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The Trumpet of the Martians

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Translators note:

Dear wanderer,

This anti-war futurist manifesto was written by the avant-garde brigade led by Velimir Khlebnikov¹ in 1916, when the war was raging across Europe and Russian Empire² was about to be destructed from the inside³. That whole time, 1900-1917, is quite fascinating because of the unique vibe it had — “chaos versus cosmos”, as I heard someone calling it. Even before 1914 everyone sensed that the world was about to change and many parts of it would collapse and fade into oblivion. Amidst that turmoil, envisioning the change, many now widely known movements originated, including symbolists, formalists, futurists⁴, modernists and many other.

I picked futurist’s manifesto by accident. I was reading about Khlebnikov and his fascinating work in poetry and it popped up in the list. Immediately⁵, I got a throbbing urge to share it with you because it was nothing like any manifestos I’d ever read⁶. Instead of just being a list of beliefs and statements or a plain explanation of the vision and mission of the movement, this manifesto is highly poetic and unusual in its language, ridden with raw emotions, symbolism, references, subtext,

and... well it is weird. The central ideas are dismantling the old, suggesting a blueprint of a new world, the one where “begetters”⁷ (visionaries and creators) snatch “the torch” from the “getters” (those who capitalise without innovating).

This manifesto is an ode to the youth and anti-war statement at the same time that demands that old “getters” (read “geezers”) stop sending young men to the slaughterhouse and give them the opportunity to create, so the new generations could flourish and redefine the world in novel artistic and spiritual ways. The manifesto calls for a cosmic shift in how humanity strides forward — where the spirit of conquest is directed not against each other in conflict, but against the constraints of time and tradition.

Was the vision of this manifesto fully realised? What about other movements of that time? It’s hard to tell but regardless of their influence on literature and arts, we can still see parallels with our time and find relevant insights that could help us reshape the future in a way we envision it.

PEOPLE!

The people’s brain hitherto hops on 3 legs (3 axes of space)! In cultivating mankind’s brain, like ploughmen, we attach the 4th leg to this puppy, namely, the TIME AXIS⁸.

Poor puppy! No more will you be tormenting our ears with your nasty

barking.

People of the past fooled themselves assuming that the state's sails could only be built for the axes of space.

We, wearing a cloak of victories, embark on the construction of a young alliance with sails at the axis of TIME, warning in advance that our size is bigger than of Khufu⁹, and our goal is brave, majestic and stark.

We, stark carpenters, once again throw ourselves and our names into the seething cauldrons of glorious goals.

We believe in ourselves and with indignation repel the vicious whispers of people of the past who dream of snubbing us in the heel. For we are gods¹⁰ [*the footnote is important here*]. Yet we are glorious in our UNWAVERING BETRAYAL of our past, barely at the age of triumph in the relentless frenzy of another hammer's swing over the globe, already trembling from our march.

Black sails of time, whir!

victor khlebnikov, mary sinyakova, bozhidar, grigory petnikov, nikolai aseev.

“MAY THE MILKY WAY SPLIT INTO THE MILKY WAY OF THE BEGETTERS AND THE MILKY WAY OF THE GETTERS.”

— HERE ARE THE WORDS OF THE NEW HOLY ENMITY —
Our queries into the void where has been no man — we shall etch them

forcefully on both the forehead of the Milky Way, and on the merchants' round deity — queries on how to liberate the winged engine from the fat freight caterpillar train of older ages. LET THE AGES SEPARATE AND LIVE SEPARATELY! We have broken the seals on the train behind our daring locomotive — there we found nothing but the graves of young men.

There are seven of us. We want a sword made from the metal of young hearts.

They, who have drowned in the laws of family and the laws of trade, who know one word, “eat”, cannot understand us, unconcerned with such matters.

The right to create world unions by age. The partition of generations, the right to separate being and doing. The right to everything as far as the Milky Way goes. Begone the noise of ages! May reign the chime of intermittent times, white and black planks, and the brush of fate. May those closer to death than to birth surrender! Fall on their backs in the battle of ages under our savage onslaught. And we — we, having explored the soil of the time continent, have found it fertile. But THEIR tenacious hands have seized us and prevent us from committing the beautiful change of space. Was there anything more intoxicating than this change? You! What better way to respond to the danger of being born as a man than by stealing TIME! We call out to a land where the trees speak, where scientific alliances are like waves, where armies are only of amorous spring, WHERE TIME BLOOMS

LIKE A CHERRY TRUE and moves like a piston, where a man in a carpenter's apron saws time into planks and like a turner shapes his tomorrow. (O kiss equations! O beam of death, slain by the beam of death placed upon the crest of a wave)¹¹. We go there, young men, and suddenly someone dead, someone gaunt grabs us and hinders us from shedding the feathers of foolish present. Is that ever a good thing?

State of the Youth, set the winged sails of time; you are facing a second stealing of fire from the getters.

Be bold! Begone the gaunt hands. Yesterday, before Balashov's blow¹², may the dreadful pupils be mangled. This is a new punch in the eyes of the vulgarly space folk. Which is bigger: the "be-" or nothing?¹³ The getters' herds have always stalked the begetters; now the begetters fend off the getters' barking, who used to stalk a lone begetter.

The entire industry of the modern globe, from the point of view of the getters themselves, is a "theft" (the language and manners of the getters) from the first begetter — Gauss. He created the doctrine of lightning. And during his lifetime he had not even 150 roubles a year for his scholarly work. With monuments and laudatory articles YOU are trying to sanctify the joy of that committed theft and temper the purring of conscience which suspiciously resides in your worm-like appendage. You wield an allegedly your banner of Pushkin and Lermontov who you once finished off like rabid dogs in outskirts, in a field!¹⁴ Lobachevsky was banished by YOU to the parish teachers. Mongolfier was in a yellow house¹⁵. And us? The begetters, now a militant band?

THESE ARE YOUR FEATS! THEY WOULD MAKE A FEW VOLUMES!

That is why the begetters, in full awareness of their special breed, different manners and special assignment, are to separate themselves from the getters by iron bars and create an independent state of TIME (devoid of space). The future will decide who ends up in the menagerie, the begetters or the getters? And who will gnaw a poker with their teeth.

V. KHLEBNIKOV.

ORDERS:

I. THE GLORIOUS MEMBERS OF THE FUTURIST¹⁶ PUBLICATIONS ARE CONVERTED FROM THE CATEGORY OF HUMANS TO THE CATEGORY OF MARTIANS.

Signed: THE KING OF TIME VELIMIR THE 1ST¹⁷.

II. INVITED WITH THE RIGHT OF ADVISORY VOTE, AS GUESTS IN THE COUNCIL OF THE MARTIANS: WELLS¹⁸ AND MARINETTI¹⁹.

SUBJECTS FOR DISCUSSION:

“ULLA, ULLA,” MARTIANS!²⁰

How to free ourselves from the dominance of people of the past, who still retain a shadow of strength in the world of space, without soiling

ourselves with their life (soap of wordmaking²¹), leaving them to drown in their self-earned fate of spiteful woodlice. We are condemned to conquer, through MEASURE AND TIME, our rights to freedom from the filthy customs of people of previous centuries.

How to free the fast locomotive of the younger generations from the uninvited and defiantly clung to it the freight train of the older generations? Elders! You are stalling the run of humanity and preventing the roaring locomotive of youth from taking the mountain that lies in ITS path. We have broken the seals and made sure that your cargo is gravestones for youth.

In the guise of cargo clung to our whistling haughty reverie the mud of pre-celestial people rides as a stowaway!

Published in April 1916 in Kharkiv, Ukraine, in the form of a scroll.

ТРУБА

Люди!

Мозгъ людей и донныѣ скачуть на 3 ногахъ (3 о
этому щенку 4-ю ногу, именно—*ОСЬ ВРЕМЕНИ*.

Хроной щенокъ! Ты больше не будешь истязать сл
Люди прошлаго не умѣе себя, полагая, что паруса

Мы, одѣтые въ плащъ только побѣды, приступаем
преждея заранѣе, что нашъ размѣръ больше Хеопса, а зада

Мы суровые плотники снова бросаемъ себя и наши

Мы прѣнимъ въ себя и съ негодованіемъ отталкива
пята. Вѣдь мы босы. (Ошибка въ согласной). Но мы прекр
вступило въ возрастъ побѣды и въ неуклонномъ бѣшен
дрожать отъ нашего топота.

Черные паруса времени, шумите!

«ПУСТЬ МЛЕЧНЫЙ ПУТЬ РАСКОЛЕТСЯ НА МЛЕЧНЫЙ П

— *ВОТЪ СЛОВА НОВОЙ СВЯЩЕННОЙ ВРАЖДЫ.* —

Наши вопросы въ пустое пространство, гдѣ еще не
и на кругломъ божествѣ купцовъ—вопросы какъ освободит
возрастовъ. ПУСТЬ ВОЗРАСТЫ РАЗДѢЛЯТСЯ И
паровозомъ дерзости,—тамъ ничего нѣтъ, кромѣ могилъ ю

Нашъ семеро. Мы хотимъ меча изъ чистаго желѣза

Имъ, утонувшимъ въ законы семей и законы торг

Notes

1. He deserves a separate post (one day).
2. In this article, the term “Russian” is used in specific contexts rather than broadly referring to nationality. It may denote something related to the “Russian Empire,” reflecting historical or cultural associations, or it may signify the “Russian language,” indicating the linguistic medium rather than the ethnic identity of the individuals discussed. Although the people mentioned come from various national backgrounds, they are unified by their use of the Russian language.
3. For the record, I’m not a monarchist but I’m not a communist/socialist/whatever either and believe that the whole Soviet state was a fascist state like many other communist states around the world. If there was any good promise in the ideas the revolution was pursuing, it was ditched and forgotten as soon as people who took over the country revealed themselves as nothing but greedy terrorists who then killed dozens of millions of people and oppressed millions more, leaving a large political scar that hasn’t been healed since. I don’t know why this footnote exists. It feels like there’s a separate essay hidden between the lines and now emerging into reality taking over the main topic today, but dilligaf?
4. Meaning Russian Futurists only. The primary difference between Italian Futurists and Russian Futurists lies in their philosophical and ideological underpinnings and their approach to the future and modernity. Italian Futurism celebrated speed, technology, and industrialization, often glorifying war and violence as means to overthrow the old order and embrace the new. It was characteristically aggressive, seeking to reject the past and even attack traditional cultural institutions. In contrast, Russian Futurism, though also praising modernity and innovation, was less focused on violence and had a more complex relationship with the past. Russian Futurists, including Velimir Khlebnikov, sought to break with traditional literature and art but were more inclusive in their embrace of the future, often integrating elements of the Russian language and culture in a transformative way. They were more experimental in their linguistic and artistic pursuits, seeking to revolutionise art and society without the same level of aggressive

- militancy found in Italian Futurism. You can trace that difference at least in this manifesto taking an anti-war stance.
5. That immediacy lasted about a year, by the way.
 6. I've actually read maybe two or three, so my expert opinion is rather sham here. Sorry!
 7. In the original it's "inventors" / "creators" and consonant to the original of "getters", which is "acquirers" / "consumers". I picked "begetters" and "getters", even though they might not necessarily carry the same semantic value, solely because they, like in the original, sound similarly and have the same root (do they?).
 8. The manifesto reflects Khlebnikov's concept of four-dimensional time-space.
 9. Refers to the size of the Great Pyramid of Giza (tomb of pharaoh Khufu).
 10. To dodge censorship, the original had a deliberate typo that resulted in "gods" turning into "barefoot". It's "босы" vs "боги" in the original, which do look and sound similar, but I can't achieve that in English.
 11. tf that means?
 12. Balashov Abram Abramovich — a mentally ill person who slashed the painting 'Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan' by I. E. Repin in the Tretyakov Gallery in January 1913.
 13. In the original, he asks about two prefixes in "изобретатели" (inventors) and "приобретатели" (consumers"), but since I've turned them into begetters and getters, I had to play around accordingly.
 14. Both Pushkin and Lermontov were killed in a duel.
 15. 'жёлтый дом' (yellow house) usually referred to a psychiatric hospital or institution for the mentally ill. This expression originated from the color of the walls of some psychiatric hospitals at that time.
 16. I used "Futurists" in English but the original was different. That word, "будетляне", was made up by Khlebnikov to name a group of futurists he belonged to and make it sound more Russian/Slavic. Literally it's "will-be-ers" or "will-be-ists", people who "will be", people of tomorrow, people of the future.
 17. Khlebnikov did actually call himself the king of time. Based.
 18. C'mon, everyone knows H. G. Wells.
 19. Marinetti was the founder of Italian Futurism and co-author of fascist manifesto that was published in 1919 (which is NOT endorsed here and rather despised and mentioned solely for historical context!). For Khlebnikov in 1916, Marinetti probably was perceived differently, and even though they had shared beliefs, their

- vision of futurism was clearly different (see footnote (3)).
20. “Ulla” is the Martian death noise in the original novel the War of the Worlds. The noise in the book was described as “ulla ulla ulla ulla”.
 21. This is quite difficult to translate and I might be wrong here BUT after an hour of googling I think I get it. “Мыло словотворчества” or “soap of wordmaking” is Khlebnikov concept. This term encapsulates Khlebnikov’s innovative approach to language, where he viewed words not as fixed entities, but as malleable substances that could be reshaped and redefined. Just as soap facilitates the separation and transformation of substances, Khlebnikov’s “soap of wordmaking” represents the fluidity and transformative potential of language in his poetry, embodying his vision of a world where words can be forged and crafted anew, much like soap transforming the nature of substances it interacts with. Some deep alchemy stuff here tbh.

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for original fictions and translations.*

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