

VLADIMIR

MAYAKOVSKY

Selected Poetry

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

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Selected and translated from the Russian by
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Designed by R. VARDZIGULYANTS

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WHAT ABOUT YOU!

I splashed some colours from a tumbler
and smeared the drab world with emotion.
I charted on a dish of jelly
the jutting cheekbones of the ocean.
Upon the scales of a tin fish
I read the calls of lips yet mute.
And you,
 could you have played a nocturne
with just a drainpipe for a flute?

1913

LISTEN!

Now, listen!

Surely, if the stars are lit
there's somebody who needs just them,
somebody who wants them to shine a bit,
somebody who calls it, that wee speck
of spittle, a gem?

And overridden
by blizzards of midday dust,
tears in to God,
afraid that it's too late,
and sobbing,
kisses the hand outthrust,
and swears
that he can't, simply can't bear a starless
fate:

there must be a star, there must!
... Then goes about anxious,
though tranquil seeming,
whispering to somebody,

"You're better?

Not scared?

All right?"

Now listen,

it must be for somebody stars are set
gleaming,

it must be indispensable

that over the rooftops

one star at least should turn on its light?

1913

FED UP

Couldn't sit home.
 Annensky, Tyutchev, Fet* . . .
 Driven by boredom
 again among people to roam
 I go
 to cinema, pub, café.
 At table.
 An aura of hope seems to shine.
 One beat my silly heart misses.
 What if
 the past week has so altered this
 countryman of mine,
 I'll scorch off his cheeks with kisses?
 Cautious, I lift up my eyes, peer about,
 digging into the jacketed populace.
 "Back out!
Back out!
BACK OUT!"

* 19th-century lyric poets.—Tr.

yells fear from my heart,
over-running my face, moody and hopeless.
Unheeding,

here's what my eyes abut on:

a little to the right, un-heard-of, un-seen,
thoroughly absorbed in a leg of mutton,
the puzzlingest creature there's ever been.

You look and marvel—is it eating or no?

You watch and wonder—does it breathe
or not?

Five feet of featureless, pinkish dough,
not so much as a tag in a convenient spot.

Only, lolling on the shoulders, sleek silk
bladders,

glistening cheeks all space annex.

Raging and tearing, my heart yells madder,
"Back out, now!

What next?"

I swing to the left: mouth—agape;
then again to the right, in opinion flinching.
To the observer of the second wry shape,
the first

looks the double of Leonardo da Vinci.

No humans!

Can you comprehend

the outcry of a thousand days' pain?

The soul doesn't want to go dumb till the end,
yet to whom complain?

I'll fling myself down,
rub my face raw
on the curbstone, washing it from my hot tears'
font,
with love-thirsty lips plant a thousand kisses
and more
on the tram's intelligent front.
Home I'll go,
to the wallpaper cling.
Where else are roses more worth my wooing?
Dear,
blotchy thing,
shall I read you **Plain As Mooing!***

For history

When all are accommodated in heaven
and hell,
accounts drawn up for both saint and retrograde,
In the year 1916—
remember well—
handsome people vanished from Petrograd.

1916

* One of Mayakovsky's earliest collections.—Tr,

CLOUD IN TROUSERS

(Part 2)

Glorify me!
What, to me, are the great?
On all created I set my NULL.
Reading?
The very idea I hate.
Books?
How dull!

I used to think
that books were made this way:
the poet comes,
unseals his lips with ease
and sings, inspired old ninny, right away—
please!
But actually,
before the singing can start
you walk, beblistered with fermentation,
while softly wallows in the silt of the heart
that silly haddock, imagination.

Doves and nightingales, peppered with
rhyme,
he broils in his pot, the doddering weakwit,
while the street contorts in dumb pantomime
with nothing to shout or speak with.
Vainglorious, again and again we build
our cities—towers of Babel;
then God comes
and topples city on field
mixing words into a babble.

Its yell
throttled,
as if kidnapped for ransom,
silent, the street heaved in agony,
bloated taxi and gristly hansom
bristling, jammed like a gag on it.
Chest all pedestrianed—
no consumptive's more flat—
the road lay, blocked by the city's gloom.

And when—
anyway!—
out on the square the congestion it spat,
ousting the churchporch, that trod on its
throat, for room,
it seemed, his choir of archangels following,

God, plundered, would descend with punishing
club.

But the street only squatted, hollering
"LET'S—GET—GRUB!"

Gangster-brained makeup-men, krupps
and kruppsies,
paint on the city a menace boarish,
while in mouths lie words—decaying
corpses,

two alone live and fattening—

BASTARD

and, I believe,

BORSCH.

The poets, slobbering in fears and sobs,
dashed clear of the street, ruffling their
tresses:

"How shall we ever get on with our jobs
with just such two

to sing pansies,

love and pink dresses?"

After the poets—

the street-going nation:

students,

prostitutes,

contractors.

Gentlemen!

Stop!

Why this humiliation?
How dare you beg them be benefactors!

We, with our sinew,
robust and supple men,
for us to be beggars? Rip them instead,
them, self-stuck as a free supplement
to every double bed!

Ask them for favours?
Wait till they grant them?
Beg anthems from pygmies of lyric
and oratory?

We ourselves
are creators in a burning anthem—
the roar of factory and laboratory.

Much care I for Faustus,
what though he scoot
through celestial fireworks beside
Mephistopheles!

I know,
the nail in my boot
than any of Goethe's fancies more awful is.

I, the gold-tongued,
my every word giving
new life to the body,
new birth to the soul,
I tell you,
the tiniest speck living
is more precious than all I create—all!

Listen!

Blaspheming and writhing,
here

preaches Modernity's yell-mouthed
Zorcastre.

We, lips a-blob like a hanging chandelier,
faces like kitchen-dimmed plaster,
we,
chain-gangmen of the leper-house city
where gold and filth breed the hideous
disease—

we're purer than Venice in all her purity
laved and laundered by suns and seas.

Much worry for me
that Ovids and Homers
had nobody like us,
all coal-pocked and sooty.

I know,
the sun would be put out, almost,
to see our spirit's Hellenic beauty.
No prayer so sure as sinew and brawn,
to the devil meekness be hurled.
We—
each of us—
hold in our paw
the transmission belts of the world!
It was this that hoisted me on the calvaries
of rostrums
in towns and cities, low and high,
and there wasn't a soul who with swelling
nostrils
didn't yell
"Crucify!
Cru-ci-fy!"
But to me,
you, people,
even those most hard,
are so near and dear, there's no meting it.

Seen the dog in the yard
licking the hand that's beating it?!