One of the significant aspects of Victory Over the Sun is its concern with the nature of language: rules of grammar and syntax are worked against rather than merely broken, new words are invented and passages written in the Futurist translational language of pure sound. This approach makes the opera difficult to translate with accuracy; at times translation is not possible. Indeed, the linguistic complexity of Khlebnikov's prologue is so great that the version published here can only be considered an approximation.

One of the most obvious problems of translation derives from the Russian use of neuter, masculine and feminine forms. In the prologue, Khlebnikov makes the same word alternately masculine and feminine and gender can, somewhat awkwardly, be indicated to the reader— if not the listener— with parentheses. Kruchenykh, too, changes gender, as in the traveler's song in the first scene, where the neuter word "lake" is given a masculine form. Although this change is meaningful in the context of the opera, it has no English equivalent.

Even the zaum or pure sound passages present problems of translation. In the first scene, Nero and Caligula sings letters of the alphabet. (The singular has just been used, not in emulation of Kruchenykh's destruction of grammar, but because two characters are joined, as Cocteau would do later in his Romeo and Juliet, into one two-headed character.) Since the Russian letters have no exact English equivalent, however, Eva Bartos has chosen to render the Russian sounds phonetically.

In several cases, Kruchenykh creates a noun from a verb, and these changes cannot always be rendered clearly in English. The verb "to sell" can, when converted into a noun indicating a place in the last line of the first scene, become "sellery," but the transformation of "to threaten" into the noun "threatener" in an earlier song by the Traveler is even less pointed and effective. In like manner, the sounds of words are very important, yet no translation can capture the dimensions of both sound and meaning. Sometimes the use of sound is poetical, echoing endings or entire words: in Russian, for example, the words translated as "sword" and "ball" in a speech of the Ill-Intentioned One in the first scene sound almost identical.

On the other hand, it is possible to find English equivalents for many of Kruchenykh's linguistic deformations. Extra consonants, a lack of agreement in number, unusual grammatical order, verbs created from nouns, neologisms and so forth can be rendered with some accuracy. Certainly, the general—if not always the specific—nature and variety of his historically significant work is apparent in translation.

*For an explanation of zaum as well as for information on the artistic movement of which Victory Over the Sun was one manifestation, see Vladimir Markov's important, scholarly and detailed book Russian Futurism: a History (University of California, 1966).
conceived by the dreamer, this heavendweller of deedplaces [f.]
and deedplace [f.] and deedplace [m.].
Between young friendliness of contemplatingude "Willebeslavl"
there is its own prompter.
He will take care to see it that talkers and singers
go smoothly, not dragging themselves alone, but becoming
rulers over their listeners, and this could save the people
of contemplatingude from the anger of Suzdalians.
Lookers painted by an artist, will create a change in
the look of nature.
Seats on clouds and on trees and on a whale shore take
them before the bell rings.
Sounds coming out of the hornhall reach you.
Dream-whistler of foamaker will fill up contemplationness [m.]
Sounders will obey freewheeling-merrymaker.
Seeds of Willebeslavl will fly into life.
Contemplationness [m.] is mouth!
Be a hearing (bigears), contemplator!
And look around.

Victor Khlebnikov

Overture

The layout of the text of Victory Over the Sun follows that of the Russian
publication; the examples of Matyushin's music were copied by hand from
the same source.

ACT 1

First Scene

White and black—white walls and black floor.
Two strong male inhabitants of the future country tear the
curtain.

The First One:

All is well that begins well!

The Second One:

What about the end?

The First One:

There will be no end!
We are striking the universe
We are arming the world against ourselves
We are organizing the slaughter of scarecrows
Plenty of blood
Plenty of sabers
And gun bodies!
We are submerging the mountains!

(They sing.)

We will lock the fat beauties
In the house
Letting these various drunkards
Walk stark-naked there
We don't have the songs
Sighs of prizes
That amused the moldiness
Of rotten naiads!

(The first strong man leaves slowly.)

Second Strong Man:

Sun, you gave birth to passions
And burned with an inflated ray
We will throw a dust sheet over you
And confine you in a boarded-up concrete house!

(nero and caligula, appear combined in one person with his single left
arm held up and bent at a right angle.)
NERO AND CALIGULA:

(threateningly)

Quid surrens
der
He drove without any luggage
Last Thursday
Roast and tear
apart what I didn’t finish
roasting. (He freezes in a noble gesture; then sings. During the singing, the
SECOND STRONG MAN leaves.)

—I am eating a dog
And white-legged
A fried cutlet
Dead potatoes
The place is limited
Stamp be quiet
ZHIIH SHIUH CHUUH

(A TRAVELER THROUGH THE CENTURIES arrives in the wheels of an air-
plane. He is covered with pieces of paper on which are written: stone age,
middle ages, etc. . . . NERO talks into space.)

NERO AND CALIGULA:

It should be forbidden to treat elders this way . . .
The flying machines are unbearable . . .

TRAVELER:

—Denly all became
Suddenly guns

(He sings.)

—The lake sleeps
Plenty of dust
Flood . . . Look
Everything became masculine
The lake is harder than iron
Do not trust old measurements

(ENERO cautiously looks through a lorgnette at the metal of the wheels.)

(The TRAVELER, still singing:)

—The storm began to seeth
The shroud rolls
Quickly, storm-measurer
Do not trust former scales
They will make you sit down on roe
If you don’t catch empty-heel

VICTORY OVER THE SUN

NERO AND CALIGULA:

It should be forbidden to treat elders this way! they like youth
Ligh I looked for a little scum
I looked for a little piece of glasses—everything
was eaten even the bones weren’t left . . .
But what should I do I will leave sideways into the 16th century in quo-
tation marks here.

(He leaves, half-turning to the public.)

Everything is befouled even bones have been vomited

(He takes his boots off, leaves.)

TRAVELER:

—I will ride through all centuries, I was in the 35th where there is power
without violence and rebels fight against the sun and even though there is no
happiness there everybody looks happy and immortal . . . No wonder I am
covered with dust and dia metrical . . . Ghostly kingdom . . . I will ride
through all centuries even though I have lost two baskets until I find the
right place for myself.

(THE ILL-INTENTIONED ONE creeps up and listens.)

—In aleea it is not enough for me in the underground dark . . . Shined
. . . But I traveled all over (to the audience): It smells like a rainy failure.
Sleepwalkers’ eyes are overgrown with tea and blink on skyscrapers and
and on the spiral steps the marketwomen were accommodated . . . The cam-
like factories already threaten us with fried fat and I didn’t ride even
through one side. Something is waiting at the station.

(He sings.)

—Not more not less
How to slaughter threateners
Grab, grab him
Bullet* little pill
— Spinning top

Oh brave me I will finish my trip and leave no track behind . . . The New

THE ILL-INTENTIONED ONE:

—How is that, are you really going to fly?

*Command form of a verb that was formed from the noun.
TRAVELER:
—Why not? If my wheels won't find their nails?

(THE ILL INTENTIIONED ONE shoots, the TRAVELER drives off, shouting:)
——Garrison! Catch you own
Seepseewu Zuh Zuh Zuh!—

(THE ILL INTENTIIONED ONE lies down and lays the gun on top of himself.)
——Even I didn't shoot myself—because of shyness—
But I erected a monument to myself—that's not bad!
I'm the first to have a monument—wonderful! ... A black two-horse carriage is coming right at me.

(A machine gun of the future country appears on stage and stops at a telephone pole.)
——Oh sorrow! What a meaning this appearance has which took its enemy by surprise ... (He meditates.)
I without continuation and imitation.

(The SQUABBLER appears, walks about and sings:) 

Lucost locust
lance drink
drink lance

Do not leave a gun for dinner at dinner time
Nor during the buckwheat porridge course

Won't you cut if off? Chase each other

(THE ILL INTENTIIONED ONE attacks [the SQUABBLER], shoots several times without a word.)

——Attack!

Ha-ha-ha! Enemies, did you get tired or don't you recognize us?
Enemies, attack from the cracks in the grating challenge me to a duel. I broke my throat myself; I will turn into powder, cottonwool, a hook and a loop ... Do you think the hook is more dangerous than cottonwool? (He runs out and returns after a while.)

Headress in the cabbage! ... 
And ... behind the partition! Drag that blue-nosed corpse

(One of the enemies pulls his own hair—crawls on his knees.)

Coward, you are betraying and cheating yourself!

(The SQUABBLER laughs aside.)

SQUABBLER:
——Contemptible, how much grave dust and shavings are in you shake out your fear and wash yourself otherwise...
(One enemy cries.)

ILL-INTENTIIONED ONE:
Oh, the enemy's crown! You consider me a fork and you ridicule my thought but I was waiting and didn't go at you with my sword.
I am the continuation of my tracks.
I was waiting ... I had buried my sword carefully in the earth and I took a new ball and threw it. (He moves like a soccer player.)
Into your herd... Now you are confused... Having fainted you can't distinguish between your smooth heads and the ball you are confused and you hug the bench and swords by themselves go into the earth out of fear the ball frightens them:

If you run unfaithful... you will knock your master's head off and he will run after it inside a flower sellery...

Second Scene

Green walls and floor.

(ENEMY SOLDIERS are passing by in Turkish costumes—one limping in every one hundred soldiers—with flags held low. Some of them are very fat. One of the soldiers comes forward and gives flowers to THE ILL-INTENTED ONE—he tramples on them.)

ILL-INTENTED ONE:

To come out to meet yourself with a skewbald horse with a gun under your arm... Eh!

I have been looking for you for a long time and finally a perspired mush-
room—

(He starts fighting with himself. Appears SINGERS in sports clothes and STRONG MEN. One of the SPORTSMEN sings:)

The flower world doesn't exist anymore
Sky cover yourself with rot
(I am not talking to the enemies
but to you friends)
Every birth of autumn days
And blemished fruit of summer
Not about these, the newest bard
Will sing

FIRST STRONG MAN:

—Go millions of streets—
Or darkness will be truly Russian
Crunching of cart runners
And—should I say it?—Narrow heads
Unexpectedly for them
The sleepy-heads began to fight
And raised so much dust
It seemed Port-Author was being taken

VICTORY OVER THE SUN

CHORUS:
The triumphal car moves
Two-horsed car of victories
What a delight to fall
Under its wheels

FIRST STRONG MAN:

—The mature victory
Has been sealed with wax
Nothing matters to us
The sun lies slaughtered!
Start the fight with guns
Crush them with your fingernails
Then I will say: Here you are
Strong men boweeey!

CHORUS:

Let the red-rot horses
Trample
And hair will curl
Into the smell of skin...

SECOND STRONG MAN:

The salt crawls toward the herdsmen
The horse fixed the bridge in the ear
Who keeps you at your posts
Run along the black ribs
Through steam and smoke
And little hooks of cranes
People stood on the steps
Tea-plant waves with switches

FIRST STRONG MAN:

—Do not cross the firing line
The metal bird is flying
The wood-goblin is flapping his beard
Buried under a hoof
The violets groan
Under the firm heel
And the stick becomes quiet
In the sepulchral puddle
FIRST and SECOND STRONG MAN:

(sing):

The sun bid
Darkness fell
We will all take knives
And wait locked up

(curtain)

Third Scene

Black walls and floor.
(GRAVEDIGGERS walk in. Their upper half is white and red. Their lower half is black.)
(They sing:)

To smash a turtle skull
To fall on a trundle
Of blood-thirsty turnips
Welcome the cage
The fat bed bug smells like a grave...
Black leg...
A flattened coffin swings
A lace of shavings curls.

Fourth Scene

SOMEONE TALKING ON THE TELEPHONE:
—What? The sun is imprisoned!
Thank you.—

(People walk in carrying the sun—they are so crowded together that one can't see it.)

ONE:
—We came from Tenth Countries
Frightful...

Know that the earth doesn't turn around.

MANY:
—We pulled the sun out by its fresh roots
These fat ones became permeated with arithmetic
Here it is look

VICTORY OVER THE SUN

ONE:
—We ought to establish a holiday: A day for the victory over the sun.
(They sing:)

CHORUS:
—We are free
Broken sun...
Long live darkness!
And black gods
And their favorite—pig!

ONE:

The sun of the iron century has died! The broken guns have fallen and
wheels—rims bend like wax under gazes!

SOMEONE TALKING ON THE TELEPHONE:

What? . . . Someone hoping for gun fire will be cooked in the porridge
today!

Listen!

ONE:
—For more compact stairs
Forged not in fire
Nor from iron nor marble
Nor air slabs

In fumes and smoke
And fat dust
The blows strengthen
We become as strong as pigs
Our faces are dark

Our light comes from inside
We are warmed by the dead udder
Of the red dawn

BRRRUN    BRRRUN

(curtain)
ACT II

Fifth Scene

TENTH COUNTRY

Exterior walls of houses appear but the windows go toward the inside in a strange way as if they are pipes drilled through the walls. Many windows, placed in irregular rows and they seem to be moving in a suspicious way.

("MOTLEY EYE" appears:)

The past is leaving
As quick steam
And slides the bolt shut

And the skull in the form of a bench skipped through the doorway

(MOTLEY EYE runs away watching the skull.)

(The NEW ONES appear from one side of the stage, the COWARDS from the other side.)

THE NEW ONES:

We shot into the past

THE COWARDS:

was something left?

— not a sign

— is emptiness deep?

— it ventilates the whole town. Everyone breathes lightly and many don't know what to do with themselves because of that extraordinary lightness. Some tried to drown, the weak ones went mad, saying: we might become terrible and strong you see.

That oppressed them.

THE COWARDS:

One shouldn't show them blazed trails, keep control of the crowd.

THE NEW ONES:

One brought his grief, take it I don’t need it anymore! he also imagined that his insides were lighter than an udder

let him spin

(He shouts.)

ELOCUTIONIST:

how extraordinary life is without a past
With danger but without regrets and memories...
Forgot are mistakes and failures boringly squeezing into one's ear you now become like a clear mirror or a rich reservoir where in a clear cave light-hearted goldfish wiggle their tails like grateful Turks

(The FAT MAN enters. He becomes anxious—he has been sleeping.)

FAT MAN:

My head is two steps behind my body—necessarily!
It continually lags behind!

Ah annoyance!

Where is the sunset? I will be off... the lights are on... everything is light in my house... quick one must be off... (He picks something up) a piece of airplane or a samovar (He tries it with his teeth)

hydrogen sulphide!
It looks like a piece from hell I will take it and put it aside... (He hides.)

ELOCUTIONIST:

(in a hurry)

I want to relate everything—recall the past
full of the melancholy of mistakes...

breaking the bending knees... let's recall it and compare it with the present... what a joy:

liberated from the weight of the earth's gravitation we whimsically arrange our belongings as if a rich kingdom were moving

(The FAT MAN sings:)

being shy to shoot oneself
It's difficult on a journey

Frightening-gun and gallows

Control the roe...
ELOCUTIONIST:

(interrupting:)
or don't you feel how two balls live: one—a little sour and a little warm—is corked and the other one gushes out of the cave like an overturned volcano...

(Music.)
they are incompatible... (Music of strength)
only gnawed-at skulls run on just four legs—likely they are donkeys' skulls... (He walks away.)

Sixth Scene

FAT MAN:
10th countries... all the windows are built toward the inside, the house is fenced in try to live here if you can
What 10th countries! well I don't know I would have to live locked up one can't move one's head or hand something will become unscrewed or displaced and how that damned axe works clipping all of us we walk around bald and it's not hot it's only humor it's such a nasty climate that even cabbage and onions don't grow and a market—where is one? they say on the islands...
I wish to climb a ladder into that house's brain and to open there No. 35 door—oh they are miracles!
yes, everything here is not that simple though at first glance it seems to be a chest of drawers—and that's all! but then you roam and roam (He climbs up somewhere.)
no, not here all the routes become entangled and lead up toward the earth but there aren't any side paths... hello is there anybody of our side there... hand me string or voice shout... shishshish! guns made of birch—imagine!

OLD TIMER:
here, please this entrance will take you straight back... the other one doesn't exist or goes straight up to the earth

FAT MAN:
—but it's frightful

OLD TIMER:
—do as you wish...

VICTORY OVER THE SUN

FAT MAN:
I'd like to wind my watch
Look here dummy which way is your watch running? the hand?

ATTENTIVE WORKER:
both backwards at the same time before dinner and now only the tower, gears—you see?
(OLD TIMER leaves.)

FAT MAN:
oh, I am about to fall (He peeps inside the watch: the tower the sky the streets are upside down— as in a mirror.)
where should I pawn the watch?

WORKER:
do not dream they won't spare you! Why figure out yourself—speed you know is effective, if one puts the wagon filled up with old boxes on each of two molars and powder it with yellow sand and put all this in action then you will see yourself...
the simplest thing is that they will collide with some pipe in a chair but what if they don't? you see all the people there silenced so high that they don't care about how an engine feels how its hoofs and other parts feel it is natural!
the scythe's stoke roam
when it will over-take an antelope
but the whole point is that
nobody is going to risk his headope
but however I am leaving everything as before (He leaves.)
(The FAT MAN from a window:)
yes, yes, very likely yesterday there was a telegraph pole here but today it is a snack bar, and tomorrow there will be bricks, I presume.
that happens here every day nobody knows where the bus stop is and where they will dine hello you move your feet—(He leaves through an upper window.)
(Propeller noise behind the stage. A YOUNG MAN comes rushing in: frightened; he sings a pretty-bourgeois song:)

you you youk
you you youk
rgr rgr rgr
Petty Bourgeois Song

\[ \text{Zot Zot} \quad \text{Zot} \quad \text{u} \quad \text{u} \quad \text{ik} \quad \text{grr} \quad \text{grr} \quad \text{grr} \quad \text{een} \quad \text{een} \]

\[ \text{Dr dr} \quad \text{Ruhd} \quad \text{Ruhd} \quad \text{oo} \quad \text{oo} \quad \text{Kuhnh Kuhnh Likuh Nah} \]

*Sounds in first two bars are different from those in the text.

VICTORY OVER THE SUN

I am making my way quietly
on the dark road
on the narrow path
a cow under my arm
black cows
sign of mystery
under a silk saddle
a hidden treasure
I secretly
admire it
in the silence a thin needle
hides in a neck
(SPORTSMEN march in time to the lines of the buildings:)
here . . . everything runs without resistance
here all roads come from all directions
locomotiving hundreds of little hoofs
overtaking and deceiving awkward people
by simply suffocating them
beware of motley eyed
monsters . . .
the future countries will exist
if someone is worried by wires he must turn back
(They sing:)
from the height of skyscrapers
how freely
carriages pour
even case-shots don't strike as strongly
from everywhere self-propels come icing
death graves glasses and posters
footsteps are hanged
on sign-boards
people run down
like tumbling derby hats
(Music—machine rumble)
and crooked curtains
overturn window panes
grr zhmah
kmah
one seerg vrezoo
gweh . . .
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