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BENGT JANGFELDT, editor

*DAVID BURLIUK ON
VELIMIR KHLEBNIKOV*

"Надо помнить, что Витя был . . . мудрец".
David Burliuk¹

David Burliuk had a remarkable genius for discovering poetic and artistic talent in other people, and one of his discoveries was Vladimir Maiakovskii, whom he met in 1911. Maiakovskii mentions Burliuk as his "real teacher," who made a poet out of him.²

Burliuk himself was a talented poet and painter whose undoubtable masterpieces are sometimes overlooked because of the author's very rich and uneven production. His real greatness, however, lay elsewhere: he was a born enthusiast and a great organizer, the kind of untiring promoter that every new artistic movement depends upon so heavily. Burliuk organized poetry readings, art exhibitions, and he was an excellent orator and propagandist of Futurism. He was, no doubt, the "Father of Russian Futurism," and he was, to a certain extent, also a father figure for the Russian Futurists themselves. Being ten years Maiakovskii's senior, he was by 1910 both more experienced and more well-read than his younger colleagues, for whom he became a tutor of modern European poetry and painting.

Burliuk was also one of the first to appreciate fully the genius of Velimir Khlebnikov. The letter published below is a good illustration of his paternal, protective attitude toward the great poet.

After they were introduced to one another in 1910, Khlebnikov visited the Burliuks on several occasions, at Novaia Maiachka, Count Mordvinov's estate in the Ukraine managed by Burliuk's father (from which Burliuk's letter was

1. The epigraph comes from *Color and Rhyme* (Hampton Bays, N.Y.), No. 66 (1967-70), "published in honor of poet-artist David Burliuk by Mary Burliuk," p. 93. This issue contains interesting materials on Khlebnikov and Maiakovskii. I am grateful to Mr. David Burliuk Jr. for presenting me with the issue.

2. Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols. (Moscow: GIKhL, 1955-61), I, 20.

sent) and, in 1915, at their estate in Mikhalevo outside Moscow.³ Realizing Khlebnikov's inability to take care of his manuscripts, Burliuk

14X забрал у него все его рукописи. . . .⁴ Рукописи Хлебникова—большие тетради в клеенчатых черных переплетах с красным обрезом.—Там был роман из Петровской эпохи, масса первых (юношеск~~и~~) черно-ви~~к~~ов.⁵

Khlebnikov spent the spring of 1912 with the Burliuks in the Ukraine. In April of that year Burliuk went abroad, to Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy. He recalled later:

/M В 1912 году уехал за границу, а Витю Хлебникова оставил на попечение нашей экономики. Вернувшись через два месяца назад, застал Витю дома, а рукописей . . . нет. Хлебников отостал их в плетеной корзине по железной дороге в Казань, ду~~л~~ая туда ехать.⁶

It goes without saying that Khlebnikov had lost the receipt, and the manuscripts were obviously lost forever.

Notwithstanding his high opinion of Khlebnikov's poetry, however, Burliuk was quite negligent in handling his manuscripts. This was due partly to imprudence, but Khlebnikov's miniscule handwriting was difficult to interpret not only for Burliuk; and asking Khlebnikov himself was obviously out of the question, since he would only either withdraw or rewrite the whole poem (see letter below). When, in 1914, Burliuk edited and published Khlebnikov's *Tvoreniia 1906-1908*, it was so full of misprints that Khlebnikov protested in an "Open Letter," saying that

Давид и Николай Бурлюки продолжают печать подписанные моим именем вещи, никуда негодные, и вдобавок тщательно перевирая их.⁷

3. In 1952, *Color and Rhyme* devoted an issue (No. 26) to the thirtieth anniversary of Khlebnikov's death: "This issue . . . is dedicated to dearest memories of our sweet friend and great poet, Velimir Khlebnikov" (p. 1). The issue contains Marusia Burliuk's memoirs of Khlebnikov's stay in Mikhalevo in 1915 (pp. 2-6).

4. Benedikt Livshits, *Polutoraglazi strelets* (New York: Chekhov, 1978), p. 5.

5. *Color and Rhyme*, No. 66 (1967-70), p. 93.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

7. Velimir Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5 vols. (Leningrad: Izd. pisatelei, 1928-33), V, 257. On the other hand, in 1921(?) Khlebnikov wrote an "ode" to David Burliuk ("Burliuk," *ibid.*, III, 289-91).

Levkii Ivanovich Zheverzheev (1881-1942), to whom Burliuk's letter is addressed, was a prominent man in the Russian prewar art world, a *maecenas* and the president of the Union of Youth society of artists and writers. Just like Burliuk, Zheverzheev had a remarkable talent for organizing exhibitions, poetry readings, and publications. In December 1913, for example, he helped finance the staging of Maiakovskii's first play, *Tragediia*, and in 1912-13 he published three issues of the very important new journal *Soiuz molodezhi*. The poems mentioned in the letter—Khlebnikov's and Burliuk's own—were intended for the fourth issue of this journal, which was never published.

Extracts from the letter were published in 1940.⁸ The original is kept at the Gor'kii Institute of World Literature in Moscow (fond 92, op. 1, ed. khr. 25).

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8. Velimir Khlebnikov, *Neizdannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow: GIKhL, 1940), pp. 12 and 14.

Новая Маячка
Таврической г/убернии/
Д. Бурлюк

1913.IV.4

Глубокоуважаемый Левкий Иванович!

Вчера мной получена телеграмма от Безваля⁹—спешу исполнить Ваше предложение.

Посылаю (62 по 70 №№) свои стихи.¹⁰ Радуюсь посылкой Вам очень редких рукописей Гениального Хлебникова—прошу и заклиная отпечатать их—это старый период его творчества—дивно прекрасные смутные строки "Училища".¹¹ Это, кажется, единственная уцелевшая проза (он все теряет)—из его старых вещей. Печатать его надо все точно до единой точки и буквы. Хлебников выше критики. Но, Левкий Иванович, умоляю Вас об одном, не показывайте эти рукописи ему самому, т.к. он не любит своих прежних вещей—и взяв их, дает что либо новое. "Новый" Хлебников отпечатан уже—порядком, драгоценные же образцы его прежнего творчества—мало известны. Печатайте их "до точки" не показывая ему. Еще предупреждаю, Хлебников—не способен делать Корректуру—он пишет поверх ее новый вариант. Его от печатания надо устранить совершенно.

Это самый беспомощный человек и самый интересный писатель, какого я только знаю.

Хлебников требует забот. Его надо собирать. Рукописи его надо хранить. Он требует как никто полного издания—достроченного—своих вещей. Это собрание ценностей, важность которых учтена сейчас быть не может.¹²

Я был бы Вам очень благодарен, если бы Вы отобрали у него рукописи все (с ним иначе нельзя—он их утерять—как уже многое). Пусть они хранятся в надежной Вашей библиотеке. Тогда я передам Вам и то что есть у меня.

9. Anton Aleksandrovich Bezval' was a close friend of the Burliuk family, and in February 1914 he married David Burliuk's younger sister, Nadezhda. According to Livshits, *Polutoraglazyi strelets*, p. 30, Bezval' was the organizer of the Futurists' poetry readings and lectures in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

10. Burliuk used to number his poems.

11. "Uchilitsa" is a short tale written in rhythmical prose. It was published for the first time a year later in *Tvoreniiia 1906-1908*; the tale's dating is, however, uncertain.

12. The first attempts to publish Khlebnikov's poems in separate editions were made in 1914, when *Tvoreniiia 1906-1908* and *Izbornik stikhov s poslesloviem recharia. 1907-1914*, came out. The first book has an appendix with laudatory articles about Khlebnikov by David Burliuk and Vasilii Kamenskii (who was the first to discover Khlebnikov, in 1908).

Еще раз прошу Вас отпечатать—хлебниковское, мной присланное.

Примите уверение в моем уважении к Вам

Давид Давидович Бурлюк

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