
Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928

VOLUME EDITOR Anna Lawton

TEXTS TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY Anna Lawton

AND AN AFTERWORD BY Herbert Eagle

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS ITHACA AND LONDON

Contents

Preface	xi
Introduction by Anna Lawton	1
Futurism in the World	1
Futurism in Russia, 1912–1916	11
Futurism in the USSR, 1917–1928	33
Cubo-Futurism	49
Slap in the Face of Public Taste. <i>D. Burliuik et al.</i>	51
From <i>A Trap for Judges</i> , 2. <i>D. Burliuik et al.</i>	53
[The Word as Such]. <i>A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov</i>	55
From <i>The Word as Such</i> . <i>A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov</i>	57
The Letter as Such. <i>V. Khlebnikov and A. Kruchenykh</i>	63
From <i>Explodity</i> . <i>A. Kruchenykh</i>	65
Declaration of the Word as Such. <i>A. Kruchenykh</i>	67
New Ways of the Word. <i>A. Kruchenykh</i>	69
The Liberation of the Word. <i>B. Livshits</i>	78
Poetic Principles. <i>N. Burliuik with D. Burliuik</i>	82
Go to Hell! <i>D. Burliuik et al.</i>	85
We, Too, Want Meat. <i>V. Mayakovsky</i>	87
From <i>Secret Vices of the Academicians</i> . <i>A. Kruchenykh</i>	90
From Now On I Refuse to Speak Ill Even of the Work of Fools. <i>D. Burliuik</i>	95
A Drop of Tar. <i>V. Mayakovsky</i>	100
The Trumpet of the Martians. <i>V. Khlebnikov et al.</i>	103

Ego-Futurism	107
The Tables. <i>I. Severyanin et al.</i>	109
Egopoetry in Poetry. <i>Graal-Arelsky</i>	110
The First Year of Futurism. <i>I. Kazansky</i>	112
Ego-Futurism. <i>I. Ignatyev</i>	118
Mezzanine of Poetry	131
Overture. <i>Anonymous (L. Zak)</i>	133
Throwing Down the Gauntlet to the Cubo- Futurists. <i>M. Rossiyansky</i>	137
From "Moment Philosophique." <i>M. Rossiyansky</i>	140
Open Letter to M. M. Rossiyansky. <i>V. Shershenevich</i>	144
Foreword to <i>Automobile Gait</i> . <i>V. Shershenevich</i>	148
From <i>Green Street</i> . <i>V. Shershenevich</i>	150
Two Final Words. <i>V. Shershenevich</i>	155
Centrifuge	159
Turbopaeon. <i>Anonymous (N. Aseyev, S. Bobrov, B. Pasternak)</i>	161
Charter. <i>N. Aseyev et al.</i>	162
Foreword to <i>The Lyric Theme</i> . <i>S. Bobrov</i>	164
The Wassermann Test. <i>B. Pasternak</i>	166
Two Words about Form and Content. <i>E. Bik</i>	172
Company 41° and Beyond	175
Manifesto of the "41°." <i>I. Zdanevich et al.</i>	177
From <i>Kruchenykh the Grandiosaire</i> . <i>I. Terentyev</i>	178
Declaration of Transrational Language. <i>A. Kruchenykh</i>	182
From <i>Shiftology of Russian Verse</i> . <i>A. Kruchenykh</i>	184
Instead of a Foreword. <i>B. Pasternak</i>	187
Left Front of the Arts (Lef)	189
What Does Lef Fight For? <i>N. Aseyev et al.</i>	191
Whom Does Lef Wrangle With? <i>Lef</i>	196
Whom Does Lef Warn? <i>Lef</i>	199
Our Linguistic Work. <i>V. Mayakovsky and O. Brik</i>	202
From Where to Where? <i>S. Tretyakov</i>	204
Language Creation. <i>B. Arvatov</i>	217
Lef to Battle! <i>Lef</i>	232
Lef's Tribune. <i>S. Tretyakov</i>	234

Lef and MAPP. <i>Iu. Libedinsky, V. Mayakovsky et al.</i>	246
Reader! <i>Lef</i>	249
We Are the Futurists. <i>O. Brik</i>	251
The Black Sea Futurists. <i>S. Kirsanov</i>	256
Broadening the Verbal Basis. <i>V. Mayakovsky</i>	260
Happy New Year! Happy New Lef! <i>S. Tretyakov</i>	265
What's New. <i>S. Tretyakov</i>	269
More Left than Lef. <i>N. Chuzhak</i>	272
Afterword: Cubo-Futurism and Russian Formalism	281
<i>by Herbert Eagle</i>	
Literature as the Art of the Word	284
Verbal Art as the Renewal of Perception	294
The Process of Literary Evolution	297
Notes	305
Selected Bibliography	333
Name Index	341
Title Index	347

- b. considering handwriting a component of the poetic impulse.
 c. and therefore, having published in Moscow "hand-lettered" (autographic) books.³
6. We abolished punctuation marks, which for the first time brought to the fore the role of the verbal mass and made it perceivable.
7. We understand vowels as time and space (a characteristic of thrust), and consonants as color, sound, smell.
8. We shattered rhythms. Khlebnikov gave status to the poetic meter of the living conversational word. We stopped looking for meters in textbooks; every motion generates for the poet a new free rhythm.
9. The front rhyme (David Burluk), as well as the middle and the inverse rhyme (Mayakovsky), have been worked out by us.
10. The richness of a poet's lexicon is its justification.
11. We believe the word to be a creator of myth; in dying, the word gives birth to myth, and vice versa.
12. We are enthralled by new themes: superfluousness, meaninglessness, and the secret of powerful insignificance are celebrated by us.
13. We despise glory; we know feelings which had no life before us. We are the new people of a new life.

DAVID BURLIUK, ELENA GURO, NICHOLAS BURLIUK,
 VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY, KATHERINE NIZEN, VICTOR
 KHLBNIKOV, BENEDICT LIVSHITS, A. KRUCHENYKH

[The Word as Such]

In 1908 *A Trap for Judges, 1* was in preparation.¹ Part of the works (of the Cubo-Futurists) ended up in that miscellany, part in *The Studio of the Impressionists*.² In both collections, V. Khlebnikov, the Burliuks, S. Miasoedov,³ and others outlined a new aesthetic direction: the word was being developed as such.

From then on a poem could consist of *a single word*,⁴ and merely by skillful variation of that word, all the fullness and expressiveness of the artistic image could be achieved.

However, the expressiveness was of a different kind—an artistic work was perceived and critiqued (or at least was intuitively felt) simply as word.

The work of art is the art of the word.

As an inevitable consequence, tendentiousness and bookishness of all kinds were eliminated from literary works.

A closeness to the passionlessly passionate machine.

The Italians inhaled the Russian air and started producing crib notes on art, word-for-word translations.

They made no verbal artifacts until 1912 (the year their big collection was issued),⁵ or later.

That's understandable: the Italians relied on tendentiousness. Like Pushkin's little devil,⁶ they sang praises to modernity and carried it on their shoulders, but instead of preaching modernity they should have

Written in 1913 this text was subsequently published by Kruchenykh, without a title, in *The Unpublished Khlebnikov*, vol. 18 (Moscow, 1930). It was reprinted in *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Leningrad, 1933), with the title "The Word as Such" (Slovo kak takovoe).

jumped on its back and sped off, they should have delivered it as the sum of their works.

After all, preaching which does not result from art itself is wood painted to look like iron. Who would trust such a lance? The Italians turned out to be vociferous braggarts, but taciturn artist-writers.⁷

They ask us about the ideal, about pathos? It's not a question of hooliganism, or of heroic deeds, or of being a fanatic or a monk. All Talmuds are equally destructive to the wordwright, what constantly remains with him is only the word as (such) itself.

A. KRUCHENYKH, V. KHLEBNIKOV

From *The Word as Such*

A. KRUCHENYKH AND V. KHLEBNIKOV

ABOUT ARTISTIC WORKS

1. that it be written and perceived in the twinkling of an eye!
(singing splashing dancing, scattering of clumsy constructions, oblivion, unlearning. V. Khlebnikov, A. Kruchenykh, E. Guro; in painting, V. Burliuk and O. Rozanova).¹

2. that it be written tightly and read tightly, more uncomfortable than blacked boots or a truck in the living room
(plenty of knotted ties and buttonholes and patches, a splintery texture, very rough. In poetry, D. Burliuk, V. Mayakovsky, N. Burliuk, and B. Livshits; in painting, D. Burliuk, K. Malevich.

What is more valuable: wind or stone?

Both are invaluable!

Examples: 1st type—from V. Khlebnikov

(the princess and the werewolf are flying over the Earth
And, to defend himself from the icy air
of the frosty height
from a lynx
he turned into a bear.

This is the first part of the fifteen-page booklet *The Word as Such* (Slovo kak takovoe) (Moscow, 1913), written by A. Kruchenykh and V. Khlebnikov, and illustrated by K. Malevich and O. Rozanova. Here the authors express their own personal views rather than speak for the entire Hylaea group.

She asked: "To where?"
 he turned around and in the wind he barked:
 to Petersburg . . .
 sensitive to the cold
 the princess shrank along . . .
 and now to Earth they fly tumblerlike
 Where the gold of St. Isaac lures them
 And direct from the heights, from the Sun's radiant station
 They fly to a girl's school of all-round education.
 (Comic poem in *The Croaked Moon*)²

Or from E. Guro:

Finland
 . . . Lulla, lolla, lalla-lu,
 Liza, lolla, lulla-li.
 Whisser, whisser³ the pine trees,
 ti-i-i, ti-i-u-u . . .⁴

(exactly whisser! the leaf-bearing trees whisper, but the conifers whisser)
 or

Explodity
 of fire
 melancholy
 of a steed
 roubles
 of willows
 in the hair
 of wonders
 (A. Kruchenykh, *Explodity*)⁵

while in the works of the first type the similes are usually limited to one word, in the second type they extend to several lines and consist mainly of nouns, in this way ultimately effective in "roughing up" the language, for ex.:

. . . "the rags of my lips stained with someone else's gilds
 the smoke of my hair over the fire of tin eyes . . ."
 (V. Mayakovsky)⁶

"Sky is a corpse"!! No more!
 Stars are worms—drunk with fog

I suppress the pain with rust-ling, with deceit
 Sky is a stinking corpse!!

 Stars are worms—(purulent living) rash!!
 (D. Burluk)⁷

in the following poem the line is dominated by the first vividly expressive consonant: it colors the line and produces the effect of rising, slowing down, *finale*
 for example:

I grew lazy I am a priest
 why build all from earth all the time
 I withdrew to the palace of bliss
 I lie and warm myself near a swine
 on the warm mud
 swines' exhalations
 and reek of dogs
 I lie and put on pounds.
 A messenger knocked at the door . . .
 etc.⁸

in the first 8 lines the dominant letter r is positioned in the following way:

r, r
 r
 r
 r
 r, r

the poem starts with two r's and the same two letters appear at the end of the poetic sentence (not the grammatical one), therefore the period is placed only after the 8th line and not before.⁹

the poets who preceded us used a completely different method of orchestration, for ex.—

An angel was flying in the midnight sky
 softly singing a song . . .¹⁰

The coloration here is given by an anemic s . . . s . . . s . . . We are just as dissatisfied with the pictures painted in jelly and milk as with verses built on

sa-sa-sa
 si-si-si
 ti-ti-ti
 etc.

This kind of food would only give a healthy man an upset stomach.

We have provided a model for another sort of sound and word combination:

dyr bul shchyl
 ubeshchur
 skum
 vy so by
 r l ez¹¹

(as a matter of fact, in this five-line poem there is more of the Russian national spirit than in all of Pushkin)

this is not a voiceless, languorous, creamy toffee of a poetry (a game of solitaire . . . a fruit candy . . .) but a formidable *chant*:

Everyone is young young younger
 In the belly a devilish hunger
 So come after me you all . . .
 I am casting a proud call
 Behind my back to each
 This very brief speech!¹²
 We'll be eating stones and grass
 Poisons, sweetness, bitterness
 We will swallow emptiness
 The abyss and the highest place
 Birds, wild beasts, monsters, fish,
 Wind, clay, salt, and ripple from our dish! . . .

(D. Burliuk)¹³

before us language was required to be: clear, pure, honest, melodious, pleasant (tender) to the ear, expressive (vivid, colorful, juicy). we could easily carry on in the perennially playful tone used by our critics to expand further on their view of language, and we notice that their requirements (oh, horror!) apply more to womanhood as such than to language as such.

in fact: clear, pure (of course!), honest (ahem! ahem!), melodious, pleasant, tender (absolutely right!), finally: juicy colorful you . . . (who's there? come on in!)

it's true in recent times they tried to turn womanhood into the eternal feminine, into the beautiful lady,¹⁴ and in this way the *skirt* became *mystical* (this must not confuse the uninitiated—on the contrary! . . .) We think rather that language must be first of all *language*, and if it has to remind us of something, then better the saw or the poisoned arrow of a savage.

from the above it is evident that

before us the wordwrights were concerned too much with the human "soul" (the puzzles of the spirit, passions, and feelings), but they understood poorly that it is bards who create the soul, and since we—the Futurian bards—paid more attention to the word than to Psyche, which our predecessors had reduced to a trite cliché, she died in isolation, and now it is in our power to create a new one . . . do we want to?

. . . ! No! . . .

let them better live by the word as such than by themselves.

in this way we resolve (without cynicism) many of our forefathers' fateful questions. To them I dedicate the following poem:

let's promptly end
 this *unworthy vaudeville*—
 oh, of course
 this will surprise no one
 life is a *silly joke and a fairy tale*,
 old people used to say . . .
 we do not need a pointer
 and of this rot we won't make head or tail¹⁵

the Futurian painters love to use parts of the body, its cross sections, and the Futurian wordwrights use chopped-up words, half-words, and their odd artful combinations (transrational language), thus achieving the very greatest expressiveness, and precisely this distinguishes the swift language of modernity, which has annihilated the previous frozen language (see a more detailed discussion in my article "New Ways of the Word" in the book *The Three*). This expressive device was alien and incomprehensible to the faded literature before us, and to the powdered ego-foppists¹⁶ (see the Mezzanine of Poetry) as well.

the ungifted and the apprentices like to labor

(Bryusov the industrious bear; Tolstoy, who rewrote and polished his novels 5 times, Gogol, Turgenev) the same can be said of the reader. wordwrights should write on the cover of their books:

once you've read it—tear it up!

Grunts the steed and does not want to learn
(laziness seized the ardent)
the steed smiles all alone
in front of the quick and the strong

running hundreds of meters
and overtaking all
it unnoticed measures with its eye
those who drag along

the swift one is the laziest
the wise one—the silliest
and the brave one under fire,
in its neck tucks its ears¹⁷

this year the Futurian show-house (theater) will open
these are new show-house words
(invented by: V. Khlebnikov and A. Kruchenykh)

visage-man, countenance-man, impersonator = actor
personas = characters
groupepeople = troupe
softspeaker = prompter
action, tion, sion = scene act
sagarama = drama
etc.

The current year of our artistic life had a great beginning: 6 Futurian books¹⁸ were published, on September 29 an exhibition of the works of the incomparable N. Goncharova opened, an exhibition of the unbearable Larionov is forthcoming, on October 6 there will be a Futurian evening etc., etc.

The Letter as Such

They no longer argue about the word as such, they even agree. But what is their agreement worth? You need only recall that while talking about the word, after the fact, they do not say anything about the letter! The born-blind! . . .

The word is still not a value, it is still merely tolerated.

Otherwise, why would they clothe it in a gray prisoner's uniform? You have seen the letters in their words—lined up in a row, humiliated, with cropped hair, and all equally colorless, gray—these are not letters, these are brands! But ask any wordwright¹ and he will tell you that a word written in individual longhand or composed with a particular typeface bears no resemblance at all to the same word in a different inscription.

After all, you would not dress all your young beauties in the same government overcoats!

Of course, not! They would spit right in your eye; but the word—it remains silent. Because it is dead (like Boris and Gleb),² your word is stillborn.

Ah, accursed Sviatopolks!

There are two propositions:

1. That mood changes one's longhand during the process of writing.
2. That the longhand peculiarly modified by one's mood conveys that mood to the reader, independently of the words. Also, one has to pose the question of graphic signs, visual signs, or simply tactile signs as if

¹"The Letter as Such" (Bukva kak takovaia) was written in 1913 and subsequently printed in *The Unpublished Khlebnikov*, vol. 18 (Moscow, 1928–33).

felt by the hand of a blind man. Of course, it is not mandatory that the wordwright be also the copyist of a handwritten book: indeed, it would be better if the wordwright entrusted this job to an artist. But there haven't been any such books until recently. They were issued by the Futurians for the first time. Namely: *Old-Time Love* was rewritten in longhand for printing by M. Larionov, *Explodity* by N. Kulbin et al., *Duck's Nest* by O. Rozanova.³ Here, one can at last say: "Every letter is . . . A-1!"⁴

It's strange, neither Balmont nor Blok⁵—and they would seem to belong to our generation—thought of entrusting their babies not to a typesetter, but to an artist. . . .

A piece may be rewritten in longhand by someone else or by the creator himself, but if he does not relive the original experience, the piece will lose all the charm acquired by means of free handwriting during "the wild snowstorm of inspiration."

V. KHLEBNIKOV

A. KRUCHENYKH

From *Explodity*

A. KRUCHENYKH

Emotional experience cannot be put into words (frozen ones, concepts), word-tortures, gnoseological isolation. Therefore, we strive for a transrational free language (see my declaration of the word),¹ that is the means of expression a person resorts to at crucial moments. Here is an example, the speech of the flagellant, V. Shishkov:² "nosoktos lesontos futr lis natrufuntru kreserefire kresentre fert cheresantro ulmiri umilisantru"—here, we have the genuine expression of an excited soul, religious ecstasy.

I cite my verses in the transrational and universal language (of vowels):

i
che
de
mali
gr
iu
iukh
d d d
d d d
se
v
m'

This is the last part of Kruchenykh's booklet *Explodity* (*Vzorval'*) (St. Petersburg, 1913), handwritten by the author and lithographed. It includes illustrations by Malevich and Kul'bin.

.....
 m'
 serzhamelepeta
 senial ok
 risum
 meleva
 alik a lev amakh
 li li liub biul

because of a foul
 contempt for
 women and
 children in our
 language there will be
 only the masculine
 gender³

on April 27 at 3 o'clock in the afternoon I instantaneously mastered
 to perfection all languages Such is the poet of the current era
 I am here reporting my verses in Japanese Spanish and Hebrew:⁴

iké mina ni
 sinu ksi
 iamakh alik
 zel
 GO OSNEG KAID
 M R BATUL'BA
 VINU AE KSEL
 VER TUM DAKH
 GIZ
 SHISH

Declaration of the Word as Such

(4) THOUGHT AND SPEECH CANNOT KEEP UP WITH THE EMOTIONS OF SOMEONE IN A STATE OF INSPIRATION, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in the common language (concepts), but also in a personal one (the creator is an individual), as well as in a language which does not have any definite meaning (not frozen), a transrational language.¹ Common language binds, free language allows for fuller expression. (Example: go osneg kaid etc.). (5) WORDS DIE, THE WORLD IS ETERNALLY YOUNG. The artist has seen the world in a new way and, like Adam, proceeds to give things his own names. The lily is beautiful, but the word "lily" has been soiled and "raped." Therefore, I call the lily, "euy"²—the original purity is reestablished. (2) consonants render everyday reality, nationality, weight—vowels, the opposite: A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE. Here is a poem exclusively of vowels:

o e a
 i e e i
 a e e E³

(3) a verse presents (unconsciously) several series of vowels and consonants. THESE SERIES CANNOT BE ALTERED. It is better to replace a word with one close in sound than with one close in meaning (bast-

¹"Declaration of the Word as Such" (Deklaratsiia slova kak takovogo) appeared as a leaflet, in the summer of 1913. It laid the foundation for the theory of transrational language and was subsequently reprinted in several of Kruchenykh's books.

cast-ghost). If similar vowels and consonants were replaced by graphic lines, they would form patterns that could not be altered (example: III-I-I-III). For this reason it is IMPOSSIBLE to translate from one language into another; one can only transliterate a poem into Latin letters and provide a word-for-word translation. The verse translations that exist at present are merely word-for-word translations; as aesthetic texts they are nothing more than coarse vandalism. (1) A new verbal form creates a new content, and not vice versa. (6) INTRODUCING NEW WORDS, I bring about a new content WHERE EVERYTHING begins to slip (the conventions of time, space, etc. Here my view coincides with N. Kulbin's, who discovered the 4th dimension: weight, the 5th: motion, and the 6th or 7th: time).⁴ (7) In art, there may be unresolved dissonances—"unpleasant to the ear"—because there is dissonance in our soul by which the former are resolved. Example: dyr bul shchyl, etc. (8) All this does not narrow art, but rather opens new horizons.

ALEXEI (ALEKSANDER) KRUCHENYKH

New Ways of the Word (the language of the future, death to Symbolism)

A. KRUCHENYKH

nobody would argue if I say that we have no literary criticism (judges of verbal creation)

they would not consider as critics those vampires who feed on the blood of the "great deceased," or those who suffocate anything that is young and alive

vampires, gravediggers, robbers, parasites—these are the only names that our critics deserve

to gnaw at each other's throats, to peck at each other, to drown in "a spoonful of water"—these are their regular occupations, their desired prey

our critics delight in settling a score, or in conducting a political or a family investigation, and keep putting aside questions of *the word*

Russian readers (even they!) despise such critics and reject with a feeling of revulsion the cud that they offer instead of food

but it is to the disgrace of those who sincerely appreciate and love the arts that no one has yet pronounced the necessary word

It is not surprising that *we*, the bards of the future, are pelted with the dirt of "petty criticism."

We, like warriors on a foggy morning, have attacked by surprise our idle enemies—and now they, to the amusement of the victors and of the whole world, kick each other, pull each other's hair, and all they can throw at us is *dirt* and *abuse*

The essay "New Ways of the Word" (*Novye puti slova*) was published in the collection *The Three* (St. Petersburg, 1913), which also included works by Khlebnikov and Guro. It was illustrated by Malevich. The editor, Matiushin, dedicated the collection to the memory of his late wife, Guro, who died earlier that year.