>27</sup>

In this play, Marshak also proves his craving for intertextuality and the influence of avant-garde linguistic experiments. The episode with the ice cream seller is clearly taken from his poem *The Ice Cream (Morozhenoe)*, illustrated by Vladimir Lebedev, which Raduga published in 1925. It is quite a grotesque anecdote, with the final transformation of a man into a snowman as a severe punishment for his greed. The vendor goes around with his cart and shouts his wares:

<i>Morozhenoe</i> (1925)	<i>Petrushka the Foreigner</i> (1927)
– Отличное	<i>Мороженщик</i>
Земляничное	Продал мороженое на сто
Морожено!	рублей,
...	А сундук стал еще тяжелей.
Мы возьмем для вас пломбир	С места его не сдвину —
И клубничное,	Не могу понять причину...
Земляничное	(Кричит)
Мороженое!	Отличное!
...	<i>Петрушка</i>
Получайте, гражданин,	(из сундука)
Именинное	Земляничное!
Апельсинное	<i>Мороженщик</i>
Мороженое!	Клубничное!
...	

<sup>26</sup> M. Petrovskii, *V nachale bylo slovo narodnoe*, “Doshkol’noe vospitanie”, n. 1-2, 1964, p. 108-114, p. 119. Marshak is well aware of his passion: “Since childhood, I’ve been passionate about those folk songs where a man commands: rain, snail, thunder, fire. All in the imperative mode [...] There’s a will everywhere [...] orders are everywhere, the little man commands the elements”. S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 7, Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971, p. 585. See also: K. Chukovskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v 15-i tomakh*, vol. 3, Moskva, Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2012, p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> M. Petrovskii, *V nachale bylo slovo narodnoe*, cit., p. 121.

Вся дорога загорожена,	<i>Петрушка</i>
Катит в саночках народ.	Горчичное!
Под полозьями не лед,	<i>Мороженщик</i>
А клубничное,	Апельсинное!
Земляничное,	<i>Петрушка</i>
Именинное	Керосинное!
Апельсинное,	<i>Мороженщик и Петрушка</i>
Прекрасное	(вместе)
Ананасное	Мороженое! <sup>29</sup>
Мороженое! <sup>28</sup>	

In *The Ice Cream*, the fat man asks for the ice cream:

– Эй! – кричит он. – Поскорей  
Положи на пять рублей!<sup>30</sup>

In the play, he is just an anonymous buyer who is functional to the sketch:

Покупатель  
Эй, мороженщик, скорей  
Положи на пять рублей!<sup>31</sup>

As for the apparently meaningless language, which can be found both in children's folklore and games and in the linguistic experiments of many poets in the first decades of the twentieth century, Marshak makes Petrushka very fond of illogical expressions, such as:

Приехал из города Козлова  
Не понимаю по-русски ни слова!  
Ани-бани – три конторы,  
Сахер-махер-помидоры! [...]  
Бульон, бутерброд, консомэ!  
Мы по-русски не понимаэ! [...]  
Коленкор, сатин, радамэ!  
Мы по-русски не понимаэ! [...]  
Пардон, таракан, мерси!  
У кого-нибудь другого спроси.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 1, Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1968, p. 140-143.

<sup>29</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 243.

<sup>30</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 1, cit., p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 244.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 247-249.

At a structural level, the plot unfolds in a more dynamic way reminiscent of a milder version of slapstick comedies, which may signify an indirect influence of the cinema, so popular in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup>

Petrushka retains some characteristics of the folk character, but now the focus is not only on his lies but also on his ability to play around and his carelessness of the consequences. Still, Marshak cannot help adding some touch of paradox to his character: in one episode, he suggests that a man asking for a pack of cigarettes should not smoke them because they are bad for his health. Petrushka plays the role of the moraliser, thus subverting his original vocation of troublemaker.

The final scene is essential to an understanding of all the stages the play undergoes. Let us focus on the direct appeals to the audience, which in the *mise-en-scène* in Krasnodar turned out to be improvisation and in *Petrushka the Foreigner* become a leitmotif (five times throughout the play). The final scene marks a new turn: Petrushka ambiguously appeals to his “beloved parents” (his own, in the play, but also those present in the hall) and claims to have done all this for the audience (“I am not guilty, viewers are”).

Драгоценные родители!  
 Виноват не я, а зрители,  
 Я для них-то и припас  
 Сто проделок и проказ.  
 А со мной в одной программе  
 Вы участвовали сами!  
 С нами был и старичок,  
 Продающий табачок.  
 Да и дедушка с мороженым  
 Помогал сегодня тоже нам,  
 И дежурный постовой  
 С перекрестка мостовой, –  
 Потому что мы – актеры...  
 Сахер-махер-помидоры!<sup>34</sup>

With his final monologue, Petrushka reaffirms his irresponsible and frivolous nature, always trying to avoid responsibility, but also carries out a more subtle operation: he takes up the idea of the connection between the scene and the audience and unmasks the theatrical device (“because we are actors”) to underline the fictional essence of the show, its playfulness, but precisely for this reason its chance to have a real impact on the young spec-

<sup>33</sup> See D. Gillespie, *Russian Cinema*, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 34-58.

<sup>34</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 251.

tators. The final “magic” formula underlines the conventionality of the play and turns the possible punishment of Petrushka because of his disasters into laughter.

Marshak, therefore, does not abandon the mechanisms of folklore but converts them according to a new aesthetic sensibility – hence the stress on education, school and textbooks – without giving up the comic element and its pedagogical effect.

Marshak was not the only one to deal with Petrushka by adapting his character to the new social reality. Indeed, once established, the Soviet powers-to-be understood the propagandistic potential of folk theatre. After 1917, Petrushka became the hero of Soviet reality, a means of social and political satire: ‘Cooperative Petrushka’, ‘*Rabfakovets*<sup>35</sup> Petrushka’, ‘Red Army Petrushka’ became very popular all over the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> A doll of ‘Red Army Petrushka’, created by Kukryniksy (the collective name for the caricaturists Mikhail Kupriianov, Porfirii Krylov and Nikolai Sokolov), had a stunning success at the First All-European Exhibition of Theatre Puppets in Brussels in 1930 and became the emblem of the National Puppet Union (Vsesoiusnyj soiuz kukol’nikov). The revolutionary Petrushka was transformed into a victorious proletarian and replaced the traditional one. However, Marshak does not follow this path. His aim is completely different: he wants to retain the spirit of folk Petrushka by adapting him to the new reality but without betraying his original value as the best representative of the ‘culture of mocking’ (*smechovaia kul’tura*), instead intimating, in the final scene, the importance of human comprehension and kindness over rules and laws.

#### The Kitty’s House: a satirical fable-play for little ones

As Marshak states in a letter to N.S. Kovacheva on 20 December 1958, the fairy tale play (*skazka-p’esa*) published in 1922, *The Kitty’s House* (*Koshkin dom*), “which took 5-6 pages, turned into a whole big performance, a household comedy with a large number of actors”.<sup>37</sup>

*A Three-Act Tale* (*Skazka v trekh deistviiakh*) was written in 1945 and issued in a separate edition by the publishing house Detgiz in 1947. In this

<sup>35</sup> Student of the so-called “rabfak” (workers’ faculty), a type of educational institution in the Soviet Union which prepared Soviet workers to enter institutions of higher education.

<sup>36</sup> See I.Iu. Ushacheva, M.L. Murygina, *Teatr Petrushki: iz proshlogo v nastoiashchee*, “Sovremennye nauchnye issledovaniia i innovatsii”, n. 3, 2017. URL: <<http://web.snauka.ru/issues/2017/03/79852>> (last access: 01.07.2020).

<sup>37</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 8, cit., p. 336.

version, Marshak reinforces the satirical traits of the protagonist, Aunt Kitty, by creating an image of a complacent, idle, banal Philistine surrounded by flattering false friends. The third, final version was published in 1948, titled *The Kitty's House, A Two-Act Play* (*Koshkin dom. P'esa v dvukh deistviach*), and was performed a year before, at the Central Government Puppet Theatre 'S. Obraztsov', in 1947. This is the version which is printed in volume two of Marshak's collected works.

The source of the play is to be found in the lines of a children's song, which Marshak was very fond of, as he recalls in a letter to A. Avakova of 2 April 1958: "The dramatic fairy tale 'The Kitty's House' was born from a few lines of a children's song, while the plot, as in 'Teremok', was developed independently".<sup>38</sup> The lines are 'Tili-tili-tili bom, / zagorelsia koshkin dom' and in the 1922 version are placed at the centre of the play, while in the 1948 version they open and close the play and are repeated (with variations) throughout the text.

The play is concerned with the re-education of an arrogant creature, Aunt Kitty, and her friend and servant, the Old Cat. In the first version, the moral lesson is condensed into brief episodes, the characters are fewer and the whole story takes on the appearance of a movement game<sup>39</sup> rather than a dramatic action.

The more significant change at a structural level is the addition of a Chorus and a Narrator in the latest version, which replace the prologue *The Actor and the Viewer* (*Akter i zritel*) of the 1922 text. The prologue in 1922 presents the story and suggests what viewers should do after the play ends:

And when you get home, try to set up a theatre yourself and again put on scenes from *The Kitty's House* and *The Flying Trunk*.<sup>40</sup>

Its aim is to establish a connection with the audience but also to openly trigger children's imagination and explain how to put it into practice. In the 1948 version, the Chorus and the Narrator assume the function of linking the action with the audience by addressing them during the play; moreover, by providing more dramatic material to work on, they increase the performativity of the play, which is intended to trigger children's laughter.

The Chorus, like the traditional Greek one, opens the play, introduces the setting and the main protagonist – Aunt Kitty. Then, the Narrator goes on to

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>39</sup> "The first plays of our *Theatre for Children* were elementary, reminiscent of a movement game rather than a play". S. Marshak, E. Vasil'eva, *Teatr dlia detei*, cit. p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

describe in detail Kitty's rich life, home and servant and signals the beginning of the action.

Following a circular structure, the Chorus again assumes the play's voice at the end of the story, summing up the events and explaining the change which occurred in the two main characters:

Поумнел и старый кот,  
Он совсем уже не тот.<sup>41</sup>

Marshak uses the Narrator in the manner of folk literature to break up the sequence of the action in the play. He appears seven times, and each time marks a turning point. The Chorus and Narrator present the action and comment upon it, but they judge the events from a distance.

It is clearly noticeable that the structure of the first version is more primitive than that of the second. The play starts off with the first dramatic event: the kittens asking their Aunt Kitty for help. The main turning point – the burning of Aunt Kitty's house – follows immediately after the kittens are roughly thrown out. Thus, the fire seems to be the right punishment for the kittens' mistreatment. After that, Aunt Kitty and the Old Cat start to look for help and go to the Hen. She turns them down and suggests that they go and ask the kittens for shelter. The nephews immediately forgive the bad behaviour of the adults and welcome them.

In the second version, the plot is much more developed and a number of new episodes are inserted, which, on the one hand, gives Marshak the chance to deepen the psychological characterisations of the animals and reinforce the comical and satirical effect of the play; on the other, at a linguistic level, it allows the author to include different genres of traditional children's folklore, such as lullaby, *draznilka*, and *pribautka*, which he has been cultivating since the beginning of the twentieth century but which become a relevant component of his work after the Revolution. In the play, Marshak also gives space to his beloved *perevertysk* (or *topsy-turvy rhyme*), as Chukovskii defines it, which is the best expression of nonsense children's poetry:<sup>42</sup>

Кошка  
Мой дом для вас всегда открыт!  
Здесь у меня столовая.  
Вся мебель в ней дубовая.  
Вот это стул –

<sup>41</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 302.

<sup>42</sup> On "stishki-perevertyski" and their literary and pedagogical value, see K. Chukovskii, *Ot dvuch do piati*, in Id., *Sobranie sochinenij v 15-I tomakh*, vol. 2, Moskva, Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 2012, p. 229-253.

На нем сидят.  
 Вот это стол –  
 За ним едят.  
 Свинья  
 Вот это стол –  
 На нем сидят!..  
 Коза  
 Вот это стул –  
 Его едят!..<sup>43</sup>

As in *Petrushka*, Marshak again turns to his previous works, this time while describing the central episode of the play: the burning of the house. In 1923, he wrote a poem titled *The Fire*,<sup>44</sup> in which the brave fireman Kuz'ma fights a personified fire started by a poor girl called Elena. The episode differs significantly from the poem, and yet some details stand out:

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Pozhar</i> (1923)</p> <p>Приоткрыла дверцу Лена.        Соскочил огонь с полена,        перед печкой выжег пол,        влез по скатерти на стол.        [...]        Из ворот без проволоочки        Выезжают с треском бочки.        [...]        А огонь все выше, выше,        Вылезает из-под крыши,        Озирается кругом,        Машет красным рукавом.        [...]        Топорами балки рушат,        Из брандспойтов пламя тушат.<sup>45</sup></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Koshkin dom</i> (1948)</p> <p>Словечко за словечком —        И снова разговор,        а дома перед печкой        Огонь прожег ковер.        [...]        Поскорей, без проволоочки,        наливайте воду в бочки.        [...]        С треском, щелканьем и громом        Встал огонь над новым домом,        Озирается кругом,        Машет красным рукавом.        [...]        Эй, работники-бобры,        Разбирайте топоры,        Балки шаткие крушите,        Пламя жаркое тушите.<sup>46</sup></p>
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It is clear that the author, while working on new texts, always has his

<sup>43</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenij v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 279.

<sup>44</sup> S. Marshak, *Pozhar*, Petrograd-Moskva, Raduga, 1923 (on the cover: 1924). A second edition was released in 1952 in the collection *Stichi, skazki, perevody* by publishing house Goslitizdat.

<sup>45</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 1, cit., p. 342-344.

<sup>46</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 287-289.

previous ones in mind, especially when they can provide suitable rhymes, images or rhythmical patterns.

After the fire, Aunt Kitty and Old Cat desperately look for shelter and decide to ask their numerous friends – the goats, the pigs and the rooster – who had just praised Kitty’s house and her hospitality. Marshak lingers rather a long time describing the visit of the other animals to Kitty’s house in order to stress their nature and personality. Their acts and words reveal their attention to material values (rich furniture and tissues) and their frivolous attitude: they love singing and dancing and even making up stories, which gives Marshak the chance to include a fairy tale within the fairy tale:

Пусть дождь и снег стучат в стекло,  
У нас уютно и тепло.  
Давайте сказку сочиним.  
Начнет козел, петух – за ним,  
Потом – коза. За ней – свинья,  
А после – курица и я!<sup>47</sup>

The author does not criticise their way of life; still, he effectively underlines their selfishness, particularly when they enter the living room and are able to see only themselves in the mirrors:

Козел  
(козе)  
Смотри, какие зеркала!  
И в каждом вижу я козла...  
  
Коза  
Протри как следует глаза!  
Здесь в каждом зеркале коза.  
  
Свинья  
Вам это кажется, друзья:  
Здесь в каждом зеркале свинья!  
  
Курица  
Ах, нет! Какая там свинья!  
Здесь только мы: петух и я!<sup>48</sup>

This attitude is confirmed after the fire, when each of the guests one at a time turns down the homeless Aunt Kitty and Old Cat by making up excuses of all sorts. The satire<sup>49</sup> is enhanced by the use of the animals mimicking hu-

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 284 and ss.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>49</sup> See R. Perel, *The use of folk elements in Marshak’s Dramas for Children: The Kitten’s*

man behaviour, which can be dishonest and disrespectful, as in the case of Aunt Kitty and her friends, or moral and compassionate, as the Kittens demonstrate. If the former show the world as it is, the latter present the world as it should be, and this energy, the perception of such dichotomy, leads the author to believe – at least to hope – that change is possible and that art can make the world a better place, especially the world of children. Nevertheless, in Marshak's opinion, a moral should be understood not by explaining it, to children above all, but by making them experience the dramatic action in the play.

In a 1945 article, he directly refers to *The Kitty's House*:

This fairy tale has a moral – it's no different from other fairy tales, either. The morality is simple and, I think, useful. But I don't want to tell it in my own words [...] However, one of the protagonists of *The Kitty's House*, a clever, noble kitten, tries to formulate the morality as follows: 'Who knows how wet the water is...'<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, this is a very important reply in the play, which takes an almost biblical tone:

Ну, что поделать! В дождь и снег  
Нельзя же быть без крова.  
Кто сам просился на ночлег –  
Скорей поймет другого.  
  
Кто знает, как мокра вода,  
Как страшен холод лютый,  
Тот не оставит никогда  
Прохожих без приюта!<sup>51</sup>

In the first version of the text, the ending is less effective – the Kittens immediately forgive the “bad reception” of Aunt Kitty and Old Cat and welcome them – whereas in the new version, at first, the First Kitten suggests that Aunt Kitty and Old Cat look for a place in the city dormitory.<sup>52</sup> Then, piety gets the better of resentment and they open their door to the two poor animals, but in this way their decision is well considered and expresses in

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House and The Twelve Months, B.A. University of British Columbia, 1970, p. 21. Marshak was well acquainted with satire; his first translation, dating back to his high school days, was an ode by Horace. He then worked for many years as a satirist for journals and newspapers in Krasnodar. See I. Kutsenko, S.Ia. *Marshak v Krasnodare 1918-1922*, cit.

<sup>50</sup> Anon., 'P'esa-skazka', "Sovetskoe iskusstvo", n. 37, 14 September 1945, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 2, cit., p. 300. My emphasis.

<sup>52</sup> Notice that Marshak uses the expression “wandering cats” (“блуждающие коты”), whose etymology is the same as “блудный” in the parable of the prodigal son.

full the power of a conscious choice to choose the moral action. That is not all; since a real repentance and conversion can take place only by an active effort, Aunt Kitty and Old Cat offer to help the kittens build a spacious house where they can live happily together. Marshak firmly believes in the benefit of work; his poetry is full of active people doing their jobs, as he himself acknowledges in a letter to I.M. Dol'nikov of 27 April 1955:

I love working people – those who do their job skilfully, cheerfully, generously. [...] Meanwhile, one can and should deal with work in completely different ways. The fireman Kuz'ma, the postman, the doctor from *The Ice Island*, the carpenter who turned a tree into a table, the stepdaughter from *Twelve Months*, [...] these are the heroes of my books. And self-righteous laziness has always been disgusting to me, whether it's Mr. Twister or the pig family from *The Kitty's House* ('I'm a pig and you're a pig, all of us brothers, we are pigs...').<sup>53</sup>

The 1922 tale, then, is turned into a good example of satire on the bourgeoisie attitude<sup>54</sup> against the poorest but kindest ones, with a final message of proactive human comprehension and brotherhood.

## Conclusions

The two plays demonstrate how vast Marshak's knowledge of folklore and how interesting his approach to such rich material was, with particular attention to fairy tales:<sup>55</sup> the folk motifs used by Marshak reveal social concepts by tracing certain patterns of character and connecting them with patterns of action. Moreover, they represent, in Marshak's view, the only possible common field in which to interact with the world of art: "True art can only reach other parts of the world if it has deep roots in the soil of folk culture",<sup>56</sup> Marshak claimed during his speech at the London International Conference on the history of theatre, which he delivered in July 1955.

If key elements of the first plays were "continuity of action and whimsi-

<sup>53</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 8, cit., p. 281.

<sup>54</sup> It would not be out of place to see in the play a satire against the bourgeoisie in favour of workers, that is, a typical Soviet setting. The welcoming of Aunt Kitty and Old Cat is made possible because the two decide to get to work and collaborate to *build* a new house – and a new future together.

<sup>55</sup> Interesting ideas about Marshak's position with reference to fairy tales can be found in K. Senne, *Staraiia novaia skazka: mifopoeticheskii podtekst p'esy-skazki S. Marshaka "Dve-nadtsat' mesiatsev"*, "Detskie chteniia", n. 2, 2017, p. 227-245.

<sup>56</sup> S. Marshak, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8-i tomakh*, vol. 6, Moskva, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1971, p. 420-426, p. 420.

cality in the development of the plot",<sup>57</sup> returning to these works some years after their first publication, Marshak makes significant changes which enrich the verbal, structural and thematic levels of the texts. The later versions differ from the previous ones, but they also represent different kinds of re-elaborations: in particular, *Petrushka the Foreigner* displays a "modular re-writing", in which the core meaning of the traditional text is kept alive, while the setting changes according to the new socio-cultural context. In *The Kitty's House*, the first version is fully incorporated in the second, but this time, the author explores the satirical potential of the play and turns a children's game into a full-fledged dramatic text with a strong moral message.

However, the main concern in the plays, as well as in any other works for children by Marshak, remains how to address children through literature: the writer has always stressed the importance of the right language for children, which should distance itself from the artificial and indulgent language used in children's works at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the two latest versions, Marshak's work on language is clearly visible: his verse is now more concise, clear and explosive. He plays with metrical structure and genres. He keeps the best of previous works and combines it with new verbal, intonational and rhythmical patterns.

At a thematic level, too, it is possible to observe some constants in his texts for the theatre: in particular, two recurrent images (*obraz*) appear in each text: the soldier<sup>58</sup> and the orphan<sup>59</sup> (*besprizornik*). They are evoked, in one way or another, in each play, and they certainly are very important in Marshak's gallery of characters, because they are the symbols of the outcast and of sufferance but also of strength of will and courage, which are essential human traits in Marshak's view. Moreover, he has experience of both the first and second world wars and he knows very well their effects on society: swarms of orphans and invalid soldiers had populated the Soviet Union for many years. His son Jacob died during the second conflict.

The plays also demonstrate that rewriting is a typical feature of Marshak,<sup>60</sup> and it can be seen as well in his poetry and even his translations. Va-

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<sup>57</sup> S. Marshak, E. Vasil'eva, *Teatr dlia detei*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>58</sup> The soldier also plays a role in the plays *The Twelve Months* (1943) and *Clever Things* [*Umnye veshchi*] (1945).

<sup>59</sup> In *Twelve Months*, both the queen and the stepdaughter are orphans. See K. Senne, *Staraiia novaia skazka: mifopoeticheskii podtekst p'esy-skazki S. Marshaka "Dvenadtsat' mesiatsev"*, cit.

<sup>60</sup> For these plays, the passage is double: from a folk or literary source to an authorial version and from an earlier version to a later one.

riability (*variantnost'*) is a key concept in his poetics and a constant throughout his artistic life.

The present analysis has underlined the imperative for the Russian poet to find the right balance in works of art, especially for children. That is why, in a letter to Rassadin, he suggests that his friend read a review by Blok on Bondi's and Mejerhold's *Alinur*:

I think that the modern artist's reception should be quite the opposite: to be thrifty; not to overload a work of art with art, if I may put it that way. We have to lull the viewer into a simple and natural way to wake up his resting imagination with an unexpected spark of art. From here, a modern artist, no matter what workshop and direction he belongs to, in his work is a 'naturalist', a craftsman, turns the blocks, carries the loads of psychology, history and everyday life on his shoulders.

Marshak shared this view and the relentless work on his own plays thus confirms both one of his typical techniques and his aim to educate children through literature, that is to say, through play, laughter and imagination.

#### Abstract

##### Evolutions in Marshak's theatrical works for children

Marshak's plays are a relevant though less well-known part of his works for children. He begins to address children in the aftermath of the October Revolution and the First World War by writing plays for the 'The Children's Little Town' ('Detskij gorodok') in Krasnodar (today Ekaterinodar). He returns to theatre some years later with a new version of the play *Petrushka* and in the 1940s and 1950s with more developed texts for the stage.

This article considers two plays from the 1922 collection *Theatre for Children* (*Teatr dlia detei*), namely, *Petrushka* and *The Kitty's House* (*Koshkin dom*), in order to compare them with the new versions Marshak writes in later years. The goal of this examination is to identify which elements remain in both versions of the plays and which are omitted or changed to meet different artistic and/or ideological requirements. The analysis will show Marshak's unquestionable ability to draw from folk motifs and apply them to new contexts in order to project certain social values in the framework of his personal moral and artistic views on art for children. Moreover, the paper provides additional evidence about Marshak's technique of appropriation and elaboration as one of the pillars of his poetics.

Keywords: Samuil Marshak, theatre for children, *Petrushka*, *The Kitty's House*.