



The Bedbug and Selected Poetry

Vladimir Mayakovsky, Patricia Blake (Editor), Max Hayward (Translator), George Reavey (Translator)

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This selection of Mayakovsky's work covers his entire career--from the earliest pre-revolutionary lyrics to a poem found in a notebook after his suicide. Splendid translations of the poems, with the Russian on a facing page, and a fresh, colloquial version of Mayakovsky's dramatic masterpiece, The Bedbug.

The Bedbug and Selected Poetry Details

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From Reader Review The Bedbug and Selected Poetry for online ebook

Melusina says

Mayakovsky opened my eyes, ears, nose, ears - myself. Having discovered his poetry, in particular, equals to having discovered another planet with living organisms. I felt smashed in the face on nearly every page, some of the lines burnt my eyes (or tongue if I read them aloud) and I felt alive with the lines elevating my pulse, my blood pressure, and reviving a weary body and encouraging a vivid mind to continue a losing game - exactly because books and writers like Mayakovsky existed. Let his words pull out the roots of yourself. As for The Bedbug, it is a play with a most curious twist, rather extraordinary and ahead of its time. It can be read on many levels, which is the beauty of this unique play. Do not hesitate a second: read it now!

Sophie says

I enjoyed this. There were quite a few poems, parts or lines I didn't get meaning from or saw in a negative light ("I love to watch children dying." I really don't know what to think about the 'A Few Words About...' poems) but overall the images and the words Mayakovsky used were powerful and often amusing. My favourite poem was 'Conversation with a Tax Collector about Poetry' and a few of my favourite parts are below;

All right, marry then.

So what.

I can take it.

As you see, I'm calm!

Like the pulse

of a corpse.

You're teasing me now?

*"You have fewer emeralds of madness
than a beggar has kopecks!"*

But remember!

*When they teased Vesuvius,
Pompeii perished!*

Formerly I believed

books were made like this:

a poet came,

lightly opened his lips,

and the inspired fool burst into song-

if you please!

But it seems,

*before they can launch a song,
poets must tramp for days with callused feet,
and the sluggish fish of the imagination
flounders softly in the slush of the heart.
And while, with twittering rhymes, they boil a broth
of loves and nightingales,
the tongueless street merely writhes
for lack of something to shout or say.*

I read The Introduction and Selected Poetry from this book but not The Bedbug.

Zach says

I honestly had a better translation of the bedbug copied from an alternate source. Mayakovsky is the "loneliest eye on the way to the blind!" If there were the monarch butterfly in the socialist cannon, he is surely a cloud in trousers. As Evgeny Zamyatov says with paraphrased: Mayakovsky was the Futurists and he was one of the great poets. If there was no Mayakovsky, the futurists are nothing and the world has lost one of the greatest.

Art says

The Bedbug is one of my favorite plays, so this is a re-read. Full of crazy scenes. At his wedding, the protagonist gets into a fight to defend his bride, her veil catches fire, the fumes from all the alcohol set the hall ablaze, the firemen get there two hours later to flood the place but the protagonist is never found. Fifty years later the body is found, frozen in the basement and revived (along with his bedbug!).

David says

My favorite poem in this collection is "The Cloud in Trousers."

Rich says

The great Russian futurist many people never really have ever read or heard of. Surreal, sarcastic, biting, self deprecating, and tender at times. A lot of his later work reads like Bolshevik propaganda, but when he hits his stride, like in "A Cloud In Trousers," he's simply amazing.

Laura Edwards says

I really liked some of the poems, others just weren't for me. I rounded up since I didn't finish the play and can't really make an honest comment on it.

Jason says

Read "Conversation with a Tax Collector About Poetry"

Michael says

i cant even have this book near me because i would transcribe the whole damn thing here, because it is astoundingly something

vladia! where are you now! please do you hear me? do you hear me!

you know i am listening!

you are such a bear, and you know that with a smile....
but thats just a look.

you are a darling.

i love and miss you with my own fifteen-bear-strength...
i miss even your books just beyond my reach, even if i can see them i am missing you and shaking with an unreasonable jealousy that i am ashamed of!

but...

and i am smiling too. hey vladia!

hye!

mwpm says

I love to watch children dying.
Do you note, behind protruding nostalgia,
the shadowy billow of laughter's surf?
But I -
in the reading room of the streets -
have leafed so often through the volume of the coffin.
Midnight
with sodden hands has fingered
me
and the battered paling,
and the crazy cathedral galloped
in drops of downpour upon the cupola's bald pate.
I have seen Christ escape from an icon,

and the slush tearfully kiss
the wind-swept fringe of his tunic.
At bricks I bawl,
thrusting the dagger of desperate words
into the swollen pulp of the sky:
"Sun!
Father mine!
If at least *thou* wouldst have mercy and stop tormenting me!
For my blood thou spilled gushes down this nether road.
That is my soul yonder
in tatters of torn cloud
against a burnt-out sky
upon the rusted cross of the belfry!
Time!
You lame icon-painter,
will you at least daub my countenance
and frame it as a freak of this age!
I am as lonely as the only eye
of a man on his way to the blind!"

- **A Few Words About Myself**, pg. 56-59

* * *

Four words,
heavy as a blow:
" . . . unto Caesar . . . unto god . . . "
But where can a man
like me
bury his head?
Where is there shelter for me?

If I were
as small
as the Great Ocean,
I'd tiptoe on the waves
and woo the moon like the tide.
Where shall I find a beloved,
a beloved like me?
She would be too big for the tiny sky!

Oh, to be poor!
Like a multimillionaire!
What's money to the soul
In it dwells an insatiable thief.
The gold of all the Californias
will never satisfy the rapacious horde of my lusts.

Oh, to be tongue-tied

like Dante
or Petrarch!
I'd kindle my soul for one love alone!
In verse I'd command her to burn to ash!
And if my words
and my love
were a triumphal arch,
then grandly
all the heroines of love through the ages
would pass through it, leaving no trace.

Oh, were I
as quiet
as thunder
then I would whine
and fold earth's aged hermitage in my shuddering embrace.
If,
to its full power,
I used my vast voice,
the comets would wring their burning hands
and plunge headlong in anguish.

With my eyes' rays I'd gnaw the night -
if I were, oh,
as dull
as the sun!
Why should I want
to feed with my radiance
the earth's lean lap!

I shall go by,
dragging my burden of love.
In what delirious
and ailing
night,
was I sired by Goliaths -
I, so large,
so unwanted?

- To His Beloved Self, The Author Dedicates These Lines, pg. 132-135

* * *

Past one o'clock. You must have gone to bed..
The Milky Way streams silver through the night.
I'm in no hurry; with lightning telegrams
I have no cause to wake or trouble you.
And, as they say, the incident is closed.
Love's boat has smashed against the daily grind.

Now you and I are quits. Why bother then
to balance mutual sorrows, pains, and hurts.
Behold what quiet settles on the world.
Night wraps the sky in tribute form the stars.
In hours like these, on rises to address
The ages, history, and all creation.

- **Past One O'Clock**, pg. 236-237

Oliver St John says

Really beautiful at times and not like much else. Very angry. The Bedbug was fun

Nicholas Sauer says

Some really intense poetry that's almost visual. Um, let's see...it's the Russian Revolution and love gone cosmically wrong seen through the crazy, fatalistic, angst-riddled eyes of Mayakovsky (he was a big fan of hyperbole). His experiments with rhythm and spacing and length of lines are pretty creative. And there's the original Russian versions right across from the English translation. But the version of the slapstick yet tragic *Bedbug* while great is highly edited from the original which makes it streamlined but a little disappointing.

Alan says

Mayakovsky's poems are filled with depressing lines, like, "I love to see children die..." When I first read this line in Russian, I thought I had the second verb wrong. Nope. I sure hope I'm missing his irony, but I'm happy to miss it. His verse is self-absorbed, depressing and narrow: so he'd make a great American poet, the male equivalent of Sylvia Plath, except he didn't try to kill his kids. But the poem I cite suggests he would have, had he the chance.

He was a satirist of society, so elevated by Stalin to literary sainthood. His play *Bedbug*, here, has quite a bit of slapstick--about marriage between a heiress and a working stiff, then futuristic robots. The one passage I enjoyed was M's use of committee-meeting language at the nuptials: "This marriage is now convened." Occasionally there are revealing period-reflections, for instance, communist newspapers from all over the globe--Chicago, Indonesia--report the nuptials.

But the *Bedbug* ages pretty well, esp in the Max Hayward trans. After all, it's from 1930, but seems more like the fifties. Wonderful final scenes of proletarian man on exhibit in a zoo, with a bedbug--both exotica in the future.

Izzy says

I have only read "The Bedbug" and I highly recommend it to you all. I love the fictional satiric way the

author chooses to deal with socio/political issues. The play is funny and wit, coming up with the idea and writing it definitely reflects the author's ingenuity.

My only regret is that I cannot read or understand Russian and so I had to read a translated version which I believe takes out some of the beauty of the words and rhymes.

Definitely, a fan of Mayakovsky

Misti Rainwater-Lites says

He had that fire I look for and rarely find. I like my poetry hot, so hot the flames leap from the page. God. Yes.

Kevin Bell says

Mayakovsky is notoriously difficult to translate, so I have little to say of the translation. Many older compilations suffer from an excessive focus on his Soviet themed odes to Lenin and the revolution. This book has an entirely appropriate focus on his lyric poetry and his love poems. For those interested in avant garde literature or in Russian poetry in the 20th century, this is a great read.

Bruce says

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) was a Russian poet and dramatist who had a powerful influence on the writers of his day. He initially supported the aims and programs of Bolshevism – in addition to writing serious poetry he created many propaganda posters – and traveled widely outside Russia, but he gradually became disillusioned with the nature and direction of the Soviet Union under Stalin, writing satirical drama that was quickly suppressed. He died playing Russian roulette.

Mayakovsky's poetry can be vigorous, rough, and powerful: "Your thought,/ musing on a sodden brain/ like a bloated lackey on a greasy couch,/ I'll taunt with a bloody morsel of heart;/ and satiate my insolent, caustic contempt." He can also be exquisitely sensitive and introspective, as in his last poem, "Past One O'Clock":

"Past one o'clock. You must have gone to bed.
The Milky Way streams silver through the night.
I'm in no hurry; with lightning telegrams
I have no cause to wake or trouble you.
And, as they say, the incident is closed.
Love's boat has smashed against the daily grind.
Now you and I are quits. Why bother then
to balance mutual sorrows, pains, and hurts.
Behold what quiet settles on the world.
Night wraps the sky in tribute from the stars.
In hours like these, one rises to address
The ages, history, and all creation."

In "The Bedbug," a delightfully satirical and amusing play, Mayakovsky uses the figure of Prisypkin, a

former Party member in about 1920, to contrast those dedicated to the purity of the Revolution with those intent on working for their own material and social advantage. At the end of the first half of the play, a fire consumes the place and personages present for Prisypkin's wedding. In the second half, fifty years later, Prisypkin is discovered frozen in a block of ice in the basement of the burned-out building and is resuscitated, along with a bedbug crawling out of his collar; mutual misunderstandings between Prisypkin and "modern" Soviet citizens inevitably ensue, and Prisypkin and the bedbug are left living in a cage in the zoo. For us today, the play provides prescient insights into the nature and course of Russian history over the course of the 20th century, even as it sheds light on the intellectual ferment and variety of Russia in the late 1920's.

Eric says

'Poetry is what's lost in translation,' yadda yadda, but Mayakovsky's English effigy is compelling nonetheless. A high-school teacher assigned 'A Cloud in Trousers'--out of Koch's Word on the Wind anthology--and I was officially obsessed. This book was a dogeared angsty missal. I still love his wacky, unexpected, collage-like imagery, his strangely tender semaphore speech (that's my attempt to get around 'intimate yell,' Schulyer's unbeatable description). Mayakovsky's gruff, Rodchenko-posed image even adorned my locker door, just below Camus (that one in profile, cigarette daggling from his lips, overcoat collar Bogartishly turned-up) and Baudelaire (haunted and haggard, in one of Carjat's portraits). This book, plus Les Fleurs du Mal, The Rebel, Poem of the Deep Song and Absalom, Absalom! made my world.

Albert says

If you like modern experimental Russian poetry, check it out. I find the Russian sensibility one of my favorites, and this book gives a good overview of his work for the Western reader. I like seeing the original Russian on the facing page, but my knowledge of the language makes it look like gibberish, so I can't compare the translated verse to their original cognates. Worth the journey, if you like poetry at all. A dwindling breed for sure.

Jonfaith says

**Have you seen
a dog lick the hand that thrashed it?!**

The five stars are for the poetry. the play is a satire which endures because of its all too human kernel. The verse is loud, a clamoring. Metallic. I appreciate a verb like **shock** in this instance. **Current** is also a valuable word when considering these riveting lines of Mayakovsky. Seeking council the other day I went to my Director--who sighed from over steaming bowl of noodles and said, No wisdom. She could use some Mayakovsky about now. My crazy sister noted the other night on social media that Hollywood should leave politics alone. These poems couldn't help her.

