The Cubo-Futurist opera, *Victory Over the Sun* (December, 1913), is one of a number of small avant-garde theater pieces which proposed to synthesize on stage the revolutionary modern styles which were then being explored in painting, writing and musical composition. Like the Russian avant-garde movement as a whole, it is a late descendant of Symbolist esthetics, its form and themes rebuilt on the bases of psychological interests, hermetic and apocalyptic visions, and the irreverence of the Russian peasant theater. *Victory*, in particular, also seems to have drawn upon Slavic seasonal rituals, which were still practised in rural areas at the time of the opera's composition. In intention and in effect it portends, functioning as a kind of "rite of passage" for its audience—from present to future time.

Aleksei Kruchenykh wrote the libretto for *Victory Over the Sun*, Velimir Khlebnikov contributed the prologue, Mikhail Matiushin composed the music, and Kazimir Malevich designed the sets and costumes. The collaboration of these four men was a result of the realignment of artistic forces early in 1913, when the Moscow based "Hylea" poets, including Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov, became a part of the Petersburg "Union of Youth" organization, with which Matiushin—violinist, painter and composer—was associated. At the same time Malevich, who had been working with Natal'ia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, was drawn into the new alliance by its interest in Cubism and in philosophy.

The general outline of the genesis of *Victory Over the Sun* is known. In July, 1913, Malevich spent some time in Uusikirkko, Finland, with Kruchenykh and Matiushin, who was recovering from his wife's untimely death two months previously. Khlebnikov, summering in Astrakhan with his parents, had intended to accompany the other three. "I am coming," he had written to Matiushin. "Wait for me and send me 18-20 roubles, those earthly wings, to fly from Astrakhan to you."1 But no sooner had he received the money from Matiushin than he dropped it into the water while bathing and lost it. "The purse slipped


away as if it were alive . . . . Later I tried to fish for the purse-frog with a hook and line, but nothing came of it," he wrote sorrowfully to Matiushin.²

While in Uusikirkko, Kruchenykh worked on the libretto for Victory Over the Sun. "I wrote Victory Over the Sun imperceptibly," Kruchenykh noted later, "the stimulus of the very unusual voice of Malevich and the gentle singing violin of dear Matiushin helped me to formulate it."³ On 18 and 19 July, Malevich, Kruchenykh, and Matiushin held a conference which they rather grandly called "The First All-Russian Congress of Poets of the Future (The Poet-futurists)." Their program and stylistic intentions were soon proclaimed in During the Last 7 Days:

CHRONICLE
The First All-Russian Congress of Poets of the Future [The Poet-futurists]. A meeting on the 18th and 19th of July, 1913, in Uusikirkko (Finland).

The kind of activities for the coming year are being discussed and planned, activities of the year which is ending are examined, and papers are given: D. Burliuk’s, Khlebnikov’s “On the New Music,” and others.

In general the plans and ideas are expressed in the following precepts:
We intend to arm the world against us!
The time of slaps is passed:
The noise of explosion and the slaughter of scarecrows will rock the coming year of art!

We want our opponents bravely to ban the scattering of their belongings! Let them not wag their tails and not be able to hide themselves behind them. We commanded with a crowd of thousands at meetings and in theaters and from the pages of our clear books, and now we shall announce the rights of singers and artists, lacerating the ears of those vegetating under the stump of cowardice and immobility:

1) To destroy the “clean, clear, honest, resonant Russian language” emasculated and smoothed out by the tongues of the man from “criticism and literature.”

It is unworthy of the great “Russian people!”

2) To destroy the antiquated movement of thought according to the law of causality, the toothless, common sense, the “symmetrical logic” wandering about in the blue shadows of symbolism and to give the per-