

‘To accept or not to accept? For me the question never arose. It was my Revolution!’

This is how Mayakovsky formulates his attitude to the October Revolution in his autobiography.

Mayakovsky was a convinced Bolshevik and it was natural therefore that at an artists’ meeting he should express himself clearly and succinctly on the subject of the recognition of Soviet Power: ‘We must welcome the new power and open up relations with it’.

In political terms, everything was clear, but Mayakovsky did not manage to open up concrete and effective relations with the organs of Soviet Power immediately.

First of all he had to reach an understanding with the People’s Commissar of Education, A V Lunarcharsky. He had to reassure himself on Lunarcharsky’s attitude to ‘left’ art, to the Futurists, and to his own poetry. Mayakovsky’s position was that now

The Futurists are in luck.
The old tail coat
is coming apart
at all its seams . . .

and that the first duty of the People’s Commissar was to give every cooperation and support to ‘the art of the young’.

Anatoly Vasilyevich proved to be a man of extremely liberal aesthetic views – he was for innovation, for creative invention, he knew something of Futurist literature, and he considered Mayakovsky an extremely talented poet. As far as the Futurist’s theory on the abolition of all past culture was concerned, he agreed that much was of course outdated and much needed to be ‘renovated’; but his main concern at this point was not whether or not some of the old junk was surviving. On the contrary, he saw it as his revolutionary duty to do everything possible to safeguard the extraordinarily rich cultural heritage which had come into the hands of the people.

Mayakovsky was disillusioned. Having failed to come to any understanding with the People’s Commissar, and seeing no other propaganda outlets for ‘left’ art, Mayakovsky went to Moscow where, with David Burlyuk and V Kamensky, he tried to start up ‘a conversation with the people’ over Lunarcharsky’s head, persuading workers and peasants to turn away from old art towards an art which was in tune with the Revolution, towards ‘left’ art.

The ‘conversation with the people’ was conducted from the stages of the Poet’s Café in Nastas’insky Lane and the Pittoresque

Prominently displayed in the paper was the following announcement: 'The Flying Federation of Futurists – speakers, poets, painters – announces: free presentations of speeches, poems, paintings, to any workers' audience eager for revolutionary art. Contact the Poet's Café from 10 pm every evening.'

However, up till now we know of only one appearance before a mass audience, which the Futurists organised in a circus. There may possibly have been others, but basically, the conversation did not emerge beyond the doors of the café.

What was the theme of that conversation? The programme-manifesto of the Flying Federation of Futurists states:

'The old order was supported by three whales: political slavery, social slavery and spiritual slavery. The February Revolution destroyed political slavery, the road to Tobolsk is strewn with the black feathers of the double-headed eagle,* October hurled the bomb of social revolution under capital. The fat backsides of fleeing factory bosses loom on the distant horizon.'

This was the situation on the political level. But in the art field, everything went on in the old way.

'The theatre goes on as before, presenting the "Emperors of Judea" and such like (Romanov works).† As before, the heavy muddy feet of monuments to generals, princes, tsars' mistresses and tsarinas' lovers block the exits of young streets. Trinket shops grandly called "exhibitions" trade in out and out daubs executed by fine ladies in their dachas, rococo style or à la one of the various Louis'.

'And finally, at our own bright festivities, we sing not our own anthems, but the grey-haired *Marseillaise* which we borrowed from the French.'

Mayakovsky also wrote of this in his 'Open Letter' to the workers:

'I am amazed to see "Aidas" and "Traviatas" with all their various Spaniards and counts, ringing out from the stages of the theatres we have taken over; to find those same opulent roses from manor house conservatories in the verses you accept; and to see how your eyes are dazzled by paintings which represent the

* A reference to the fact that after he was deposed by the February Revolution, the Tsar Nicholas II and his family were taken secretly to Tobolsk, a small town in Siberia.

† Mayakovsky is referring in particular to a work by the Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich Romanov – *Tsar Iudeiski*, 'a drama in five acts', published in Moscow in 1914. An English version translated by V E Marsden under the title *The King of the Jews*; a sacred drama, was published, also in 1914, by Cassell & Co, London.

The Flying Federation of Futurists invited the people to turn away from 'old, musty art' and 'to hungrily tear off pieces of the lusty, raw art offered by us' (the Futurists).

In their decree on the democratisation of art, Mayakovsky, Kamensky and Burlyuk announced that

'along with the destruction of the Tsarist order, an end will be put to art's domicile in the pantries and barns of human genius – in palaces, galleries, salons, libraries and theatres. . . . Let paintings (colours) pour like many-coloured rainbows over the streets and squares, from house to house, ennobling and delighting the eye (taste) of the passerby.'

It was also announced that the 'first posting of verses and paintings would take place in Moscow on the day of publication of our paper'. And in fact, three small Futurist paintings were hung on the corner of Kuznetsky Bridge and Neglinnaya Street at the height of the second floor on March 15, 1918, the day the paper appeared. This was intended to signify – 'art has come out onto the street'.

Into the street, Futurists,
Drummers and poets!

However, all efforts to come out of the café into the streets to the people proved in vain. Apart from resounding slogans and the pictures on the walls of a building, the democratisation of the arts announced by the Flying Federation of Futurists went no further.

Mayakovsky soon realised the childishness of the enterprise and saw that the battle for the new art had to be waged, not from the stage of the Poets' Café, nor from the pages of his paper, but within the Soviet system, together with all those who were building the artistic life of the regenerated country.

In his first letter to L Y Brik from Moscow in mid-December 1917, Mayakovsky wrote:

'The café is for the moment a very pleasant place. As gay as the "Stray Dog" used to be in the early days.*'

'Packed with people. Sawdust on the floor. On the stage, us ("me" at the moment – Dodya and Vasya** have gone until Christmas). Pretty bad. That's all. Futurism is in great favour. Masses of performances. At Christmas time there's going to be a Futurist (Christmas) tree party. Then – "the election of the three triumvirs of poetry". I'm negotiating a reading of *Man* at the Polytechnic Museum! . . .

* A St Petersburg nightclub which was the centre of early Futurist activity, particularly around 1912-13. The Italian Futurist Marinetti delivered several lectures there.

** Burlyuk and Kamensky.

‘ A huge amount of entertaining things going on, but unfortunately of a mimed nature given the inarticulateness of the characters involved. Imagine for instance Vysotsky, Marants and Shatilov* (after all the banks are shut!) listening earnestly to Dodichka’s† “ He had a passionate love for flies with fat arses ”. A million new people. It’s crowded and unthinking.’

But at the beginning of January he was already writing to LY:

‘ Things are as they were with me. My life’s like a gypsy song: by day I loll about, by night I indulge the ear. The café’s palled on me. It’s a small-time flea’s nest. Ehrenburg and Vera Inber are still something like poets. I’ve made plenty of public appearances. The Futurist Party was held at the Polytechnic Museum. Quite a crowd there, like at a demonstration. Right at the beginning of the evening it turned out that of the four people announced on the poster, Burlyuk and Kamensky wouldn’t be coming, and Goltsschmidt‡ was crying off. I had to keep things rolling by myself. It makes me shudder to remember it.’

His later letters no longer make references to the Poets’ Café or other platforms. In just one letter there is an ironic comment on the subject of ‘ smart ’ writing paper: ‘ Beautiful? Yes? Pardon me for writing on such refined paper. It’s from the Pittoresque and they just can’t do anything without refinement.’

In June Mayakovsky said goodbye to Moscow and returned to Petersburg. He spent the summer with the Briks in Levashovo in a private pension. This was a kind of breathing space after the bustle of Moscow. Mayakovsky relaxed and gathered strength. During this time he was writing *Mystery-Bouffe*. L Y Brik recalls some of the typical aspects of that Levashovo summer in her unpublished memoirs.

‘ We went to Levashovo to the dacha. We took three rooms with board. Volodya painted landscapes in oils and wrote *Mystery*. Volodya wrote verses constantly – during meals, walks, conversations with the girls, work sessions – all the time! He used to mutter, gesticulating a bit as he walked. No company disturbed him – it even helped.

Volodya spent the entire days on walks with me, showing me his landscapes, asking if he were making progress as a painter. In the evenings he played “ kings ”** with Brik and myself, but by the end of the summer it emerged that *Mystery-Bouffe* was finished. . . .

* Well-known Moscow merchants and financiers of the period.

† Burlyuk.

‡ A colourful figure of the period, Goltsschmidt called himself ‘ a Futurist of life ’ – to demonstrate his strength he used to break boards on his head.

** A Russian card game.

We were fed the same salted fish with dried peas every day. Bread and sugar were brought to us from Petersburg by our maid Poly. Poly used to bake the bread in bricks under a metal tin that used to hold Borman's "George" biscuits – it was black, crisp and tasty.

We sat at one end of a long table in the guest room. At the other end sat a voluptuous blonde. Suddenly the blonde disappeared and a very ugly, thin, old woman took her place. Volodya picked up his spoon to eat his soup, raised his eyes and said in a scared whisper:

"Where before was such a feast, there now stands a grave".*

We used to go mushrooming. There were a lot of mushrooms around, but not very good ones – the russula were beautiful and many-coloured. We used to leave them at the kitchen to be cooked. We tried bilberry jam with saccharine. Since then even on our hungriest days we never touchèd saccharine.

In autumn we had to return to Petersburg and we had no money to pay the pension. I sold my portrait, painted by B Grigor'ev in 1916, to the artist I Brodsky. It was a huge portrait, larger than life-size; it showed me lying on the grass against some kind of background glow. When Volodya saw it he said: "Lila in overflow".

I came across my portrait being carried on a cab down the Nevsky Avenue and was overjoyed that I'd got rid of that monstrosity and we wouldn't be in debt.

After Levashovo, Mayakovsky rented a small flat in our house (7, Zhukovsky Street) like the one we had earlier. For lack of space, the bath was in the corridor. In the bedroom there was an ottoman and a large mirror in a pink velvet frame.

In one of his letters to his sister in Moscow written from Levashovo, Mayakovsky wrote: "I'm being so nourished on milk here (six glasses a day) that tell mother not to be surprised if I grow an udder."'

In Levashovo, Mayakovsky and Brik received a letter from Shterenberg and Punin, the heads of the IZO (Arts) department of Narkompros, inviting them to join the collegium. All 'our', 'left' people – Altman, Shkol'nik, Tatlin and Malevich (the latter two in Moscow) – had come into the department; a kind of fortress of the new art, the art of the young, had been created, from which we could do battle with the 'old men' of art.

Exchange of fire with the 'old' fortress – the museum department – began at once. As well as questions of principle, the battles between the departments were fought for all kinds of material benefits: for accommodation, for special rations, and for grants.

* A line from the poem 'To the death of Prince Meshchersky' (Na smert' knyaza Meshcherskovo) by the great Russian classicist poet, Gavril Derzhavin (1743-1816).

The IZO section insisted that the Government's main concern should be concentrated on better material conditions for living artists, organising exhibitions of their work and extensive Government purchase of the best of these works.

The museum department on the other hand insisted that the best accommodation space should go to the museums, that museum workers should be provided with academic rations and that money should be spent as a first priority on providing the museums with objects of value, and on their preservation and restoration. . . .

Mayakovsky worked enthusiastically in the Narkompros IZO, fought the 'old' in support of the new art, spoke at meetings and wrote verse for the IZO department journal *Art of the Commune*.*

Back in Levashovo it had been decided to set up an 'Art of the Young' publishing organisation to publicise the new art.

The IMO (Art of the Young) society began early in 1918 when Mayakovsky was still in Moscow. Strictly speaking there had never been any properly constituted 'society' or 'fraternity'. They simply took over an empty flat, no 21 at 5, Fontanka, and hung the paintings of young artists on the walls: Shkol'nik, Spandikov, Le Dantieu, and others. It was thought that buyers would come to see the exhibition and perhaps even make a purchase. But no such buyers turned up. It was all their own people who came – penniless enthusiasts of 'ultra-left' art.

The IMO centre was used for the organisation of informal group meetings and literary-artistic discussions for their 'own people'.

One way or another the IMO imprint had now come into existence, and Mayakovsky used it as his publishing pseudonym – as he had previously used the Asis (Association of Socialist Art) imprint for the second edition of his poem *Cloud in Trousers*, for the publication of *Man* and for *The Futurist Paper*.

On July 27, 1918, the question of the publication of Futurist literature was on the agenda of the discussions of the Narkompros literary collegium. The IMO imprint had not yet been mentioned, but discussions centred around the publication of an 'anthology of Futurist literature' – this was the future *Unsifted Word*, the first book published under the IMO imprint.

Mayakovsky put the proposal that Narkompros issue a collection of Futurist literature. The literary collegium under the chairmanship of A V Lunarcharsky agreed to Mayakovsky's proposal and asked him to present an estimate to the literature department. On the presentation of an estimate, a subsidy would be granted for the publication of the anthology.

Mayakovsky began work on compiling the anthology. However, before it was completed, a decision was made to produce an agit

* For further details on the 'Art of the Commune' journal, see 'Mayakovsky and the Literary Movements of 1917-30' in this issue.

88 album, to be published under the IZO imprint, but produced by the work force of IMO. The album was prepared and appeared for the first anniversary of the October Revolution under the title *Heroes and martyrs of the Revolution*.

The album consisted of eighteen large sketches with verse subtitles. The sketches were commissioned from the artists Koslinsky, Makletsov and others.* The verse text was written by Mayakovsky.

The album is marked 'published by the Arts department of the People's Commissariat of Education', and on the inside page, 'IMO Publishing Centre, Petrograd, Fontanka 5, Flat 21'.

By October, Mayakovsky had completed *Mystery-Bouffe*. He presented it together with *The Unsifted Word* to the Narkompros literary collegium for publication under the IMO imprint. The collegium accepted them for publication and both books also came out around the anniversary of the October Revolution – they were the first books published by Mayakovsky as part of the struggle for new art.

The notion of publishing an anthology of Futurist literature had occurred to Mayakovsky while he was still in Moscow during the period of the Flying Federation of Futurists. *The Futurists' Paper* carried a notice to the effect that Mayakovsky was preparing a collection of Futurist writings for publication through Asis. In Mayakovsky's report to the Narkompros collegium, this collection is still referred to as either 'an anthology of Futurist literature', or 'the Futurists' anthology', and is apparently not linked thematically with the Revolution in any way.

The collection was intended to give a notion of Futurist literature as the newest and most innovatory tendency in literature, but in the course of collecting the material, Mayakovsky changed his principle of selection; the idea of the link between the Futurists and Futurism and the Revolution came to the fore. Mayakovsky refers to this in his preface to *The Unsifted Word*:

'Of course the present book does not exhaust Futurism. It has selected verses on a particular theme – the word revolution by the revolutionaries of the word. The future will produce an account of Futurism full-grown; for the moment it is not a corpse which will allow itself to be dissected, but a fighter, unfurling its flags.'

The link with the theme of the Revolution decided the choice of material. The resulting anthology was not intended to be a summing up, a historical retrospective, a dissection of the corpse, but a militant collection of the work of a revolutionary literary group genuinely necessary to the Revolution. And therefore – not just an anthology, but a revolutionary anthology – a disassociation from the militarist Marinetti, the sugary-voiced Severyanin and their like.

The manuscript of *The Unsifted Word* anthology was presented

* Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny).

to the Narkompros collegium at the beginning of October. Thus the two months (August and September) which passed between the application for approval and the presentation of the completed manuscript were sufficient for a radical change to occur in Mayakovsky's attitude to Futurists and Futurism. In July Futurism for Mayakovsky had still been an innovatory literary movement, significant in itself. The Futurists were the revolutionaries of form. This was enough to earn them the right to publication by the revolutionary Soviet government.

In two months Mayakovsky had come to a different point of view. Futurists were necessary to the Revolution not because they were the revolutionisers of form, but because a genuine revolution in form was inevitably linked with social revolution. For this reason not all Futurists were necessary to the Revolution, but only those who had found a spiritual outlet in the Revolution. And for this reason *The Unsifted Word* was not a literary anthology of the work of the Futurists, but a revolutionary anthology of those young poets who stood on the barricades of art under the slogan:

'Today the socialists' unprecedented story is making a great heresy come true.'*

In those months (August and September) Mayakovsky started working on the IZO collegium. Of course, practical participation in revolutionary construction had an immediate and decisive influence on Mayakovsky's literary position. The divisions between the platforms of the various literary groups gradually began to lose their sharpness. Much was seen in a different broader perspective. And first and foremost, it became clear that only literature which moved in step with the Revolution was needed by the Revolution, and had the right to exist. This was the beginning of Mayakovsky's difficult road to his position as poet of the revolutionary masses, poet of the proletarian revolution and socialist construction. Dividing Futurism along the line of those 'for and against the Revolution' was a first step on that path.

The Unsifted Word anthology included the verse of Aseyev, Burlyuk, Kamensky, Khlebnikov, and Mayakovsky's *Our March, Revolution, War and the Universe* (part five). The material was selected by Mayakovsky who also wrote the foreword to the collection. A second foreword was written by Lunarcharsky.** Both forewords were intended to explain to the reader why an anthology of Futurist literature was being published and to reply in advance to the misunderstandings which such a publication might provoke.

Mayakovsky entitled his foreword 'This book should be read by everyone'. And he poses questions as if from a puzzled reader:

* A line from Mayakovsky's *Revolution*.

** For a full text of Lunarcharsky's preface see 'Mayakovsky and the Literary Movements of 1917-30' in this issue.

'Why?' and then 'What do we want with this incoherent jumble, these lurid slogan writers?'. Mayakovsky replies: 'All your objections are reformist lies.' He explains that the Futurists should not be held responsible for every piece of nonsense laid at their door. 'We, the young poets of Russia, having found a spiritual outlet in the revolution and taken our stands on the barricades of art, have nothing in common with the militarist Marinetti, or with the sugary-voiced Russian Severyanin.'

Mayakovsky explains further why

'we revolutionary Futurists are necessary to the proletariat – because we give socialism a new word. The bourgeoisie made a poetic cult of trivial sentimental emotions, harmonious landscapes, and portraits of well-born representatives. Its corresponding language is also gentle, polite, and well-bred. . . . And these poetic waters all flowed into the frozen expanses of dull, stereotyped rhythms.

'We (the revolutionary Futurists) have frightened away the cloudless skies over fine private houses with the red glow of factory chimneys. We have invaded the amorous whispering on cosy porches with the thousand-legged march of centuries. These are our rhythms – the cacophony of wars and revolutions.

This is why the revolutionary Futurists are necessary to the proletariat, why it is essential to read this collection of verses on the theme of "the word revolution by the revolutionaries of the word".'

The article 'everyone should read this book' is significant for its precise formulation of Mayakovsky's literary position towards the end of the first year after the Revolution. For the political activist – the revolutionary struggle; for the Red Army fighter – himself and his weapons; for the poet – his word; all three engaged in one and the same action under the slogan 'Long live socialism!' Everyone on his own strip of the front. With this formula, Mayakovsky disassociated himself on the one hand from those 'left' poets who did not participate in the fight for socialism, and on the other from those who failed to understand the significance of the new poetic language in that struggle.

When these two books were handed in for publication, Mayakovsky and Brik also presented the People's Commissar of Education, Lunarcharsky, with a memorandum-report on the publication of the books of the new art.

The list of books in preparation was as follows:

1. *The Theory of Futurism*: a collection of articles concerned with establishing the validity of the revolution in art.
2. *The Practice of Futurism*: a collection of articles elucidating the strategy of Futurism as a particular revolutionary movement.
3. *Studies in the theory of poetic language*. This will consist of

a reprint of revised articles from the first and second editions (1916 and 1917), and new articles on: plot-construction, rhythm, the theory of wordplay, method, the analysis of semantic variations, and also articles clarifying the fundamental methodological errors of Symbolism. The collection will have an additional section of texts and a full bibliographical list of literature on style available in Russian and European languages. Those involved in the work: Brik, Polivanov, Yakubinsky, Shklovsky, and others.

4. 1909-1919: the literature of the decade. A history of artistic achievements 'after Symbolism'.
5. Khlebnikov. Longer poems.
6. Kamensky. Verse.
7. Pasternak. Verse.
8. Mayakovsky. In six issues – everything written by the poet, with a critical essay.
9. *The Will of Millions* – a book.
10. Almanac. 'Our time in verse and sketches'.

In accordance with the agreement, IMO had the right to publish no more than twelve works per year. *The Unsifted Word* and *Mystery-Bouffe* had already appeared, and the list therefore contained ten titles.

Lunarcharsky looked through the list and marked his approval: 'Checked, interesting. Lunarcharsky, 10 February.'

The list had been compiled on the basis of a broad programme. The object was to present the theory and history of Futurism, or more accurately, of all the ultra-left artistic movements in Russian art 'after Symbolism'. The object was to be achieved by the studies on the theory of Futurism and on the history of futurist struggles, and by the collection of literary-artistic works beginning with *Sadok Sudei* (*A Trap for Judges*), which had appeared early in 1910. For the sake of an even decade, the beginnings of Futurism were fixed as 1909, thereby making 1919 the tenth anniversary of its existence – hence the title, 1909-1919. From then on this anthology was referred to as *The Unsifted Word*, second expanded edition.

The publication never appeared, but Mayakovsky transposed the decade 1909-19 onto his own *Complete Works*. This gave rise to suggestions from certain literary critics that Mayakovsky was pushing the beginnings of his literary career back to coincide with the first works of the Futurists, in which he had played no part. The suggestion was based on a misunderstanding. Mayakovsky considered 1909 to mark the beginnings of his literary activity, not because the first Futurist anthology *Sadok Sudei* appeared that year, but because in 1909 he was in Butyrsky prison and while there he filled a whole notebook with verse which was confiscated on his release. He mentions that notebook in his autobiography:

92 ' I read everything, all the newest things. The Symbolists – Bely, Bal'mon. I recognised their formal innovation. But it was alien to me. The themes and the images were not part of my experience. I tried to write as well but about other things. It turned out that to write like that about something other was impossible. It came out stilted and lacrimous. Something like this:

The forests dressed themselves in purple and gold,
Sunlight played on the domes of the churches,
I waited – but days faded into months,
Hundreds of wearisome days.

I filled a whole notebook with this kind of thing. Thanks to the warders – it was confiscated on my release, otherwise I would even have published it! '

Mayakovsky also spoke of this when he appeared at the Krasnaya Presnya (a district of Moscow) Komsomol centre on March 25, 1930, at an evening set up to mark twenty years of his literary activity. Explaining why he had organised the exhibition under the title ' Twenty years' work ' Mayakovsky said:

' In my life there was a break of two or three years when I was not involved with verse, but mainly with painting and sketching. And it was only from roughly 1912-13 that I began publishing in a regular way and literature became my definitive profession.'

The break of two or three years to 1912 was in fact from 1909. The fact that the year of Mayakovsky's first verse attempts coincides with the emergence of the Sadok Sudei group is pure chance.

The second series of books was composed of collections of the work of individual poets – Khlebnikov, Kamensky, Pasternak and Mayakovsky himself. Burlyuk and Aseyev were not included in the list because during those years they were in the Far East.

The first three works were intended to present the theory and practice of the current period. Firstly, *Studies in the theory of poetic language*, a revised and expanded reprint of the two collections of articles published by the Opoyaz (Society for the study of poetic language). This title was eventually published as *Poetics* (1919) in a markedly less comprehensive form than had been envisaged initially.

Then came the Almanach which was something in the nature of an expanded version of the album *Heroes and Martyrs of the Revolution*.

And finally there was the mysterious *Will of Millions – a Book*. This was the original title of what was to be the poem 150,000,000 which Mayakovsky even at this stage was planning to publish without the name of the author.

On July 18, 1919 IMO's representatives, Mayakovsky and Brik,

placed a report before the Commissar of Education Lunarcharsky, 93
which read:

To: *The Commissar of Education, Comrade Lunarcharsky*

On July 27, 1918 at a meeting of the Petrograd Narkompros collegium the question of a subsidy for the IMO publishing organisation came under discussion. The conclusion of the discussion was the collegium's approval of the subsidy and of the plan for the publication of books as presented by IMO; as a result an agreement was signed between Narkompros and the IMO publishing body. The collegium added a note to the effect that future publication would depend on the results of IMO's activities.

In the terms of the agreement we were entitled to publish twelve books annually. At this point, at the end of the allotted one year period, it is possible to assess the results of our work and to make an application for the means to continue our work and complete what still remains outstanding due to reasons beyond our control (namely, the shortage of paper and other printing facilities). IMO originally acquired the following works with a view to publication:

	price	print
	roubles	kopeks number
1. <i>The Unsifted Word – a revolutionary Futurist anthology</i>	6	50 5,000
2. <i>Mystery-Bouffe, 1st ed.</i>	6	50 5,000
3. <i>Mystery-Bouffe, 2nd ed.</i>	6	50 16,000
4. <i>War and the Universe, 2nd ed.</i>	3	75 24,000
5. <i>Poetics</i>		10,000
6. <i>Complete Works of Mayakovsky</i>	20	10,000
7. <i>My Sister, My Life, Pasternak</i>		
8. <i>Complete Works of Khlebnikov</i>		
9. <i>The Unsifted Word, 2nd ed.</i>		
10. <i>To the Russians, Germans, and French</i>		
11. <i>The Art of the Commune</i>		
12. <i>Ivan</i>		

The first six books have been published and distributed by us, which has enabled us to pay the authors' fees.

The remaining six were accepted for publication by us. But since in accordance with the agreement, authors' fees are payable only after the publication of the work, and the work can only be published on receipt of paper from the printing department, the issue of which has for the moment been stopped for all purposes other than agit work, we would ask you to ratify our estimate of 165,324 roubles 30 kopeks; this would enable us to carry on the literary work already under way until such time as the publishing situation has been regularised. The sum in question would be used to cover authors' fees on publication of the work.

The need for the publication of these works is fully supported by the reception they have been given by the mass reader. They

94 *were met with suspicion at first, but in the course of distribution they have captured the attention of readers: Mystery-Bouffe and The Unsifted Word for example, sold only twenty-five copies at first, to such workers' centres as The Communist, and this was on a commission basis; but a month later a total of 3,000 were ordered from the publishers. As a result, The Unsifted Word, of which only 5,000 were printed for fear of lack of sales, now has orders amounting to 30,000 copies. But there were not even enough available to supply all the public libraries, which must be provided with copies in accordance with the decision of the committee of experts.*

It should be mentioned here that our books have not gone into the retail shops but were distributed mainly in the regions in the course of our lectures to workers' meetings on questions of new art.

IMO has no publishing capital since under the agreement our publishing organisation – as purely an association of writers – received only the amount intended to cover authors' fees.

V Mayakovsky, O Brik

Members of the IMO Collegium. 18/VII/1919

The Commissar of Education met IMO's request and granted them a certain amount to cover authors' fees. But Lunarcharsky was unable to help out on the question of the publication of books. Publication therefore ceased.

Early in October 1919, Mayakovsky published his first ROSTA *Window of Satire*. A new stage in his biography had begun – the realisation of the things he had written about in *The Complete Works of Vladimir Mayakovsky*.

'We Futurists have discovered many Americas of the word, now being industriously colonised by all – even writers who fastidiously shy away from us. Soon our achievement will be, not an alphabet under construction, but the alphabet under study. Leaving what has already been written to the schools, I am moving away from what has been done and, by simply stepping over myself, I will write a new book.'

The new book was written by Mayakovsky during two years' work with Agit ROSTA. He called it *Terrible Laughter*.

Translated by Diana Matias