

## 2×2=5: Protests and Experiments in Revolution-Era Russian Poetry

In 1949, George Orwell popularized the household slogan “two plus two equals five” in his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Almost three decades earlier, however, the Russian avant-garde poet Vadim Shershenevich used a similar slogan as the name of his prominent Imaginist treatise:  $2 \times 2 = 5$ . Despite some outward resemblances, these slogans possess minimum equivalence. Orwell’s one gestures at totalitarianism’s penetrating omnipresence and is phrased as a memorable popular culture quip. Shershenevich’s, in contrast, represents a nonmainstream, anti-popular voice in a teeming post-revolutionary milieu. My collection, thus, centres on uncovering the richness of convention-defying poetic output in revolution-era Russia and re-orienting our understanding of 20<sup>th</sup> century’s avant-garde.

I place particular focus on acquiring Russian avant-garde poets’ works from the late 1910s to the mid-1920s. This time-period saw an unprecedented surge of artistic output in Russia, with one critic-poet commenting on his swollen job demands: “presumably, it will soon be necessary to review not those who write poetry, but those who do not” [Bik, 1922].<sup>1</sup> My collection, therefore, strives to capture this zeitgeist through encompassing a spectrum of contemporaneous poetic movements: Imaginism, Zaumism, Futurism, Ego-Futurism, Moscow Expressionism and Acmeism. These movements and their authors, at times competing against or even opposing each other, maintained diverse creative visions and responses to the “ten days that shook the world.” Accordingly, I am interested in illuminating their more dissident dimensions that receive inadequate present-day attention.

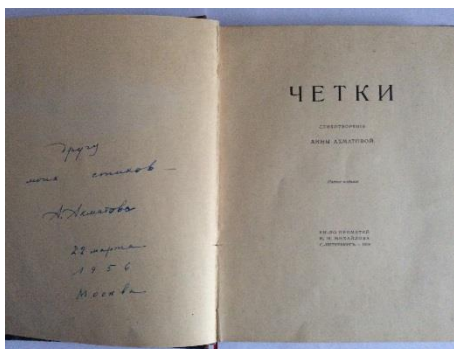
For instance, the Imaginists poets in my collection [e.g. Mariengof, Shershenevich, Kusikov, Gruzinov and others] dismissed utilitarian “mass” art, clear-cut given truths and embraced individualistic, free-form expression. For them, 1917 had sparked a pseudo-revolution that manufactured “clichés” from a “superficially external and fashionable point of view” [Mariengof et al., 1924].<sup>2</sup> Other movements I collect, such as Zaumism, undercut the ideological status quo through stressing primitivism and ever-elusive meaning. Of course, most of this artistic production was, in some sense, inseparable from the revolution: arising or drawing inspiration in its wake and succumbing to its repression and persecution. Thus, works in my collection were often circulated clandestinely in small numbers at great risk to their authors’ freedom, safety or lives.

My interest in revolution-era Russian poetry stems from its capacity to rejuvenate the innovativeness and heroism of 20<sup>th</sup> century’s avant-garde. In particular, much analogous, period output elsewhere has been culturally co-opted and brought into the mainstream. However, the poets and movements in my collection have, to various degrees, eluded these processes and outcomes. Their work thus retains a raw, estranging freshness that is invigorating to grasp and explore. Moreover, this exploration can cast new insight on the “historic” avant-garde’s 21st century relevance and contribute to the Imaginists’, and others’, mission of *eventually* achieving mass understanding. Consequently, I want to grow my collection through acquiring more works of Khlebnikov [co-creator of Zaum] and the minor Russian avant-garde poetic groups, including the Biocosmists, Luminists and Centrifugists.

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Bik, “Otzivi o Knigah,” *Pechat i Revolutsia*, 1(1), (1922), p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Mariengof et al., “Vosem Punktov,” *Gostinitsa*, 1(3), (1924).



**Akhmatova, Anna.** 1889 – 1966. *Chetki*. [Четки / *The Rosary*]. Fifth Edition. St Petersburg: KN-VO Prometei, 1918.

**Description:** Rebound in hardcover [original wrappers preserved], 140 pp., 21.3 cm x 16.2 cm, containing author's inscription: "To the friend of my poetry - A. Akhmatova 22 March 1956 Moscow."

**Condition:** Minor edge wear to boards, hinges tight, internal pages clean.

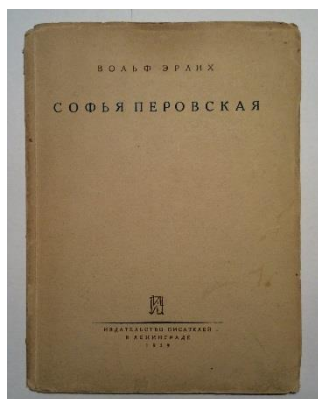
**Comment:** This work represents a turning point in Russian poetry, as Akhmatova sought to move past Symbolism's metaphysical vagueness, which she wrote is "no doubt... a phenomenon of the XIX century." Thus, in *The Rosary*, Akhmatova incorporates greater realism, intimacy and psychological acuteness to her poetic voice and intonation. Of particular interest is the work's allusion to Akhmatova's private anguish and prayer for "the poor, for the lost" [*Rosary*, 49]. Later, this was to grow into her embodiment of national pain in works such as *Requiem* [1935-1961]. *The Rosary* was popular in the 1910s though met a more unsympathetic reception from the Soviet press. Indeed, critic C. Rodov [1922] wrote: "Everyone knows that Akhmatova is a mystic, a monastician, reactionary in her ideology and therefore clearly hostile to us."

**Aseev, Nikolay, David Burluk, Vasily Kamensky et al.** *Rzhanoie slovo. Revolutsionnaya khrestomatiya futuristov*. [Ржаное слово. Революционная хрестоматия футуристов / *The Rye Word. The Revolutionary Reader of the Futurists*]. First Edition. Petrograd: IMO, 1918.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 58 pp., 26.4 cm x 19.2 cm [one of 5000 copies], wrappers illustrated by Vladimir Mayakovsky [1893 – 1930].

**Condition:** Rubbing and minor soiling to wrappers, small tears along wrappers' edge, joints worn but holding, slight internal browning.

**Comment:** This work, serving as a "revolutionary reader," represents the Futurists' attempt to associate their poetic revolution with the Russian revolution of October 1917. Hence, the authors position *The Rye Word* as a unique Russian construct, disassociated from Italian Futurist Marinetti, who they claim has "set a political task - the revival of Italy." Moreover, the work's rye theme draws on traditional, Old Russia perceptions of bread as the people's spiritual sustenance. However, in the Futurists' case, art takes on this divine function and its "bread [becomes] shared equally" [Burluk] or, in other words, open to mass consumption. Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar for Education, originally championed the work and wrote its preface. Lenin, nonetheless, showed such opposition that, in 1924, even Lunacharsky began stating, "Futurism [is] an offspring of the decay of capitalism."



**Ehrlich, Wolf.** 1902 – 1937. *Sofya Perovskaya*. [Софья Перовская / *Sophia Perovskaya*]. First Edition. Leningrad: Izd-vo Pisataley v Leningrade, 1929.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 35 pp., 17.7 cm x 13 cm [one of 1600 copies].

**Condition:** Minor spotting and browning to wrappers, light wear to wrapper extremities, joints tight, contents clean.

**Comment:** This work is an example of civic poetry that examines the actions and era of the revolutionary Sophia Perovskaya [1853 - 1881]. Its importance stems from countering certain Soviet assumptions concerning revolutions and the post-1917 Russian leadership. Ehrlich thus suggests that the esteemed Russian revolutionaries of Sophia Perovskaya's time have no clear 20<sup>th</sup> century equivalents. Likewise, *Literaturniy Sovremennik* [1933: 155] observed that the work does not depict "the Leninist concept of the people's revolution as a reflection of the peasant protest [or the] international significance of... *Narodnaya Volya*." It is also worth noting that *Sophia Perovskaya*

recalled Aleksandr Blok's [1880 - 1921] civic poetics, which had received no comparable treatment up to this point. Pasternak too gave *Sophia Perovskaya* praise, writing: "everything in it - is real poetry."

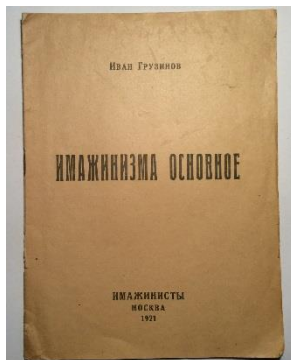


**Gerasimov, Mikhail.** 1889-1937. *Zheleznye Tsvety*. [Железные цветы / *The Iron Flowers*]. First Edition. Samara: Tsentropechat, 1919.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 95 pp., 17.7 cm x 11 cm, wrapper illustrated by Georgy Riazhsk [1895–1952], previous owner's marks on wrapper.

**Condition:** Some spotting and soiling to wrappers and opening pages, minor discolouration at wrappers' edges, joints rubbed, tear to spine top, contents generally clean.

**Comment:** This is a prime example of "industrial" poetry that praises the coming of a pseudo-mechanistic paradise. Gerasimov merges nature with metal-concrete to create a new, and more potent, aesthetic standard. Hence, in the post-revolution order, one becomes "enamoured and in love" with the "chime of copper pines" or the sight of "iron flowers." Of importance is Gerasimov's suggestion that the people themselves enabled these phenomena. This thus represents the revolution's power to ignite the masses' "proud daring" and forge a better society. *The Iron Flowers* was popular on release. However, Gerasimov soon grew disillusioned with the revolution's outcomes, leaving the Communist Party in 1921 and the proletarian poetry movement in 1923. Therefore, I include this work to illustrate the premature enthusiasm in certain Russian poetic circles that transitioned into a dissident stance.



**Gruzinov, Ivan.** 1893 - 1942. *Imazhinizma osnovnoe*. [Имажинизма основное / *The Basics of Imaginism*]. First Edition. Moscow: Imazhinisty, 1921.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 22 pp., 19.5 cm x 26.5 cm.

**Condition:** Light wear and curling to wrappers' extremities, minor tear at spine's top, joints tight, insides clean and bright.

**Comment:** This is a theoretical work that examines Imaginism's core principles. In it, Gruzinov underscores that "For a poet, as for any artist... only form exists. It is the business of the receptive reader to find content in a work of art." Accordingly, in Gruzinov's view, Imaginism is to prioritize image construction and combination, done in an organic, non-mechanical manner. This serves to eradicate rigidity and give Imaginist verses a melodic thrust. From this standpoint, Gruzinov positions Imaginism as a successor to Russian poets such as Pushkin and Derzhavin. *The Basics of Imaginism*, however, also exposes the deep, theoretical contentions among the Imaginists. For instance, Shershenevich supported Imaginism's mechanistic elements, while Yesenin argued Imaginism had no soul for ignoring, or not incorporating, Russia's contemporary character.

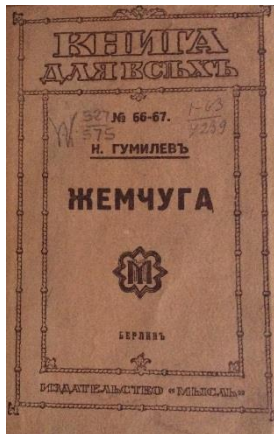
**Gruzinov, Ivan.** 1893 – 1942. *Zapadnyy snov: Lirika* [Западня снов: лирика / *Dreams' Trap: Lyric Poetry*]. First Edition. Moscow: Imazhinisty, 1921.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 10 pp., 16 cm x 12.5 cm.

**Condition:** Occasional light soiling to wrappers and internal content, minor rubbing to wrappers' extremities, joints tight.

**Comment:** This poem collection, in part dedicated to other Imaginists, touches on the uneasiness of contemporary times. Gruzinov employs free verse and draws out, at various points, either the emptiness or apocalyptic destructiveness that resides beneath everyday rural and urban existence. Of particular interest is the poem dedicated to Mariengof, in which Gruzinov juxtaposes images of the Kremlin with the "clanks and pale cries" of the "guillotine's knives." It is important to stress that such verse, in conjunction with the entire Imaginist movement, met severe criticism from the state. Indeed, the People's Commissar for Education, Lunacharsky, wrote in 1921: "all the [books] released recently

by the so-called Imaginists, with the undoubted talent of the authors, constitute a malignant outrage over their own talent, and on mankind, and over modern Russia.”



**Gumilyov, Nikolay.** 1886 – 1921. *Zhemchuga. Kniga dlya vseh № 66-67.* [Жемчуга. Книга для всех № 66-67 / *The Pearls. Book for All № 66-67*]. Third Edition. Berlin: Mysl, 1921.

**Description:** Rebound in hardcover [original wrappers preserved], 104 pp., 14.5 cm x 9.5 cm.

**Condition:** Board extremities lightly scuffed, faint water staining to wrappers, occasional pencil marks, darkening and minor soiling to internal text.

**Comment:** This work marks a milestone in Acmeism’s development. Gumilyov had questioned Russian Symbolism’s sombre, inward abstractness and, in *The Pearls*, began to formulate new poetic principles. Hence, he brings precision, compactness and razor-sharpness to his prose and images. Likewise, he shows a stronger appreciation of international culture and non-

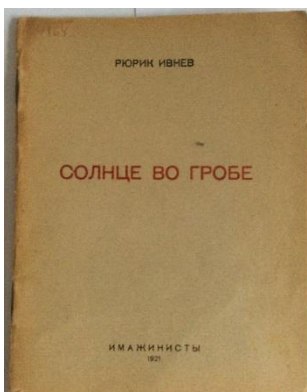
Russian poets that inspired him. As a result, *The Pearl’s* poems criss-cross from Africa to Asia and epigraphs from Alfred de Vigny and others scatter the text. The guiding motif is death, though the transition to warm colours over *The Pearl’s* four sections [“Black Pearls,” “Grey Pearls,” “Pink Pearls” and “Romantic Flowers”] projects a hopeful tone. Gumilyov’s works were banned in Soviet times and this 1921 edition was thus printed in Berlin and [presumably] illegally imported.

**Ivanov, Georgy.** 1894 – 1958. *Lampada. Sobranie sochinenii.* [Лампада. Собрание стихотворений / *The Icon Lamp. Collection of Poems*]. First Edition. Petrograd: Mysl, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 123 pp., 17.4 cm x 11 cm [one of 1000 copies].

**Condition:** Light staining and soiling to wrappers, lower spine rubbed, crease near spine edge, internally clean.

**Comment:** This work was produced the same year Ivanov emigrated from Russia. It is a characteristic example of Acmeism and centres on the theme of sunset - which stands in sharp contrast to the “twilight of freedom” metaphor Ivanov used in 1917 to describe the revolution. Nonetheless, *Icon Lamp* is more preoccupied with spiritual sunsets that, in this case, represent Ivanov’s momentary illumination of his concealed, departing “self.” Moreover, the featured poems share Acmeist traits: attention to ordinary events [e.g. luring carnival calls], clear, polished diction and deep invocation and understanding of cultural customs. When abroad, Ivanov suggested that his “return to Russia” will come in “verses.” This was indeed the case when censorship of his work weakened in the 1980s.



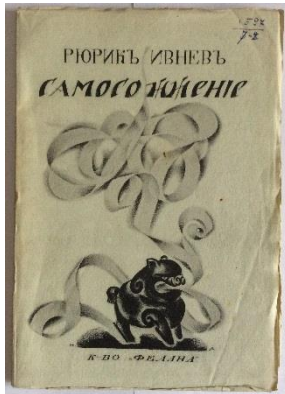
**Ivnev, Rurik.** 1891 – 1981. *Solntse vo grobye.* [Солнце во гробе / *The Sun in the Tomb*]. First Edition. Moscow: Imazhinisty, 1921.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 29 pp., 18 cm x 13.5 cm [one of 1000 copies].

**Condition:** Minor darkening to wrappers, faint rust stains near joints, light wear along spine, insides generally clean.

**Comment:** This work [a collection of 25 poems] represents an unusual cross between Imaginism, Ego-Futurism and Symbolism. It centres on the spiritual turbulence of the protagonist, depicted as “I” across the poems, who embodies the pain, commotion and irrationalism emanating from the revolution. Escaping this status quo, however, is impossible, as the

protagonist’s endeavour to connect with God [i.e. receive forgiveness and greater understanding] and the inner “self” always proves elusive. Meanwhile, the presence of multiple poetic movements in the text mimics Rurik’s own ongoing search for a creative voice. Accordingly, during his time with the Imaginists, when *The Sun in the Tomb* was published, Rurik was known as “a wandering kidney of Imaginism” [Shershenevich, 1920].



**Ivnev, Rurik.** 1891 – 1981. *Samosozhzhenie: Kniga stikhov.* [Самосожжение: Книга стихов: 1912-1916 / Self-immolation: A Book of Poems: 1912-1916]. Petrograd: Phelana, 1917.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 110 pp., 21.5 cm x 15.5 cm, wrappers illustrated by Nathan Altman [1889 – 1970].

**Condition:** Scuffing to wrappers' edges, crease and pen marks at front wrapper corners, joints tight, insides clean.

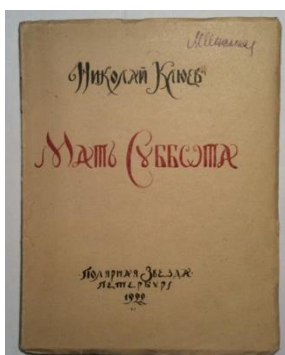
**Comment:** This Ego-Futurist work represents Ivnev's response to the turmoil engulfing Russia in the immediate years preceding the revolution. In it, Ivnev focuses on the inner feelings of the poems' protagonist, who experiences anxiety, insignificance and yearnings to "shake the burden of life at once / And lips to cling to the fire." This is interspersed with religious imagery or verses that mimic the rhythm of prayer. However, purposelessness remains ubiquitous. Indeed, towards *Self-immolation's* end, even Ivnev's future Imaginist circle, and Esenin in particular, is subjected to tacit destruction. As a consequence, this also hints at Ivnev's non-commitment to any poetic movement or mentor. Meanwhile, the overhanging theme of fire or burning trails through Ivnev's other works, such as *Flame is Raging* [1913], *Gold of Death* [1916] and *The Sun in the Tomb* [1921].

**Khlebnikov, Velimir.** 1885 – 1922. *Zangezi.* [Зангези / Zangezi]. First Edition. Moscow: Upr. OGES, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 35 pp., 24 cm x 16.5 cm [one of 2000 copies], wrappers illustrated by Petr Miturich [1887 – 1956], printed without a title page.

**Condition:** Wrappers slightly cropped, fraying and tearing to wrappers' edges with occasional losses, faint rust stains at hinges, internally clean.

**Comment:** *Zangezi* opens a new avant-garde genre, the supersaga, and reads as a sacred text anticipating our civilization's next, impending phase. Khlebnikov thus depicts its enigmatic protagonist, Zangezi, as a nationless prophet who reveals a supreme universal language accessible and comprehensible to all people, animals and the Gods. Hence, it possesses powers to unite, as Zangazi notes "this language will unite [us] once, maybe soon," and its semantic essence, or "secret [building] blocks," can give insight into the cosmos and the "plaques of [human] fate." Of equal interest is Khlebnikov's depiction of this "divine" or "stellar" tongue [an example of Zaum], which eschews traditional linguistic patterns and so necessitates pro-active self-decipherment. Together with a unique structure, involving autonomous passages assembled into twenty-one architectural-like planes, *Zangezi* remains one of the era's most innovative avant-garde works.



**Klyuev, Nikolai.** 1884 – 1937. *Mat subota.* [Мать суббота / Mother Saturday]. First Edition. Petersburg: Polarnaia Zvezda, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 36 pp., 14.7 cm x 11.3 cm [one of 3000 copies], previous owner's mark on wrapper.

**Condition:** Minimal wear to wrappers' extremities, wrappers very lightly stained, joints tight, insides clean and bright.

**Comment:** This work, a prime example of "new peasant" poetry, explores the idealistic and archetypal aspirations of Russia's rural-dwellers. Klyuev thus constructs agrarian Russia as a site of peace and abundance, cherishing simple pleasures. The mother theme, meanwhile, serves two purposes. First, it points to the mystic power of the earth [i.e. soil], which was idolized as a mothering, caring goddess in ancient times. Second, it symbolises the enduring folk spirit, as *Mat subota's* mother is revealed to be a countryside weaver [i.e. a persona that, in old Russia, was the disseminator and keeper of popular mythology]. These poetic emphases, then, contrast with other Russian avant-garde movements that Klyuev and his circle saw as too metropolitan and soulless. However, this did not deter criticism from Soviet authorities, who portrayed the "new peasant" poets as "kulak" saboteurs.

**Kusikov, Aleksandr.** 1896 – 1977. *Поэма поэм*. [*Поэма поэм / Poem of Poems*]. Second Edition. Moscow: Imazhinisty, 1920.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 31 pp., 19.5 cm x 13.5 cm, wrappers and internal illustrations by Boris Erdman [1899–1960].

**Condition:** Minor browning and soiling to wrappers, top corner crease on front wrapper, light wear along spine, joints tight, insides generally clean.

**Comment:** This work examines the nature of passion within the context of post-revolutionary norms and practices. It draws its name from Solomon’s “Songs of Songs,” which positions love as a core component of the human experience and celebrates [in the Imaginists’ view] its carnal aspects. The *Poem of Poems* thus associates its protagonist’s [i.e. Kusikov] love interest with pertinent biblical references: “The same shoulders / From “Song of Songs””. As a consequence, this marks a clear rejection of passion as a site of sin or alienation and repression. Indeed, Kusikov suggests that passionate embraces act as occasions of self-understanding and exposition. The Soviet authorities, however, saw this view as too “bourgeois.” Moreover, *Poem of Poems* ran in contrast to Shershenevich’s “Song of Songs” [1920], which explored passion through machine language.

**Kusikov, Aleksandr.** 1896 – 1977. *Koევangelieran*. [*Коевангелиеран / Kogospelran*]. First Edition. Moscow: Pleiada, 1920.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 32 pp., 27 cm x 18 cm, wrappers and internal illustrations by Boris Erdman [1899–1960].

**Condition:** Wrappers rubbed at fore-edge and lightly soiled, minor spine wear and tearing at extremities, hinges tight, insides clean.

**Comment:** In this work, Kusikov attempts to merge the Gospel with the Koran to attain spiritual salvation, or rejuvenation, among the post-revolution chaos. His soul appears to mimic the contemporary struggles and incongruities in Russian society and thus [despite being beyond the government’s direct reach] exists in an uneasy state: “Two Hearts, Two Hearts / Two hearts we live with.” Religion, however, can dispel this inner distress [bringing cultural / moral harmony], though the revolution has conclusively destroyed its “old” forms. Hence, a new faith system is required and Kusikov sees a convergence between Christianity and Islam as producing cohesive, universal principles. This idea stemmed from Kusikov’s own apparent roots, which he traced to Islamic Circassian frontiersmen, and the Russian avant-garde’s appreciation of the Koran’s lyricism and free expression. Indeed, Khlebnikov [1920] even suggested that “the Koran is a collection of verses.”



**Kusikov, Aleksandr, Konstantin Balmont and Antony Sluchanovsky.** *Zhemchuzhnyi Kovrik*. [*Жемчужный коврик / Pearl Mat*]. First Edition. Moscow: Chikhi-Pihi, 1920.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 62 pp., 21.7 cm x 14 cm, wrappers illustrated by Boris Erdman [1899–1960]

**Condition:** Wrappers lightly soiled and scuffed at extremities, some tearing and wear along spine, hinges holding, minor darkening to inside pages.

**Comment:** *Pearl Mat* explores, in part, Kusikov’s tension-laden relationship with Russia, which forms its most interesting element. Thus, it sees Kusikov contrast his “Motherland - the rebellious Russia” with his Kuban [i.e. Southern

Russia] birth place. This raises extra questions over urban-rural disparities and Kusikov’s Muslim-Christian identity. Indeed, the work’s very name refers to a Muslim prayer mat that, according to Kusikov’s other poems, becomes an “asphalt mat” in the alienating Russian cities. Moreover, it is worth noting that Kusikov privately printed the *Pearl Mat* through his own publishing house, Chikhi-Pihi. This points to the informal, clandestine nature of much Russian avant-garde output. Hence, Lunacharsky [1921] decried, “these books are published illegally... [their] paper and printers are obtained... [unlawfully]. Glavpolitprosvet has decided to... bring to justice the people [behind]... these shameful books.”



**Mariengof, Anatoly.** 1897 – 1962. *Razocharovanie*. [*Разочарование / Disappointment*]. First Edition. Moscow: Imzhinisty, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 16 pp., 17 cm x 13 cm, wrappers illustrated by Georgy Echeistov [1897-1946].

**Condition:** Light bumping and creasing to wrappers' fore-edge, wrappers slightly soiled, insides clean.

**Comment:** This work illuminates the deep and rich contentions over the fundamentals of poetry within the Imaginist movement. Mariengof dedicated it to his Imaginist "brother" Yesenin, who had criticized Mariengof's views on poetry's nature and purpose. In particular, Yesenin put into question Mariengof's, and the Imaginists' as a whole, excessive preoccupation with images and no "feeling of the homeland" [1921] which made their output "too non-serious" [1920]. Thus, in *Disappointment*, Mariengof reacts to these criticisms and makes his protagonist wonder: "Old country with a cold gray sky, / What does someone else's song say to you?... "Not the mother, but the motherland, - will you leave after me/ Stone?" These contentions point to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the Russian avant-garde.

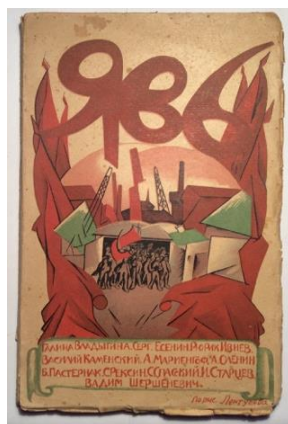


**Mariengof, Anatoly.** 1897 – 1962. *Razvratnichaet s vdohnoveniem*. [*Развратничает с вдохновением / Fornicate with Inspiration*]. First Edition. Moscow: Imzhinisty, 1921.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 14 pp., 21.5 cm x 16.5 cm [one of 1000 copies], wrapper design by Georgy Yakulov [1884-1928], former owner's inscription on cover.

**Condition:** Wrappers darkened and soiled at extremities, rust stains at hinges, occasional browning, spotting and staining throughout text.

**Comment:** This work showcases Mariengof's preoccupation with creating intolerable cognitive pressure through juxtaposing "incompatible," sometimes repellent, images. Hence, throughout *Fornicate with Inspiration*, Mariengof includes such seeming dichotomies as: "ashes of flesh," "my manly breasts" and "waves of metal sobbing." Mariengof also writes this work as a pseudo-memoir, a "genre" he favoured most. As a consequence, his images attain a stronger factual grounding. This is pertinent as their strain or shock-inducing character, in tandem with Mariengof's nihilism and anti-aestheticism, thus delivers a piercing denunciation of the post-revolution order. Even so, Mariengof is considered the less experimental Imaginist due to his emphasis on content over unorthodox poetic structure.



**Mariengof, Anatoly et al.** *Yav*. [*Явь / Reality*]. First Edition, Moscow: Vtoraya Gosudarstvennaya Tipografia, 1919.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 69 pp., 27 cm x 17.5 cm [one of 11000 copies], wrapper based on illustration by Aristarkh Lentulov [1882 – 1943].

**Condition:** Some spotting, darkening and soiling to wrappers, wrappers' edges scuffed and frayed, hinges tight, insides clean with occasional staining.

**Comment:** This work represents an important milestone in Imaginism's creation and development. It came out in the weeks surrounding the Imaginists' publication of their founding manifesto in *Sovetskaya Strana* and *Sirena*. Mariengof was *Yav's* principle contributor [14 of the work's 40 poems were his], while other featured Imaginists included Shershenevich, Rurik and Esenin. Content-wise, *Yav's* poems centre on revolutionary themes, though in a somewhat ironic and anti-aesthetic manner. For instance, though the opening poem proposes the revolution "be praised with excitement, desperately," consequent compositions underscore its bloodthirstiness and

ugliness: “blood spit shamefully... the people will swallow the people.” Moreover, Mariengof equates the revolution’s voice to an animal’s “deafeningly yapping.”

**Mayakovsky, Vladimir.** 1893 – 1930. *Liubliu*. [Люблю / I Love]. First Edition. MAF, Seria Poetov, No. 1. Moscow: Vkhutemas, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 47 pp., 16.8 cm x 13.2 cm [one of 2000 copies].

**Condition:** Wrappers very lightly soiled, some fraying and occasional minor tearing to spine, hinges firm, insides clean.

**Comment:** This work sees Mayakovsky conduct a rare, upbeat exploration of love that clashes with the grim and tormented post-revolution order. In it, Mayakovsky eschews the mechanistic Soviet vocabulary for the organic, intimate language of “unchanged and true” love. However, despite not carrying a strong dissident message, *I Love* and its publication highlights the unwelcoming environment enclosing Russia’s poetic avant-garde. In particular, Latvian police confiscated the Riga edition of *I Love* in 1922, noting its “immoral influence” and that its publishers “be held liable.” Moreover, the work met a negative reception from Soviet authorities and critics. For example, state journalist and former LEF [Left Front of the Arts] member Nikolai Chuzhak remarked, in 1925, that *I Love* is “lyrical rubbish from today’s point of view.” Lenin [1921] also labelled some of Mayakovsky’s output as “rubbish, stupid, stupid beyond belief, and pretentious.”

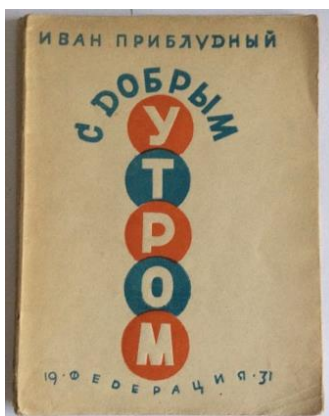


**Oreshin, Petr.** 1887 – 1938. *Na Golodnoi Zemlye: Poema*. [На голодной земле: поэма / On the Hungry Earth: A Poem]. First Edition. Moscow: Krasnaya Nov, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 29 pp., 17.5 cm x 13.5 cm [one of 3000 copies].

**Condition:** Minimal wear to wrappers, minor stain to lower front wrapper corner, hinges tight, insides clean.

**Comment:** This work is, perhaps, the most piercing and poignant example of “new peasant” poetry. Oreshin wrote it as a response to the devastating famine that swept through Russia in 1921-1922. Thus, in the opening pages, Oreshin notes that *On the Hungry Earth* is “dedicated to my grandfather, who collected pieces under the windows of the village of Galakhov, Atkara Uyezd, Saratov province and died there under the windows, in lice and in hunger April 23, 1922.” Throughout the work, the author draws attention to individual anguish and depicts it with realism, precision and touching moderation. His output, however, was criticized in *Pravda* and Soviet poet Koshkarov stated, “Oreshin is not a Bolshevik... He has not worked out a world outlook for building a new life, his soul is dead.”



**Pribludny, Ivan.** 1905 – 1937. *S dobrim utrom* [С добрым утром / Good Morning]. First Edition. Moscow: Federetzia, 1931.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 84 pp., 17.5 cm x 13 cm [one of 3000 copies].

**Condition:** Wrappers lightly soiled and bumped at extremities, minor wear to spine ends, insides clean.

**Comment:** This is a unique example of bohemian “new peasant” poetry that emphasises humour, realism and vigour. Its core theme contrasts the countryside’s warmth and naturalness to the city’s callousness and man-madness, “[its] trains that creep, frightening and ringing.” As a synthesis, Pribludny imagines unrolling the verdant pastures onto the concrete streets. Consequently, this can transform peoples’ character, making them more radiant and impromptu. Of interest is also the presence of verses that examine revolutionary themes. However, these proved controversial. For instance, Pribludny’s depiction of the Five-Year-Plan as “I thought for more than ten years, / where the bread would be, where the forest



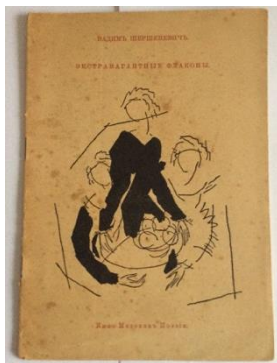
would be,” was defamatory in the Soviet authorities’ eyes. Pribludny was labelled a “kulak poet,” representing the “petty bourgeoisie,” and perished in the 1930s purges.

**Severyanin, Igor.** 1887 – 1941. *Victoria Regia*. First Edition. Moscow: Nashi dni, 1915.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 140 pp., 24.5 cm x 19 cm [one of 2000 copies].

**Condition:** Minor soiling and wear to wrappers, spine ends lightly scuffed, occasional staining to internal text.

**Comment:** This work is representative of Severyanin’s creative trough in the immediate pre-revolution years. Even so, it possesses certain interesting Ego-Futurist and decadent elements. For example, Severyanin uses dissonance, an irregular metric pattern, elongated verses, neologisms and, at times, tasteless images. The name *Victoria Regia* refers to a large South American water lily that was shown in Russia at the time. Some of the included poems also touch on the war and Severyanin’s experience of not participating in combat. However, the work’s impact is diminished due to the presence of old compositions that seem underdeveloped. Nonetheless, *Victoria Regia* is important to understanding Severyanin’s poetic growth and the connection between Ego-Futurism and Imaginism.

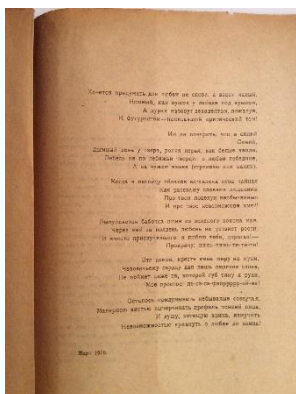


**Shershenevich, Vadim.** 1893 – 1942. *Ekstravagantnye flakony*. [Экстравагантные флаконы / Extravagant Scent Bottles]. First Edition. Moscow: Mezonin poezii, 1913.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 24 pp., 20.5 cm x 14.6 cm [one of 500 copies], wrappers illustrated by Leon Zack [1892-1980].

**Condition:** Spotting and staining to wrappers, minor spine wear, insides clean.

**Comment:** This is one of Shershenevich’s earlier works as an Ego-Futurist, preceding his subsequent transition to Imaginism. It possesses certain tropes Shershenevich developed in succeeding years, and can thus illuminate the connection between Ego-Futurism and Imaginism. In particular, in *Extravagant Scent Bottles*, we see the presence of anti-rationalism, detachment and deformed description that gestures at anti-aestheticism. Likewise, the theme of unnatural electric lighting points to Shershenevich’s ensuing embrace of machine language. However, there is minimum innovation in poetic form, a point that the Imaginists brought up to critique Ego-Futurism. Hence, Shershenevich’s later experimentation focused on this issue, as he began composing verb-less poetry or using irregular typography.



**Shershenevich, Vadim.** 1893 – 1942. *Loshad kak loshad. Tretia Kniga Lirikii*. [Лошадь как лошадь. Третья книга лирики / Horse Like a Horse. Third Book of Lyrics]. First Edition, Moscow: Pleiada, 1920.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 73 pp., 26.5 cm x 18 cm, wrappers illustrated by Boris Erdman [1899–1960].

**Condition:** Darkening and minor scuffing to wrappers, light wear to spine, occasional staining and discolouration to internal text.

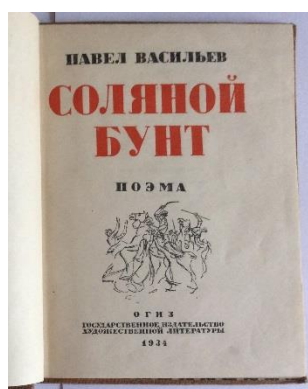
**Comment:** This work embodies Shershenevich’s growing displeasure of certain Russian avant-garde movements [in particular Symbolism and Futurism] and utilitarian “mass” poetry. Thus, he uses irregular typography, namely right margin verse alignment, to undercut *Horse Like a Horse’s* readability. Moreover, he underscores the disjointed, mechanical nature of the creative process through giving most featured poems an unintuitive or unrelated scientific-sounding heading. Upon *Horse Like a Horse’s* release, however, the Soviet authorities mistook it for an agricultural manual intended for village or provincial libraries. Even so, it laid the groundwork for *2x2=5* [1920], where Shershenevich wrote, in clear-cut terms: “poets never create what life requires of them. Life cannot require anything. Life develops in the way that art requires.”

**Sokolov, Ippolit.** 1902 – 1974. *Imazhinistika*. [Имажинистика / Imaginism]. First Edition. Moscow: Ordnas, 1921

**Description:** Original wrappers, 14 pp., 26 cm x 17.5 cm [one of 1000 copies].

**Condition:** Wrappers browned in places, minor wear and bumping along spine, hinges holding, some intermittent staining to insides.

**Comment:** This is a theoretical work that positions Imaginism as an evolutionary pinnacle of Russian figurative verse from Cantemir [1673 – 1723] to the then-present. It also exposes Imaginism's impact on other contemporary [avowedly independent] Russian poetic movements, as Sokolov was the creator of Moscow Expressionism and strove to, in his words, fashion it "considerably to the left of the futurist stooges and Imaginists." However, as is apparent in this work, Sokolov remains indebted to certain Imaginist principles. For instance, he writes that images are poetry's core building blocks and can "intensively reproduce sensations." Sokolov's Moscow Expressionism, nonetheless, collapsed under state pressure in the mid-1920s as the Soviet authorities fought its subjectivity, seeming impenetrableness and chaotic character.



**Vasiliev, Pavel.** 1910 – 1937. *Soljanoj bunt*. [Соляной бунт / Salt Riot]. First Edition. Moscow: OGIZ-GIHL, 1934.

**Description:** Hardcover, 152 pp., 17.3 cm x 13.5 cm [one of 2000 copies], title page illustrated by Lev Epple [1900 – 1980].

**Condition:** Minimal wear to boards, hinges tight, insides clean.

**Comment:** This work is an important example of nonconformist epic poetry written just prior to the Stalinist purges. It centres on the Cossack suppression of the Kyrgyzs during the 1648 Salt Riot. Of particular pertinence is Vasiliev's notion that this is a blind, doomed struggle emanating from deep-seated, unquestioned worldviews. Hence, the characteristics of Cossacks' actions connect to their nomadic norms and kinship ties. Meanwhile, the Kyrgyzs, possessing their own traditions, do not always behave as an exemplary, oppressed people. These representations, alongside Vasiliev's admiration of the Old Russia village, generated controversy in the Soviet press, with *Literaturniy Sovremennik* [1934: 151] noting that *Salt Riot* is "largely ideologically hostile to us, falling out of the main thrust of Soviet literature." Vasiliev was tried and shot in 1937 as an "enemy of the people."



**Yesenin, Sergei.** 1895 – 1925. *Pugachov*. [Пугачёв / Pugachov]. Second Edition. Petrograd: Elzevir, 1922.

**Description:** Original wrappers, 64 pp., 21.5 cm x 16 cm [one of 5000 copies], former owner's inscription on cover.

**Condition:** Light bumping to wrapper extremities, minor tear on lower spine, joints holding, insides clean.

**Comment:** This work examines the 1773 – 1775 insurrection against Catherine II's government and depicts its head, Yemelyan Pugachov, as a "model" revolutionary. Of particular interest, however, is Yesenin's suggestion that hooliganism and romanticism are Pugachov's core traits. Thus, Pugachov is described as a "scoundrel, a swindler and a thief... [who] decided to uplift Russia with a horde of robbers." On the contrary, Pugachov's self-characterization strikes a more sentimental note: "because I'm from a simple kind... I am able to... listen to the run of the wind and the creatures step, because in my chest, as in a den, a warm-hearted soul stirs." These qualities were present in Yesenin himself, as apparent in Aleksei Kruchenykh's 1926 work *Faces of Yesenin: From the Cherub to the Hooligan*. Nonetheless, Yesenin grew increasingly disillusioned with the post-revolution order and his alleged suicide in 1925 brought the most dissident poetic avant-garde era to a symbolic close.