INTRODUCTION

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DAVID BURLIUK: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Davidovich Burliuk was born on 22 July 1882 near Kharkov in the Ukraine. David was the eldest of six children, all of whom manifested literary or artistic talent. Vladimir Burliuk (1886-1917) was a painter of deep sensibility, especially in his use of color (cf. his portrait of the poet Benedikt Livshits of 1911, now in the collection of Ella Friedus, New York); Nikolai Burliuk (1890-1920) was a poet of originality, although he wrote comparatively little; the sisters Liudmila (1886-1975) and Nadia (1893-19??) were also competent artists. The artistic propensity of the Burliuk family was encouraged by the mother, Liudmila (née Mikhnevich) whose brother, Vladimir Mikhnevich, acquired some renown as the author of popular stories. Liudmila herself was a painter and contributed to a number of exhibitions.

Burliuk's education was uneven and the exact sequence of his enrollments at various gimnazii and art schools has yet to be established. After studying at gimnazii in Tambov, Tver', and Kazan', Burliuk took art courses in Kazan' and Odessa in 1899-1901: in Kazan' he was a colleague of Nikolai Feshin (Fechin) who later became known as a painter of the American West, and in Odessa he was a colleague of Boris Anisfeld (later known as a stage designer) and Isaak Brodskii, a future court painter of Stalin. In 1901 Burliuk traveled to Munich and then studied under Anton Azbe for two years before going on to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris in 1904. During the mid-1900s Burliuk organized or contributed to a number of unconventional art exhibitions such as the "Wreath-Stephanos" (Moscow, 1907), the "Link" (Kiev, 1908, at which he issued his first radical manifesto), and the "Jack of Diamonds" (Moscow, 1910-11) which brought together members of the emergent avant garde. In 1909 Burliuk moved to St. Petersburg and, in February 1910, with his brothers Vladimir and Nikolai, Velimir Khlebnikov, Vasilii Kamenskii, Elena Guro et al., published the collection Sadok sudei.

In later years, Burliuk and Kamenskii put the "official" birthdate of Russian Futurism as 1910 with their publication of Sadok sudei, even though this can scarcely be regarded as an avant-garde collection and was conservative compared to the previous and concurrent Italian Futurist manifestoes. Sadok sudei however, paved the way for other, more audacious publications engin-
eered by Burliuk: Poshchechina obschchestvennomu vkusu (1912). Sadok su-
russkikh futuristov (1914). and Tango s korovami (1914) were a few of the
anthologies in which Burliuk was involved. Burliuk contributed poems and
theoretical statements to these miscellanies and, to a considerable extent, he
influenced editorial policy. Thanks to his diligence and insistence, Burliuk co-
ordinated or patronized at least twelve Futurist collections during 1912-15.
and he played an effective part in the propagation of fellow poets and paint-
ers such as Pavel Filonov. Khlebnikov. Aleksei Kruchenykh. and Vladimir
Maiakovskii.

In 1910 Burliuk returned to Odessa where, incidentally, he met Vasilii Kand-
dinskii who invited him to contribute to the “Blaue Reiter” exhibition and almanac in Munich. In 1911, Burliuk graduated from the Odessa Art School.
entered the Moscow Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, where
he befriended Maiakovskii and from which he was expelled (with Maiakovskii)
in 1914. In 1912, meanwhile, Burliuk married Marussia Viazemskaiia, and set
up house in a hotel in downtown Moscow where it was legal to sing and play
musical instruments from 9 a.m. until 11 p.m. - thus giving the title “Nest of
Music” to the Burliuks’ apartment. It was there, in November 1912. that Bur-
liuk and his fellow Futurists (Khlebnikov. Maiakovskii. Kruchenykh. Benedikt
Livshits) compiled perhaps the most provocative of the Futurist manifestoes.
i.e., Poshchechina obschchestvennomu vkusu (published in December 1912).

From 1907 through 1913 Burliuk’s father was manager of Count Mordvi-
nov’s estate at Chernianka in the Ukraine, an area that had once the Greek
name Hylaea. Paradoxically, this ancient outpost of Classical Greece gave its
name, in turn, to one of the most vigorous of the Futurist groups, i.e., “Hy-
Livshits, and Maiakovskii during 1912-13. It was also paradoxical that Cherni-
anka, seat of the closely-knit, patriarchal Burliuk family, should have nour-
ished David Burliuk, the radical and iconoclast, although as Livshits later
commented, there were certain extreme, boisterous elements peculiar to
Chernianka that later “spilled over” into Russian Futurism: “In Chernianka
everything took on Homeric proportions. The number of rooms . . . the num-
ber of servants . . . the amount of food . . . The monstrous pile of edibles
which filled the separate ham larders, sausage, milk and various other kinds of
larders made one think about the very essence of this phenomenon . . . It
would have been ridiculous to assume a serious tone in Hylaea, that most
earthly of earths. ‘Low’ style held complete sway.”*

* B. Livshits, Polutoraglazyi strelets (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo pisatelei v Leningrade,
1933), pp. 45, 59.