

Vladimir

MAYAKOVSKY

Selected Works
in Three
Volumes



Raduga
Publishers

Vladimir

MAYAKOVSKY

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Selected Verse

each of us in his own way's a horse."
 Perhaps she didn't need a nurse, old naggie,
 perhaps even laughed at my words
 —too trite! —
 but the horse made an effort,
 heaved,
 up-dragging,
 neighed, and went on,
 all right.
 Tail a-swishing,
 great big baby,
 she came light-hearted,
 back to her stall,
 and she felt a colt—just two years, maybe—
 and life worth living despite it all.

(1918)

ORDER OF THE DAY TO THE ARMY OF ARTS*

*Translated by
 Dorian Rottenberg*

Old geezers in moss-grown brigades
 drool the same drool as of old.
 Comrades,
 off to the barricades,
 barricades of hearts and souls!
 Only he is a communist worth the name
 who burns the last bridge to retreat.
 Futurists, leave off waddling, lame,⁵⁷
 into the future—leap!
 To build a steam-engine's no sensation:
 just screw on wheels and whizz off on your train!
 But if there's no song to storm the station,
 what's electricity worth, explain?
 Pile sound upon sound
 and forward,
 whistling, page after page.
 There's still good consonants to be found:
 R.
 S.
 H.
 It isn't enough to line up in pairs
 in pants red-ribboned and stiff with starch.
 No sovdep'll make armies go anywhere⁵⁸
 if musicians don't make up a march.
 Drag pianos out into the streets,
 Drums with boat-hooks from windows dash.
 Smash pianos and drums into smithereens,
 let there be thunder—

*English translation
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Slam!
 Bang!
 Crash!
 No fun
 to tinker at factories,
 your face in coke-soot smearing,
 and then, after work, at another's luxury
 to blink with eyeballs bleary.
 Enough of pennyworth truths!
 Old trash from your hearts erase!
 Streets for paint-brushes we'll use,
 our palettes—squares with their wide-open space.
 Revolution's days have yet to be sung
 by the thousand-page book of time.
 Into the streets, the crowds among,
 futurists,
 drummers,
 masters of rhyme!

(1918)

LEFT MARCH
(FOR SAILORS)*⁵⁹

March, march out to the fore!
 Away with speech-making lousy!
 Quieter, orators!
 You
 have the floor,
 Comrade Mauser! 60
 Too long we've lived by the laws
 Adam and Eve left.
 Run down old History's horse!
 Left!
 Left!
 Left!

Ahoy, blue blouses!
 Steer forth
 over the roaring ocean.
 Steam away, dreadnoughts!
 Or
 have your keels gone blunt without motion?
 Let the British lion brandish
 his crown,
 and roar till he's dumb and deaf.
 The Commune will never be vanquished.
 Left!
 Left!
 Left!

*Translated by
 Dorian Rottenberg*

*English translation
 ©
 Progress Publishers 1977
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 Raduga Publishers 1985

There
beyond mountains of woe,
a land of sunshine spreads wide.
Past famine,
past martyrdom—go
crashing, million-strong stride!
Let hirelings by war-lords sent
surround us for murder and theft.
Russian fall under the Entente?⁶¹
Left!
Left!
Left!

Eagle eyes to be blurred?
Us to gaze back at the past?
Round the throat of the world
proletarian fingers, clinch fast!
Chest for'ard! Show 'em your might!
Let the sky by banners be cleft!
Who starts to march with the right?
Left!
Left!
Left!

(1918)

ODE TO THE REVOLUTION*

To you,
whistled at,
jeered at by artillery,
to you,
slashed by vicious-tongued bayonets' blows,
I exultantly raise
over all the vile hollering
this ode's
ceremonial
"O's".
O bestial!
O childish!
O penniworth!
O great!
What epithets haven't been piled on your doings?
Double-faced, how will you turn out yet?
As a splendid edifice
or a heap of ruins?
To the engine-driver
in soot-clouds dense,

*English translation
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Raduga Publishers 1982

to the miner, boring through ore-bed layers,
reverently
you burn your incense,
glorifying man's labour.
And tomorrow
St. Basil
Cathedral's rafters
rear in vain, imploring your mercy,
while your boar-faced six-inchers
roar with devilish laughter,
into the Kremlin's millennia bursting.
The *Slava*,
its sirens half-choked, screaming,
wheezes on its life's last cruise.
To the sinking cruiser
you send your seamen,
where a kitten,
forgotten,
mews.
And after,
a mob with drunken shouts,
mustachios twisted in bravado coarse,
you'd drove grey-haired admirals with rifle butts
head-down from the bridge in Helsingfors.
Yesterday's wounds are still licked and nursed,
yet again blood from fresh-cut arteries shines.
From the philistine comes
"O, be thrice accursed!"
and from me,
a poet,
"Thrice blessed be, sublime!"

(1918)

AN AMAZING ADVENTURE OF VLADIMIR
MAYAKOVSKY

(AT PUSHKINO, AKULOV HILL, RUMYANTSEV'S DACHA,
27 VERSTS FROM MOSCOW BY YAROSLAVL RAILWAY)

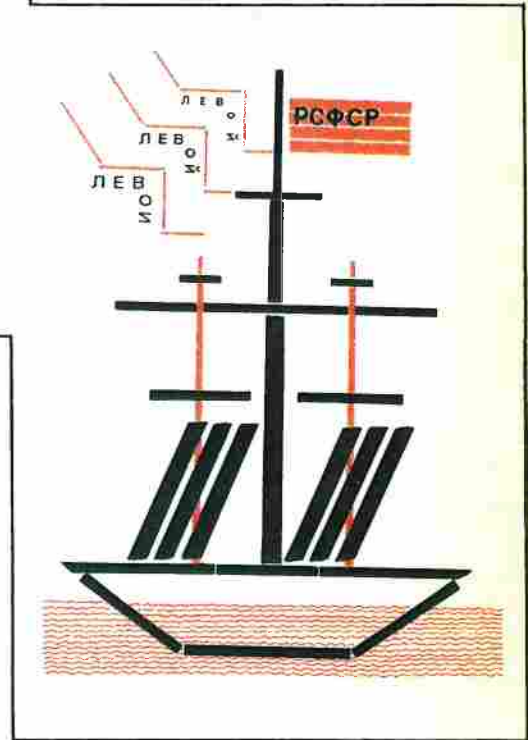
Translated by
Dorian Rottenberg

The sunset blazed like sixty suns.
July was under way.
The heat was dense,
the heat was tense,
upon that summer's day.
The slope near Pushkino swelled up
into Akulov Hill,
while at the foot
a village stood,



E. Lisitsky's illustration to Mayakovsky's "Third International"

E. Lisitsky's drawing for Mayakovsky's poem "Left March"



Vladimir Mayakovsky in 1918

Mayakovsky with the team of "Windows of ROSTA". 1920

You peep in:
 "Couldn't So-and-So see me,
 eh?"

I've been coming here God knows how long..."
 "Comrade Van Vanich's gone off to confer
 on a merger of Theo and Gukon! "

The umptieth staircase.
 You're done for, you think.
 Yet again:

"You're to come in an hour."

Damnation!

"They're in conference:
 the purchase of a bottle of ink
 for the district cooperative association."

In an hour:
 neither secretary
 nor clerk!

Great hell!
 All under 22—
 blonde or dark—
 at a conference of the YCL.

Again, perspiring, already towards dusk
 to the top of the seven-storey building I come.
 "Has Van Vanich arrived?" I ask.
 "No—in session
 at the a-b-c-d-e-f-com."

Enraged,
 like an avalanche in full might,
 I tear in,
 wildly cursing.
 Gosh!

Only halves of people in sight!
 "Where are they,"

I holler,
 "the halves that are missing?"

Murder!
 Manslaughter! "

I rush about, roaring.
 Horrendous, the picture's driving me nuts.
 Then I hear the secretary's
 calmest voice: "Sorry,
 they're attending two conferences at once.

At ten sessions daily
 we have to appear,
 so willy-nilly,
 in half we tear—
 down to the waist

we're here,
 and the rest of us—
 there."

The shock brings insomnia.
 Yawning and yearning.
 I meet the dawn with a dream of bliss:
 Oh, for just one more decisive conference,
 concerning
 the abolishment of all conferences!

(1922)

PARIS*

(CHATTING WITH THE EIFFEL TOWER)

Pounded by a million feet.
 Swished by thousands of tyres.
 The streets of Paris I roam—
 appalled here not to meet
 a familiar face or soul,
 abysmally alone.
 Round me
 motor-cars are dancing,
 round me
 from the fountain-jaws
 of Royal fish
 jets are prancing.
 I emerge
 on the Place de la Concorde.
 I await the appointed hour
 when,
 dodging the cops,
 through thick
 fog
 comes the Eiffel Tower
 to meet me,
 a Bolshevik.
 "They'll spot you,
 psst,
 don't shuffle so! "
 The guillotine-moon breeds fear.
 "Now listen
 to me! "
 (On tiptoe
 I whisper
 in her
 radio ear)

*Translated by
 Peter Tempest*

*English translation
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 Raduga Publishers 1985

"I've been busy
 propagandizing.
 Every building is with us,
 But we
 need you!
 Will you head the uprising?
 We'll vote you leader
 if you agree.
 Such a fine piece of engineering
 rotting here
 in Apollinaire moods!
 Not for you
 is the Paris
 of bleary
 bards,
 stockbrokers,
 Moulin Rouge nudes.
 The Metro's agreed
 to go with us.
 It will spit the gentlefolk
 from its tiled halls,
 the perfume and face-powder posters
 with blood
 it will wash
 from its walls.
 It thinks:
 "Why should my carriages
 serve plutocrats?"
 It won't be oppressed!
 It finds now
 our posters
 and placards
 of class struggle
 suit it best.
 Do not fear the streets!
 Should the roads
 block
 the Metro rising,
 cause delays,
 the tracks will give them a thrashing.
 I'll call a revolt of the rails.
 You're afraid?
 Of the tavern brawlers?
 To our aid
 the Left Bank will come.
 Fear not!
 I've agreed with the bridges—
 and the river's
 not easily
 swum!
 The bridges

on the Seine embankments
 in fury
 together shall rear,
 at the first call to rebellion
 shed pedestrians on every pier.
 Not a thing but shall rise—
 life's unbearable—
 In fifteen
 or twenty
 years' time
 steel
 shall age,
 and to Montmartre repairing
 sell its favours
 at night
 for a dime!
 To my land,
 tower,
 come!
 There
 we
 need
 you.
 To steel's glitter,
 smoke billowing above,
 with more tender care
 we'll greet you
 than first lovers greet their loves.
 To Moscow let's go!
 There
 there's space.
 You'll have
 your own streets—
 every one!
 We'll coddle you—
 a hundred times
 a day
 polish you
 till you glow like the sun.
 Let
 the Paris
 of fops and hussies,
 of boulevard loafers lie alone
 in the morgue of the Louvre, mid the lumber
 of museums and the Bois de Boulogne.
 Come!
 Stride with the powerful paws
 Eiffel drew you for you to stand on,
 so your brow in our sky rap out Morse
 and the stars their proud airs abandon!
 Make your mind up!

Rise, all as you are,
let revolt shake the city and seize her!
Come
to us
in the USSR!
I'll see to it
you all get a visa!

(1923)

WE DON'T BELIEVE! *

*Translated by
Dorian Rottenberg*

Its shadow out-blotting the bright spring day,
A government bulletin bars our way.

No!
Don't!

Can a tempest be bidden

not to rage?

No!

Can lighting by chains be put still?
Forever and ever,

thousand-paged,

Lenin's voice

will ring

like a bell.

Can thunder ever fall dumb and ill?

Can typhoons be stopped

from whirling at sea?

No!

Nothing can weaken

Lenin's will,

Alive in the million-strong RCP.⁶⁷

Can such fever

be measured in degrees?

Can such a pulse

for a second rest?

Never, never

will Lenin's heart miss

Even a beat in the Revolution's breast!

No!

No!

No-o-o!

We can't,

won't believe it—

that bulletin lies!

Avaunt,

stubborn shadow,

from Spring's bright eyes!

*English translation
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Progress Publishers 1980
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Raduga Publishers 1985

(1923)

*Translated by
Dorian Rottenberg*

THE PROBLEM OF SPRING*

I'm in a dreadful quandary.

Insomnia

isn't too far.

You see,

soon, after world-wide wandering

Spring

will come to the RSFSR.

Today,

like tomorrow

and ages before,

sunshine-drunk,

the room goes reeling.

Work's impossible.

I'm upset, all sore.

Though, frankly,

there isn't any cause for such a feeling.

As a matter of fact,

all's according to plan,

the sun will shine briefly

and then go by.

But—

drag the cat from the window,

if you can!

And if an animal's curious about the street,

aren't I!

I go into the street

and stand there mooning,

powerless

to shift my body from the spot.

Absolutely no idea what to do now,

Whether to move and act or not.

It's trickling godlessly

down your collar and your nose.

You listen,

not brushing it off.

It's like verse.

Legally,

you can go anywhere, I suppose,

but actually,

it's impossible even to stir.

I, for example,

am considered a good poet.

Say,

I can prove

that moonshine's an evil.

And this?

What words can describe and show it?

All words here

prove totally inadequate and feeble.

*English translation
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POETRY

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*Translated by
Dorian Rottenberg*

BROOKLYN BRIDGE

Coolidge, old boy,
give a whoop of joy!
What's good is good—
no need for debates.
Blush red with my praise,
swell with pride
till you're spherical,
though you be ten times
United States
of America.
As to Sunday church
the pious believer
walks,
devout,
by his faith bewitched,
so I,
in the grisly mirage
of evening
step, with humble heart,
on to Brooklyn Bridge.
As a conqueror rides
through the town he crushes
on a cannon
by which himself's a midge,
so—
drunk with the glory—
all life be as luscious—
I clamber,
proud,
on to Brooklyn Bridge.
As a silly painter
into a museum Virgin,
infatuated,
plunges
his optics' fork,
so I
from a height on heaven verging
look
through Brooklyn Bridge at New York.
New York,
till evening stifling and bewildering,
forgets
both its sultriness
and its height,
and only
the naked soul
of a building
will show
in a window's translucent light.

From here
 the elevators
 hardly rustle,
 which sound alone,
 by the distance rubbered,
 betrays the trains
 as off they bustle,
 like crockery
 being put by
 in a cupboard.
 Beneath,
 from the river's far-off mouth,
 sugar
 seems carted from mills by peddlers,
 it's the windows of boats
 bound north and south—
 tinier
 than the tiniest pebbles.
 I pride
 in the stride
 of this steel-wrought mile.
 Embodied in it
 my visions come real—
 in the striving
 for structure
 instead of style,
 in the stern, shrewd balance
 of rivets and steel.
 If ever
 the end of the world
 should arrive,
 and chaos
 sweep off
 the planet's last ridge,
 with the only lonely
 thing to survive
 towering over debris
 this bridge,
 then,
 as out of a needle-thin bone
 museums
 rebuild dinosaurs,
 so future's geologist
 from this bridge alone
 will remodel
 these days
 of ours.
 He'll say:
 this mile-long iron arch
 welded
 oceans and prairies together.

From here old Europe
 in westward march
 swished
 to the winds
 the last Indian feather.
 This rib will remind
 of machines by its pattern.
 Consider—
 could anyone with bare hands
 planting
 one steel foot
 on Manhattan
 pull Brooklyn
 up
 by the lip
 where he stands?
 By the wires—
 those tangled electric braidings—
 he'll tell:
 it came after steam, their era.
 Here people
 already
 holler'd by radio,
 here folks
 had already soared up by aero.
 Here life
 for some
 was a scream of enjoyment,
 for others—
 one drawn-out,
 hungry howl.
 From here the victims of unemployment
 dashed headlong
 into the Hudson's scowl.
 And further—
 my picture unfurls without hitch—
 by the harp-string ropes,
 as the stars' own feet,
 here stood Mayakovsky,
 on this same bridge,
 and hammered his verses
 beat by beat.
 I stare like a savage
 at an electric switch,
 eyes fixed
 like a tick on a cat.
 Yeah,
 Brooklyn Bridge...
 It's something, that!

1925