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GERALD JANECEK



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It is doubtless stating the obvious to say that Kručnych is not your standard academic or even publicistic literary critic. In his early works he rarely gives evidence of having read anything in the realm of literary criticism, theory or philosophy outside the sphere of Futurism, though later he increasingly makes reference to other critics either as allies or targets. Moreover, it is not easy to separate out what we usually understand as literary criticism from his theoretical statements, polemical writings and manifestos, which all tend to be mixed together in a partisan brew, whose main purpose is to defend his own Futurist works. Those of Kručnych's later writings that are closest to traditional literary criticism (such as reviews of poetry by Jakov Švedov (1925a) and Vasilij Kazin (1925b), a study of Lenin's language (1925c), or the series of booklets on Esenin) are at the same time less interesting than the earlier writings that contain the bulk of his theory-polemic-criticism. Therefore it is this latter group that I would like to examine here. Since there already is a good general survey of Kručnych as a *Sprachkritiker* by Rosemarie Ziegler (1978), I will instead look closely at several representative works from both his earliest and subsequent writings as a way of highlighting Kručnych's most original, forward-looking way of dealing with literary-theoretical questions, placing particular emphasis on his discussion of "zaum" and poetic devices.

While Kručnych participated actively in the discussions on and drafting of early Futurist manifestos, it is difficult to isolate in them what his specific contributions to them might have been. He can be said to emerge clearly as an individual theoretician only with his 'Declaration of the Word as

Such' ('Deklaracija slova kak takovogo', Markov 1967: 63-64; Lawton/Eagle 1988: 67-68), which was drafted in the summer of 1913, printed first as a separate flyer, then often included in later publications. Its eight points are numbered, but are presented in the order 4-5-2-3-1-6-7-8, a quasi-randomizing device characteristic of Kručnych. The most interesting point is the first:

4. МЫСЛЬ И РЕЧЬ НЕ УСПЕВАЮТ ЗА ПЕРЕЖИВАНИЕМ
ВДОХНОВЕННОГО, поэтому художник волен выражаться не
только общим языком (понятия), но и личным (творец ин-
дивидуален), и языком, не имеющим определенного значения
(не застывшим), заумным. Общий язык связывает, свободный
позволяет выразиться полнее (Пример: го оснег кайд и т. д.).

(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. Common language
binds, free language allows for fuller expression. [Example: go osneg
kaid etc.].)

(Lawton/Eagle 1988: 67)

An important thing to note here is the appearance in print for the first time of the term "zaumnyj jazyk" (transrational language). Here it is presented as a further elaboration of the concept of a language "which does not have any definite meaning", the exact phraseology used to introduce "Dyr bul ščyl" in *Pomada* (1913). "Definite meaning" is equated with being "frozen" or, more literally, "having grown cold or stiff". This is clearly based on Belyj's thinking in 'The Magic of Words' (1910: 429-448), where the designation "slovo-termin" (word-term) is used for the once-living word that has become the fixed concept of common, everyday usage. But while Belyj's goal is to return to language its theurgic, mythopoetic power, Kručnych's is to allow for a broader range of personal expression. It is significant (and often overlooked) that "zaumnyj jazyk" is characterized not as being *without* meaning, but as having meaning which is *indefinite*, or *unfixed*, or *not frozen*, i.e., still fluid. Kručnych's relative emphasis is also noteworthy. He does not claim exclusive hegemony for "zaum", but rather is interested only in freeing the artist from being forced to use "common language" in those instances or moments of inspiration when such "thought and speech" are unable to "keep up with the emotion" of the inspired poet.

If we compare this with statements in Marinetti's manifestos of 1909-1913, we note a similar emphasis on the inability of syntactically ordered

discursive language to convey the intense impressions of the observant poet, and both Marinetti and Kručnych reject the effete psychological lyricism inherited from Symbolism in favor of a "masculine" crudity and toughness. But in Marinetti's battery of Futurist stylistic devices, for all the difficulties his telegraphic style might produce for reader comprehension, he does not make room for intentional indefiniteness of meaning. The closest he comes is in his discussion of intuitive analogies, where he describes "imagination without strings" ("immaginazione senza fili") as follows:

Someday we will achieve a yet more essential art, when we dare to suppress all the first terms of our analogies and render no more than an uninterrupted sequence of second terms. To achieve this we must renounce being understood. It is not necessary to be understood. Moreover, we did without it when we were expressing fragments of the Futurist sensibility by means of traditional and intellectual syntax. ('Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', May 11, 1912; Marinetti 1971: 89)

Nowhere does Marinetti advocate the creation of new words with indefinite meanings. And when he encountered this on his visit to Russia (January-February 1914), he rejected the idea immediately (on Marinetti's visit see Chardžiev 1975; Livšic 1991: 162-178).

Nor does Kručnych's closest ally among the Russian Futurists, Chlebnikov, argue for "zaum" as indeterminacy. Rather, Chlebnikov is bent on reestablishing a more precise, clearer relationship between code and message than is true in natural languages. His various tables of interpretants are explicitly aimed at assisting in the decoding of possible new compounds.

Thus, on the matter of verbal indeterminacy Kručnych stands virtually alone at this early stage. Other points in the manifesto can be traced to nearby sources, but this one is entirely original.

Kručnych further elaborated these ideas in 'New Ways of the Word' (also 1913), in which he promulgates the theory of the "sdvig" (dislocation/shift) and provides a list of techniques for producing "zaum" with examples from his own works. Among the proposed techniques are:

1. неправильность [...] грамматическая:
 - а) несовпадение падежей, чисел, времен и родов подлежащего и сказуемого определения и определяемого [...]
 - б) опущение подлежащего или др. частей предложения, опущение местоимений предлогов и пр.
 - в) произвольное слововошество (чистый неологизм) [...]
 - г) неожиданность звуковая [...]

(1. grammatical irregularity [...])

- a) lack of agreement in case, number, tense, and gender between subject and predicate, adjective and noun [...]
 - b) elimination of the subject or other parts of speech, elimination of pronouns, prepositions, etc. [...]
 - c) arbitrary word-novelty (pure neologism) [...]
 - d) unexpected phonetic combination [...]
- (Lawton/Eagle 1988: 73-74)

All of these, with the possible exception of the fourth, go well beyond Marinetti's "wireless" telegraphic style and produce significant degrees of semantic and syntactic indefiniteness.

Kručenyč's Caucasian period (1917-1921) saw the introduction of a marked Freudian slant, under the influence of Dr. Charazov and Il'ja Zdanevič, which shows up in the anal erotic focus of *Malacholija v kapote* (1918a) and other works of this time (see Ziegler 1982: 239-240). Eroticism had certainly not been absent in Kručenyč's earlier works, though it was sometimes disguised (on this aspect of "Dyr bul ščyl" see Janeczek 1991), but in this period he develops the approach of bringing to the surface the hidden erotic meaning in words, as is made immediately apparent in the subtitle of *Malacholija*: 'Istorija KAK anal'naja erotika'. The book catalogs instances of anal eroticism based on the overt or hidden presence especially of the letter combination "kak" in texts ranging from Puškin and, naturally, Gogol's Akakij Akakievič, to Il'ja Zdanevič's play series *aslaablič'e*. Needless to say, this is not a difficult task, given that the word "kak" is rather frequent in Russian and is often used as a conjunction in poetic similes. Whether hidden eroticism is automatically involved was, however, disputed at the time and can still be. Also included in Kručenyč's investigation are the Cyrillic letters Ю (ju) and Ф (f), their graphic and articulatory symbolism explicitly interpreted, especially in the latter instance, in a way already present in the popular mind: "F-form falosa" (Kručenyč 1973: 274). Once these conscious or subconscious encodings are elucidated, however, they lose much of their "zaum'" indeterminacy and mystery, a fact not noted by Kručenyč.

Elsewhere he advances his view of "zaum'" as a third alternative between the choices of sanity and madness:

Таким образом намечается выход нового искусства из тупика прошлости не в нуль и не в клиническое безумие.

Ранее было: разумное или безумное; мы даем третье: – заумное, – творчески претворяющее и преодолевающее их.

Заумное, берущее все творческие ценности у безумия (почему и слова почти сходные), кроме его беспомощности – болезни.

Заумь перехитрила...
(*Ožirenie roz'*, 1918b: 14)

(In this way begins new art's exit from the dead end of passéism not into zero and not into clinical insanity.

Previously there was: the rational and the irrational: we provide a third possibility: – the transrational [zaumnoe], – which creatively transforms and overcomes them.

The transrational, which takes all its creative value from irrationality (hence even the words are similar), except its helplessness – its sickness. *Zaum'* has outwitted...)

A work of particular interest from this period is Kručenyč's introduction to A. Čačikov's 1919 collection of poems *Krepkij grom* (Kručenyč 1973: 489-496). Čačikov's poems with their Igor'-Severjanin-like decadent titles ('Approach to an Intimate Villainette', 'Chanson française', 'Café "Empire"') and their traditional forms (sonnet, triolet) would not have attracted Kručenyč were it not for their orientalisms and soundplay. The former provided unusual sound combinations as well as a non-European frame of reference (on this aspect see also Nikol'skaja 1988), which Kručenyč preferred (as did Chlebnikov). But of most significance are Kručenyč's analyses or, perhaps more accurately, refractions of Čačikov's lines. For example, he takes the lines "S prospekta Jurt-Šache i Konsul'skoj Allei / Bežit krikливо-sonnych ulic rjad" (Čačikov 1919: 15) and "distills" from them the following:

кта прос
сульксон ехаш
трю ле-ле-ле
айш соныр осько
сонор
шныт.
(Kručenyč 1973: 489)

Some pieces of this distillation are obviously based on the Čačikov poem ("pros", "kta", "sul'kson" and, from a later line not quoted by Kručenyč, "šnyt" ["šnyrjajut"]), but one searches in vain for the others. He transposes some segments ("kta pros" = "prospekta") and juxtaposes others over considerable distances ("sul'kson" = "Konsul'skoj [...] krikливо somnych"), leading one to speculate about the actual methods he used for composing his own "zaum'" (snip-snip, shuffle-shuffle, paste). He gives a second example in which he does the same thing, though in this case it is easier to locate all the pieces in the text. Another example of the distillation process on the concluding page of the essay (Kručenyč 1973: 496) duplicates the first one

by having some "zaum" words with obvious relation to the original quotation and other "zaum" words with no obvious link to the original. In the course of the discussion, Kručenyč praises Čačikov for his "sharp words marinated [nastoeny] in alcoholic spirits and not in water and paper" (1973: 490); for his rhymes, which he calls "crawling, reptilian" (e.g. "krasavyj / serale"); and for other forms of what we would term paronomasia. And he uses Čačikov to launch one of his attacks on other poets, this time particularly Tjutčev, for their deafness toward anal-erotic sound combinations ("kak").

Kručenyč concludes:

И не суждено ли нашему поэту быть участником зарождающейся поэзии Востока на русском языке, передающей мед пылающего края?! Мед зауми!

ртон фар Лоан / фер ли
розык / солак ла...
мад / зау!...
плыви ильче врез
сима!!

(And is not our poet fated to participate in the birth of *poetry from the East in Russian* which conveys the honey of that burning region?! The honey of "zaum"!)

rton far Loan / fer li
rozyk / solak la...
mad / zau!..
plyvi il'če vorez
simaj!)

That there may be more Kručenyč than Čačikov in such distillations is suggested by the fact that the source for this last quotation is not given by Kručenyč, and my attempts to locate it in any lines by Čačikov have met with failure.

The Tiflis period can be characterized as one in which Kručenyč as theoretician attempts to justify (or at least explain) "zaum" by relating it to subconscious, mainly psychosexual, processes to which a "zaum" poet will be able to give vent more directly than a traditional poet by being open to intuitive impulses (perhaps helped by alcohol – *in vino veritas* – as he suggests about Čačikov). By being free to use whatever sounds and coinages emerge in this state, the poet is able to be more honest in expressing the dark recesses of the human soul. This crude psychologism, never very openly discussed by Kručenyč as such, contrasts with his (and in general Futurism's) earlier anti-psychological stance, which was a reaction to Symbolism and late Realism. Kručenyč has moved his concept of "zaum" theoretically

from the realm of the indeterminate/imponderable to the realm of a psychologically motivated phenomenon, one that can be discovered in the works of other (unsuspecting) poets. Another, later example of this approach is his 500 *New Witticisms and Puns by Puškin* (1924). To the extent that Kručenyč sees "zaum" as more precise and expressive than ordinary language, he is also moving closer to Chlebnikov's views.

Permanently returning to Moscow in the fall of 1921, Kručenyč entered a changed literary scene which caused him first to consolidate and argue for his radical position and then to move closer to the mainstream in practice, if not in theory.

Beginning with *The Texture of the Word* (1923a), Kručenyč's eight booklets of 1923-1924 are all, judging by their titles, ostensibly theoretical works, though many of them contain generous helpings of poetry and other materials, much of which comes from previous publications. In this group I would like to concentrate on two: 'Texture' and 'The Shiftology of Russian Verse'.

In the case of 'Texture', less than half of the material is new, and only a few pages of that are theoretical. The brief essay 'The Texture of the Word' which opens the book lays out in schematic, quasi-scientific form Kručenyč's main theoretical ideas, many of which he already advanced in earlier works. Among his fundamental points are that "texture" is the making or constructing of the poetic word by arranging its sounds, syllables and letters; that the texture can be composed of sounds that are "light, tender" ("negoli legkich dum"), heavy ("tabun šagov/čugun slonov"), heavy and crude ("dyr-bul-ščyl"), sharp ("z-šč-č"), mute ("gluchaja") ("dym za dymom, bezdna dyma"), dry, hollow, wooden ("promolvil dub ej tut"), or moist – "na ju" ("pljuen'e, sljuni, junjane"); and that there are sound "sdvigi", which consist of running words together over word boundaries to create "kaki". All these fall into the category of instrumentation. Repetitions can strengthen the sound meaning, but if used incautiously can also weaken it, though his examples do not effectively illustrate this pitfall. As textural devices he also lists syllable texture (a series of monosyllabic words is heavier than a series of polysyllabic words); rhythmic texture created by what we would now call unstressed icti and hypermetrical stresses, and by symmetrical (classical) and asymmetrical (futurist) structures; semantic clarity and unclarity; syntactic regularity or irregularity (for the latter he gives the example: "belyj lošad' chvost bežali včera telegrammoj"); graphic texture (script, typeface, drawings, decorations, spelling); color; and declamation (1-3). Thus, in a neat, succinct outline Kručenyč presents a rather thorough survey of textural devices, most of which have largely been ignored by traditional literary critics but have come to claim attention in recent times, and all of which were employed by Kručenyč himself.

Kručenyč's other major theoretical work of this period, and the most complete, is *The Shiftology of Russian Verse* (1923b; excerpts translated in Lawton/Eagle 1988: 184-186). In it Kručenyč again argues for the value of "zaum" as indeterminacy and demonstrates the various uses of "sdvigi" to achieve it. As the title suggests, "shiftology" is presented as a new literary science, the science of dislocation as a literary device in the use of which poets of the time are still novices (1923b: 3). What makes this treatise most valuable is that in it Kručenyč presents along with theory examples that give a direct view of his work and the motivations for the effects and "sdvigi" he employs. Thus, in a section titled "The 'sdvig' as a device", he says:

Сдвиг – яд, очень опасный в неопытных руках глухачей, но его же можно использовать как хороший прием, например: желая придать слову "цикута" еще большую увлажненность, я искал такой фразы, в которой бы "цикута" помещалась в середине строчки и перед ней союз и, для получения посредством стыка сдвигового слова "ицикута", так получился стих:

– Паюсный корморан и цикута
сестра милосерд'я

(1923b: 15)

(The "sdvig" is a very dangerous poison in the inexperienced hands of deaf-ears, but one can use it as a good device, for example: wanting to give the word "cikuta" [=cicuta, poison or water hemlock] still more moistness, I looked for a phrase in which "cikuta" would be positioned in the middle of the line and would have before it the conjunction "i" [=and] so as to obtain by juxtaposition the "sdvig" word "icikuta", resulting in the line:

– Pajusnyj kormoran i cikuta
sestra miloserd'ja)

In another case he notes, he runs a preposition together with the following word ("važurnye serdca" [=intoopenwork hearts]) "in order to underline that in the given case the 'sdvig' was intended and desirable" (15). In general, he says, poets have trouble figuring out what to do with prepositions, resulting in either their omission or in clumsy combinations.

Under the heading of "sound-images" he discusses cases in which the focus on sound creates a "sdvig" in meaning. Hence in the lines:

литит [sic] мой дух
лебяжий
на-фта-линный?!

the word "naftalinnij" (naphthaline), though representing an acrid and unpleasant substance, is light and fleeting in sound, and thus its sound composition is appropriate to the context; however, its meaning is thereby dislocated, permitting a further "sdvig", "na-fata-linnij" (em-bridal-veiled) which is fitting for the love-flight depicted in the poem (16-17; the complete poem: 40). Hence with the word "naftalinnij" Kručenyč illustrates the principle implied as early as 1913 in a point in 'Declaration of the Word as Such' that similar-sounding words in poetry are equivalent in meaning (Markov 1967: 63; Lawton/Eagle 1988: 67). This principle, when applied literally and radically, will easily lead to semantic surprises and dislocations that will be "zaum" in nature, especially when the poet's method is hidden from view. If we are unaware that "naftalinnij" was chosen for its sounds rather than its meaning, we would be puzzled by its presence in the poem and it would seem to be a form of "zaum". Of course, poets in the past were known to have chosen some words on the basis of sound composition, but they were also guided by the appropriateness of these words to the semantic context. Kručenyč eliminates that restraint, thus producing a much greater degree of semantic dislocation than is usually the case.

Then Kručenyč discusses the "sdvig-image" by reproducing Terent'ev's 1918 article 'Maršrut šarizny' (Terent'ev 1988: 233-234), subtitled 'The law of chance in art'. Terent'ev's main point is: "The unexpected word is the most important secret of art for every poet." As a way of creating this effect, "the contrastive epithet is replaced by an epithet that conforms to nothing [ničem ne soobraznym]" (Kručenyč 1923b: 20). To further illustrate Terent'ev's thesis (Terent'ev had already used a number of quotations from Kručenyč as examples), Kručenyč appends yet another poem of his own:

БОМБАТ

(маленький ленивый зверек)

– Любите ли вы улыбку ленивого Вомбата? –
Пропел ацетелин
На ухо ангелу
– Она мяхче [sic]
Повязки на лбу,
Она снисходительней
Куриного пера,
Она нежнее, чем пещера
Где ходят босоногие адмиралы!.. (21)

He explains: "The first comparison is by similarity, the second by contrast and the third is by chance [nežnoe, kakogo daže ne byvaet – nekaja peščera, gde chodjat...]"

In the following section, 'From impressionism to the "sdvig" image', Kručenyč cites examples from Nina Saksonskaja's poetry to illustrate that as the emotions become more intense, the metaphors become more extreme and end by "going off into 'random' distances" and into word coinages (22-24). Subsequent pages survey other kinds of "sdvigi" which have been listed above. Throughout, Kručenyč remains more or less consistent with his earlier radical positions and theoretical principles.

However, a shift in emphasis away from arguing for these radical positions and toward an effort to explain and justify them in the new Soviet context can be detected in his response to the "young Marxist" critic Ja. Šaperstejn-Lers, author of a book, *The Social Meaning of Russian Literary Futurism* (1922). Because Kručenyč, in his 1916 *Secret Vices of Academics* (1973: 177), had decried the "sleepy rhythm of the salon dance (one two three) the rhythm of love and of a soundly sleeping person" as illustrated by an overly euphonious quotation from Bal'mont, Šaperstejn had concluded in a rather slapdash way that Kručenyč hated these "normal rhythms of contemporary cultural life". He depicts Kručenyč as a "wildman" who finds the cultural attributes of the commercial bourgeoisie "boring", dislikes anything "foreign and non-Russian", and prefers peasant and sectant life (Šaperstejn 1922: 35). Coming from a Marxist, these criticisms seem quite odd, but in any case in 1922 Kručenyč could not afford to be considered anti-Western and anti-cultural, given that the new Marxian politics was Western-derived and that the revival of traditional cultural values was largely government-sponsored. Therefore in *Shiftology*, Kručenyč defends himself by pointing out that his campaign against foreign words in 1913 was directed at the Symbolists and Severjanin, who had inundated Russian poetry with them. Now, however, the times were different, and Šaperstejn had evidently "forgotten his 'historical dialectics' in 1922 when he decided that I was in general against culture and the West – a temporal 'sdvig' bythecritic!" (6, sic).

If here this argument is only a brief episode in a work dedicated mostly to other concerns, nevertheless it is the beginning of a variety of efforts by Kručenyč in the 1920s to make his theoretical positions seem suitable in the post-revolutionary literary environment without actually changing them in essence. His later attempts to find "zaum'" in the works of non-futurist writers (1925d) and to apply his analytical tools to Lenin's language (1925c) have, as was noted at the beginning of this discussion, little new to offer and can be looked on as pragmatic exercises of lesser significance. In the end they failed to change Kručenyč's public image as a Futurist radical.

On the other hand, Kručenyč could take some consolation in the 1922 edition of Kornej Čukovskij's booklet *The Futurists*, in which Čukovskij, while retaining his earlier distance from the movement, nevertheless has rather positive things to say about it, such as: "all poetry is (to a certain limit)

'zaum'' (43), and "they took to pieces previous esthetics, rhythemics, etymology, syntax, and with this created new revolutionary forms necessary for the revolutionary epoch" (59), – high praise to be savored in 1922. Significantly, Kručenyč quotes the second half of this sentence in the singular, as if it referred only to "one of the futurists" (i.e. himself; 1923b: 37).

Vladimir Markov notes of Kručenyč that "no other futurist shows such an unblemished record of loyalty to futurism or such resistance to outside pressures to conform" (Kručenyč 1973: 9). This is nowhere more true than in his theoretical-critical views. It was not his fault that the world around him changed its politics before it had a chance to understand these views and perhaps accept them as useful tools for literary analysis. But there are now signs that Russia is beginning to find a future in Kručenyč. The original avant-garde is being investigated, understood, appreciated, imitated. Kručenyč's place in this process is not yet fully appreciated, but that, it seems, is merely a matter of time.

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