

Translated by

Dorian Rottenberg

Cover and illustrations by *Uladimir Ilyushchenko*

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A GREAT POET OF THE SOVIET EPOCH

In 1917, at the time of the Great October Socialist Revolution, Vladimir Mayakovsky was twenty-four years old, but had already accumulated extensive and manifold social and literary experience. "My revolution"—so he defined his attitude to the historic events in Russia and directly went to work at the Smolny. The building of the former Smolny institute, a boarding school for daughters of the nobility, now housed the headquarters of the October uprising guided by V. I. Lenin. Here throbbed the heart of revolutionary Russia, here, in the Smolny, her future destinies were being decided.

The poet immediately found his place in the ranks of Lenin's followers, applying all his poetical fervour to the inspired and inspiring everyday work of building a new socialist society. The dream he had long cherished as a poet and revolutionary was coming true. "And he, the free man of whom I'm yelling—he'll come, believe me, believe, he will," Mayakovsky prophesied back in 1915 in his early poem War and Peace. In the revolution Mayakovsky's forceful revolutionary oratory and soul-searching lyricism acquired full scope and he became the first poet of the Soviet era. The ideas of the revolution made Mayakovsky's poetry what it was: an expression of Russia's new national culture, in which her great classic heritage was developed in new forms. Mayakovsky's work may be correctly understood as a manifestation of the Russian national spirit and national art, only in the light of the struggle for the humane and universally significant ideals of the revolution.

A reader making his first acquaintance with Mayakovsky's poetry will naturally ask himself what kind of man the poet was, how he came to accomplish his great artistic mission. Let us, therefore, throw a cursory look at the main landmarks of his life and work.

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Mayakovsky spent his childhood in the remote Georgian village of Baghdadi, renamed after the poet's death into Mayakovsky. The village lies in a deep pic-

turesque valley surrounded by tall mountains protecting it from the cold winds. Mayakovsky's father, a forester, drew his lineage from impoverished nobility, but snobbery was foreign to his nature and he was very good to the local peasants. In this Russian, who spoke to them in their own Georgian (he knew other languages of the Caucasus too), they saw not a hostile agent of the tsar's administration, but an exacting teacher and friend.

In the simple work-a-day atmosphere of the family, the future poet enjoyed an uninhibited childhood, playing with the peasant boys from whom, incidentally, he picked up an excellent knowledge of Georgian. Later, when he went to school in Kutaisi, he felt an alien among the snobbish progeny of Russian officials and, contrarily, quite at home among the Georgian boys who became his dearest friends. This friendship manifested itself most markedly during the first Russian Revolution of 1905. Together with other revolutionary-minded pupils Mayakovsky hid in his desk and distributed revolutionary leaflets.

In 1906 his father unexpectedly died of sepsis, having pricked his finger when filing documents in the forestry office. The family moved to Moscow where Vladimir's elder sister was studying. "Russia was the dream of my life," Mayakovsky later recalled. "Nothing ever had such a terrific pull on me." Moscow became the starting-point of the future poet's revolutionary career. Here, in the gymnasium (secondary school). he joined the Social-Democratic Party. The next three vears-1907, 1908, 1909-were packed with events that had a decisive influence on his spiritual make-up. Mayakovsky took part in many hazardous revolutionary undertakings which more than once ended in his arrest. "Party", "Arrest", "Third Arrest", "Eleven Months in Butyrki" (in the Butyrsky prison Mayakovsky was kept in solitary confinement)—so he entitled the chapters of his autobiography referring to that period.

The impressions of childhood and adolescence, which are always vital in the development of an artistic personality, became the foundation-stones of Mayakovsky's poetry. The fact that he was born and bred among

the mountains, on the soil of revolutionary Caucasus, and that he became a convert to the ideas of the Communist Party in adolescence, had an all-important formative influence on his character and his talent.

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Vague artistic inclinations (much more definite towards painting than poetry) became apparent in Mayakovsky when he was still at school, but were staved off by his passionate urge to participate in revolutionary work. Apparently it was in prison, in solitary cell No. 103, where, by his own confession, he "pounced upon belles-lettres" and "read all the latest", that Mayakovsky arrived at the view that his vocation was to be the revolution's artist, "to make socialist art". In the Moscow school of painting and sculpture which he entered upon release from prison, Mayakovsky got acquainted with artists and poets, a milieu that was quite new to him. Eventually, poetry prevailed over his interest in painting. He joined the futurists, the most extreme trend in Russian modernism which took shape during the crisis of bourgeois culture, in the period of preparation for the proletarian revolution. The futurists postulated the primate of form, declaring war on both classic and modern art, proclaiming themselves in their manifesto to be the enemies of the "fat bourgeoisie". However, while pursuing their quest for new forms, throwing the "old great off the steamship of modernity", the futurists were far removed from any idea of class struggle. For Mayakovsky, however, the concept of a revolution in artistic form stemmed from his social revolutionism, viz., the new subject matter of socialist art demanded new formal means for its expression. The romantic notion of revolt against bourgeois culture and traditions preached by futurists had a definite attraction for Mayakovsky, and although the futurists had no intent of altering contemporary reality, their arrogant nihilism was in some ways emotionally akin to the young poet's revolutionary rebelliousness. They played a certain role in Mayakovsky's quest for new form, but could not and did not become his spiritual guides. He followed his own path of a revolutionary poet who had nothing to do

with the futurists' formalistic jugglery and their indifference to the issues of social life.

Mayakovsky the innovator was called forth by the revolution, the expectation of which provided his inspiration. He first spoke out as a poetic apostle of the revolution in his poem *Cloud in Pants* written in 1915. Mayakovsky read it to Gorky, whom he visited at his Mustamäki country house near Petrograd. Gorky was delighted with Mayakovsky's rebellious fervour, discerning in this unusual, impetuous young man the traits of that poet whose advent he foretold in 1913: "Russia is in need of a great poet, a poet that must be both democratic and romantic, for we, Russians, are a young and democratic nation."

In manuscript, Cloud in Pants had a different title— Thirteenth Apostle, which was at once pathetic and ironical, elevating the image of the poet himself as an apostle of the revolution. Later Mayakovsky summed up the essence of this piece in four slogans: "'Down with your love!', 'Down with your art!', 'Down with your system!', 'Down with your religion!' are the four cries voiced in the four parts." This pattern reveals the ideological message of the poem in which he challenged the whole structure of bourgeois society, the source of national evils and calamities and all the misfortunes of the hero himself. Its first part (Down with your love!) discloses the personal drama of the hero jilted by the woman he loves. "You know, I'm getting married," she tells him coming to their rendezvous. What response could such words evoke in a man whose whole being was taut with anticipation of love? He addresses Maria with a question and reminder:

Remember—
you used to ask,
"Jack London,
money,
love,
passion—
aren't they real?"
And I—all I knew
was that you're the Gioconda
that somebody's got to steal.

Who, then, are the poet's true rivals? Those who "pay for women"—the bourgeois world, the power of

money which cripples every human emotion.

The hero regards Maria's rejection not only as his own defeat in love, but as a declaration of war on him, the rebel, by the entire bourgeois society. And he accepts the challenge, charging into attack, deriving strength from the awareness of his affinity with other people. The disinherited, poverty-stricken and labour-exhausted outcasts must be made to realise their moral superiority over the old bourgeois world:

I know, the sun would fade out, almost, stunned with our souls' Hellenic beauty.

Thus the hero of the poem, whose beloved has been stolen, turns out to be not only an apostle of big, true love, but an apostle of struggle against a world founded on falsehood and exploitation of man by man. The main characters of the tragedy are not "he" and "she", but society and the individual, whose humiliation is consecrated by the church and contemporary decadent art. Hence the urge to blast all outworn concepts, including religious and aesthetic ones.

In the middle of 1915, assuming the half-pathetic, half-sarcastic posture of a poet-oracle "jeered at by the tribe of today", Mayakovsky prophesied the coming of the revolution, in dating which he was mistaken

only by a year.

Crowned with the thorns of revolt, the year 1916 draws nigh.

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Mayakovsky called the October Revolution "my revolution", and the young Soviet country acquired in his person a master whom it could justly call "my poet". Mayakovsky was not the only poet to welcome the revolution enthusiastically. Among the poets of the older generation there were Alexander Blok, who in The Twelve expressed the hopes and aspirations of the best

part of progressive Russian intelligentsia, and Demyan Bedny who produced the poem Land, Liberty and the Workers' Lot. Sergei Esenin was also wholeheartedly in favour of the revolution even though, in his own

words, he accepted it "with a peasant's bias".

In the years following the revolution Mayakovsky's activities were extremely manifold. He was deeply convinced that "a poet of the revolution cannot confine himself to writing books". Accordingly, he turned to the theatre and cinema, which attracted him as media of mass appeal, and wrote more than a dozen screenplays. He also contributed to newspapers and magazines, and produced political posters—an invariable item of urban scenery in the first years after the revolution.

During 1919-1920 Mayakovsky worked in the "Satirical Windows of ROSTA" (Russian Telegraph Agency), writing captions to pictures—verse propaganda on the most urgent issues of the civil war and the life of the young Soviet republic. "The ROSTA windows were a fantastic affair," wrote the poet, "a handful of artists serving, manually, a hundred-mil-

lion-strong giant of a people."

Soviet Russia was entering a new period of her life. The civil war ended in victory. The war-wrecked economy had to be rebuilt from scratch. Mayakovsky's work in ROSTA prepared him for embarking on a satirical campaign in the period of NEP (New Economic Policy), which allowed a certain freedom of private enterprise in economic rehabilitation. While his earlier satire was aimed against external enemies and "all sorts of Denikins", now he levelled his fire at shortcomings within the country. The ideals of the October Revolution had to be defended from the onslaught of petty proprietors who fancied they had won the day. It was imperative to bolster the new generation's faith in the future presaged by Lenin in his last public speech: "NEP Russia will become socialist Russia."

During this period Mayakovsky wrote the love-poem It, which was evoked by the tragic end of his relationship with the woman he loved. As he says in his autobiography, however, he wrote It "about himself and all".

Just as in Cloud in Pants Mayakovsky had hurled his indignation at capitalism: "Down with your love!", he now thundered at the philistines who raised their heads under NEP. But if in the earlier poem this slogan was followed by "Down with your system!" which he thought an essential condition for the triumph of true love, this time everything was radically changed. Now Mayakovsky saw his only hope in "our redflagged system", whose power, he believed, extended to the sphere of personal relationships: "Confiscate, abrogate my suffering!" But here the obstacle was "slavehood that ages had hammered into our souls". The conflict between the old and the new in the poet's soul is a source of much agony. At times the forces of the past seem unconquerable. The legacy of whole ages cannot be rooted out "at one go". In this lies the tragedy and the emotional crisis of the hero of It.

However, in the very process of writing the poem Mayakovsky sought and found the way out of his spiritual impassé by ridiculing and exorcising the remnants of the past in social life and in his own self, thus dis-

covering new, optimistic prospects.

The poem It is autobiographical throughout. Agreeing with the woman he loved not to meet for a time, Mayakovsky withdrew into his study for a month and a half, refusing to see friends, and, "incarcerated in his nutshell of a room", concentrated wholly on his poem, trying to find in it a solution to agonising problems in his personal life and life in general. On finishing the poem in February 1923, he came out of his voluntary confinement and with his usual fervour plunged once more into the turbulent life of a literary polemicist, "agitator, brazen-mouthed ring-leader". Seven years later, on April 14, 1930, he shot himself in the same "nutshell of a room" in Lubyansky Proyezd. The involved circumstances of his private life and the extremely inauspicious atmosphere created around him by his literary ill-wishers, were further aggravated by the failure of the first production of his wonderful play The Bathhouse. "I'm quits with life, and no need to list mutual troubles, offences, hurts," says the poet in his farewell letter.

From the poem It we may gather an idea of the part played by love in Mayakovsky's life, in the "mutual troubles, offences, hurts", which in his own words, there was no need to list. "Love is the heart of everything. If it stops working, all the rest dies off, becomes superfluous, unnecessary.... Love can't be regimented by any sort of must or mustn't—only by free competition with the rest of the world," Mayakovsky wrote in a letter-diary which he kept for L. Brik while working on It. The poem is concluded with an Application to...—an attempted escape into fantasy, a programme for the future. He paints his lofty ideal of creative love which asserts itself in "competition with the world". Mayakovsky evolved an imagery of enormous expressive power, employing his favourite deviceshyperboles and materialised metaphors—to convey the immense force of emotion common to his contemporary —the new man, whose love is "a far sight grander than Onegin's love".

In It the poet carries on a dialogue with himself. The old individualistic contraposition of love to the world had already been discarded, but the new concept of love as a form of competition with the world had not yet become fully shaped in his mind. And this explains his spiritual crisis. However, in his Application to... Mayakovsky did finally discover a way out, producing a pattern of love-ethics capable of linking that most personal of emotions with the aims of society. The idea of the creative power of love later found expression

in the famous stanza:

To love

is to break

from insomnia-torn sheets, with jealousy of Copernicus

swallowing saliva,

him,

not the husband

of Mrs. Sugar-and-sweets

regarding

as your

most deadly rival.

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One of the first Soviet poems dedicated to Lenin was Mayakovsky's "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin", written in 1924, the year when the founder of the Soviet state died. Mayakovsky had begun planning a poem about Lenin long before. The government bulletin on the leader's illness, posted up in the streets of Moscow in March 1923, made the poet respond with We Don't Believe, a short poem full of love and anxiety. Mayakovsky was present at the Congress of Soviets held on January 22, 1924, where Chairman Mikhail Kalinin announced that "yesterday at 6.50 a.m. died Comrade Lenin".... The first shock of this terrible news was followed for Mayakovsky by a state of frightening depression with which he was able to cope only through his art, by putting in words the vastness of the common grief, and poetically recreating Lenin's image.

"Never have I wanted to be understood so much as in this poem. This, perhaps, is the most important piece of work I have ever done," he said to his friends. In many respects, Mayakovsky's poem remains unsurpassed, despite the fact that the artistic portraiture of Lenin has since been augmented by many remarkable

works whose number is constantly growing.

Mayakovsky's work holds one very essential advantage which will carry weight forever. His enormous talent apart, Mayakovsky was a contemporary of Lenin and of the entire epoch which saw the establishment of the new socialist society. He painted from life. He was in the Smolny on the day of the October uprising, saw Lenin there, and heard him speaking on many occasions. His poem is not only the work of a masterpoet, but a document, the testimony of a rank-and-file contemporary. Mayakovsky recreates the thoughts and feelings of one of those millions who followed Lenin, helped him to accomplish his historic task, shared his joys and sorrows, and now felt unutterably grief-stricken and bereaved.

We are burying the earthliest of beings of all that ever walked this earth of ours.

For all its expressiveness, this formula would be far too general, had not the poet posed the question "what has he done, where did he come from, this most human of all humans?" Replying to his own question in the first and second parts of the poem, he depicts Lenin's life against the background of the history of the revb olutionary movement. Compositionally speaking, this was fully justified from the standpoint of a poet-contemporary portraying the leader's image. Only so could he help the readers to rationalise, as it were, their grief, which in many was still in a primal state of unconscious, elemental anguish—and gain a deeper mental grasp of their emotions, converting their sorrow into revolutionary energy. The portrayal of this energy of millions rallied round the memory of Lenin, an energy born of sorrow, was the life-asserting artistic task which Mayakovsky set himself in his poem. It was a work simultaneously epic and lyrical in nature.

What a joy it is

to be part of this union,
even tears from the eyes

to be shared en masse
in this,

the purest,

most potent communion
with that glorious feeling

whose name is

Class!

Then comes the description of a street in Moscow during Lenin's funeral. Mayakovsky gives an account to History, having imbibed with all his senses, "with all the billion pores his body holds", every detail of the day which "will keep its tale of woe for ever throbbing". The despair that seized the people at the news of Lenin's death gives way to a demonstration of restrained, profound emotion. The image of boundless silence permeates the entire picture. Silence in the streets, in broad daylight—the silence of millions which rang with the emotion of "child and adult wrung by grief's insistence". Silence and movement—slow,

peechless, and therefore immensely eloquent, palpable inits internal rhythm, directed by the slow music of the revolutionary funeral march: "Farewell to you, comrade, who have passed from a noble life away".

The poet-contemporary brings out unforgettable details—symptoms, tokens of popular reverence and ove, manifesting themselves in the absence of any outward expression of grief, in the magnificently diguified orderliness of this "all-human" sorrow.

The frost,

unheard-of.

scorched one's feet,

yet days

were spent

in the tightening crush.

Nobody

even ventured to beat hands together to warm them—

hush!

Self-discipline and restraint in the expression of feelings symptomatise the strength of those who follow Lenin's hearse, who will go on marching along his road. The procession across Red Square is epitomised in a remarkably dynamic, impetuous image of the surging masses inspired by Lenin's ideas:

Like a giant banner
the huge Red Square,
millions of hands
welded into its staff,
soars
with a mighty sweep
into the air.

Red Square comes to life symbolically in the swelling silk of an enormous banner, from every fold of which the living Lenin calls the world proletariat to rise in a holy war against the oppressors.

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Mayakovsky's poem about Lenin is not a requiem, but a hymn to life. Reciting it to the most varied audiences—at factory clubs, Party meetings and student gatherings—the poet won many new friends and admirers, and this gave him the moral support which he so lacked in literary circles. The poem about Lenin, warmly acclaimed by the Party and reading public, became an event not only in the literary life of the country, but in the life of the people in general. With this poem, Mayakovsky could appeal for and find understanding and sympathy among working people in any of the world's capitals, in the remotest corners of the planet. With this poem he could undertake the journey round the globe which he had long been planning.

An "envoy of poetry", he travelled abroad, reciting *Uladimir Ilyich Lenin* and other works, telling people about life in the Soviet Union and the great upsurge of Soviet culture. He visited Latvia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, and, finally, the United States. His encounters with mass audiences in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and other American cities were a triumph of his poetry and, actually, a revelation of the new Russia for his listeners. Mayakovsky's trips to the USA and France gave birth to his "American cycle" and his series of poems about Paris.

On arrival in New York, the city of skyscrapers, Mayakovsky paid tribute to the genius of American engineers ("Brooklyn Bridge"). But soon his admiration gave way to a sober awareness of those aspects of life which usually evade a visitor's first glance—the seamy side of everyday existence, the refined forms of exploitation, which make up the essence of American capitalism. The Soviet poet was insulted and outraged by the debasement of human dignity in this money-mad world. Thus, one of the most tragic poems of the American cycle is devoted to a Negro-mother selling her body to "festering Mr. Smith" to save her starving family.

Most typical of Mayakovsky's style in this cycle is the poem Atlantic Ocean.

Nearer and dearer

you are to my heart....

...in breadth,

in blood,

in cause,

in spirit

my revolution's elder brother.

Mayakovsky endows the elemental forces of nature with human features. For him the ocean is a living being with the sturdy ways of a soldier or factoryhand: "Now with nose to the grindstone, now drunk as a lord", terrible in rage and dreadful when drunk, but easily recovering its good humour and forgiving offences. This kind-hearted, wayward giant wants to be useful to men, dreams about irrigating parched deserts: "O to reach the Sahara—it isn't so far-off!"

Logically—after the image of the Atlantic—

Mayakovsky took up the theme of Columbus.

There's one single thought

that gladdens me now:

that these same waves

hugged Columbus as well,

that tired drops of sweat

from Columbus' brow

into this same water

fell.

But the poem is also alive with the painful regret that today, in the age of the arrogant all-powerful dollar, "you've dwindled, Atlantic, proud in your youth, any scum can spit at your grey-whiskered visage". The pithy end-pun of another poem in the American cycle presents, as it were, the conclusion he arrived at in his transatlantic voyage, his "discovery of America".

You're an ass, Columbus,

yes, I mean it.

As for me, if I were you,

here's what I'd do:

I would shut America and slightly clean it, then I would reopen it anew.

The sharper the satirical pungency of the American cycle, the clearer and keener becomes his awareness of his own country's historic mission: "I and my country, we throw the gauntlet to all of your drab United States."

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Mayakovsky was the leader of the artistic movement known as LEF-the left front of arts. What he longed for was not to work alone, but in a team bound together by a single purpose and idea. And although the LEF movement was marred by aesthetic prejudices which left their imprint on Mayakovsky's poetry too, still, without the support of friends who were enthusiastic about his work and believed in him, Mayakovsky would have found it far more difficult to assert himself in that vast artistic movement which began to take shape under the banner of revolutionary innovation. In those days Mayakovsky became the standard-bearer of a new and immensely potent trend in Soviet art, joined by such gifted poets as Nikolai Asseyev, Boris Pasternak, Semyon Kirsanov, Sergei Tretyakov, and attracting masters in other fields of art, among them Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Dovzhenko and Shostakovich. Mayakovsky drew wide sections of the artistic youth into the work of creating Soviet patriotic art, infecting them with his own enthusiasm. The author of this preface himself was among those who experienced his beneficial influence.

Meeting Mayakovsky, who invited me in 1927 to co-operate in his magazine as a critic and historian of Soviet literature, was an unforgettable event in my life, which determined the purport of all my subsequent literary work. I shall never forget the first recital of *Fine!* at Mayakovsky's flat. Written for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, it seemed to have absorbed the entire historical experience of the people as

well as the life experience of the poet himself. It presented, as it were, a sequel to the poem about Lenin, an artistic development of Lenin's ideas about the socialist country. The rumour that Mayakovsky was engaged on a poem about the revolution set astir the motley literary world where, along with ardent admirers, he had a great many ill-wishers. Besides his close friends and associates he had invited a number of special guests to listen to his recital. I don't know how so many people could have crowded into his tiny flat. The listeners sat on window-sills and stood packed in the hall, where hats and coats were piled on chairs almost up to the ceiling. Among those present were Anatoly Lunacharsky, Alexander Fadevey, and many people I did not know, who must have met Mayakovsky during his public appearances and lecture tours, or had simply become his enthusiasts after reading his poetry.

The debates following the recital were extremely noisy; the atmosphere was a miniature replica of what usually occurred at the Polytechnical Museum where Mayakovsky often recited his poems, involving the audience in heated discussions. The most clearly sympathetic response was that of Anatoly Lunacharsky who accepted the poem with wholehearted enthusiasm. "It is the October Revolution itself cast in bronze", were the words in which the People's Commissar of Education, a shrewd art critic, expressed his opinion of

Mayakovsky's new poem.

Fine! relates how in the unimaginably hard conditions of the civil war, economic ruin and blockade the feeling of socialist patriotism developed in the people, how under the Party's leadership, the "land of youth" paved its way to the triumph of socialism and the

"fatherland-to-be".

Always hostile to any varnishing of reality, Mayakovsky also set himself the task of showing what was "bad" in the life of the young Soviet society, and even contemplated writing a poem under that title.

In his satire Mayakovsky waged a relentless day-to-day war against evils and shortcomings. The most obtrusive among such evils was bureaucracy (*Paper Horrors*, etc.). The characters of Mayakovsky's satiri-

cal gallery—Soviet philistines and bureaucrats—were admirably shown and chastised in his satirical dramas, *The Bathhouse* and *The Bedbug*, which were restored to stage-life in the 1950s at the Moscow Satire Theatre and many other theatres throughout the country and abroad.

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On quite a number of occasions Mayakovsky depicted his own self in his poems, dramas and screenplays, giving the hero his own name. And, of course, even when remaining behind the scenes, he, like any true poet drawing on the material of his own life, presented the kind of lyrical hero who leaves his hallmark on every-

thing taking place "on stage".

In Aloud and Straight, his last work, which was to be a prelude to a big poem that remained unwritten, Mayakovsky declared: "I myself will speak of me and my time." In this poem one cannot fail to see a number of features reflecting his own literary biography; the poet clearly defined his "place in the workers' ranks", he was together with those "who had come out to build and sweep in perpetual work-a-day fever", those who fought for the cause of the Party, for the triumph of revolutionary ideas in Soviet literature.

Aloud and Straight sums up the poet's artistic experience, the back-breaking toil of extracting "precious words from artesian human depths". Mayakovsky reviews a parade of his "word-troops" always alerted for action. As hostile as ever towards the aesthetes and literary adversaries who refused to acknowledge that the revolutionary ardour of his poetry was the essence of his life, Mayakovsky defended his honour as a poet of the revolution: "The enemy of the colossus working class—he's mine as well, inveterate and ancient."

The honour of a poet of the revolution... What did it imply? It implied the poet's ability to rally the people for heroic exploits. Poetry itself is an act of heroism. In Aloud and Straight Mayakovsky asserted this attitude towards contemporaries, comrades-in-arms and descendants, and the literary wrangles of the day approximately.

peared petty and insignificant.

We're comrades all—
so let us share our glory,
one common monument

let's have

to tell our story

in socialism

built in battle

for all time.

Giving himself entirely to the people, totally contemptuous of his own fame ("the hell I care for marble's shiny sludge")—such is Mayakovsky, the poet of the Revolution, wholly identifying his colossal personality with the cause of his country and people.

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Mayakovsky's artistic programme is vast; it is a poetinnovator's programme of world-discovery. He rallied legions of impassioned followers, poets who carried on his cause and developed his traditions in all the multinational off-shoots of Soviet poetry. At the same time he broadened the poetic mainroads, so that many other poets with a different creative vision could go shoulder to shoulder with him, working for the common aim the triumph of socialism.

It is extremely difficult to translate Mayakovsky into foreign languages, but the impact of his imagery is powerful enough to break down linguistic barriers.

In the careers of many poets in Europe and America a role of major importance was played by their translations of Mayakovsky's works. In France, excellent translations were made by Elsa Triolet; in Britain by Herbert Marshall (published recently in India and America); in Germany by Hugo Hupert. The Moscow foreign language magazine Soviet Literature has printed a series of translations from Mayakovsky by the best Soviet workers in the field.

In 1960 Progress Publishers put out a book of Mayakovsky's selected poetry rendered into English by Dorian Rottenberg. In 1967 the same translator produced the first complete English version of *Uladimir Ilyich Lenin*, which has just come out in a third

edition. This book, too, will be a new and, we hope, welcome gift to admirers of Mayakovsky's poetry.

Mayakovsky's influence on world poetry is enormous. According to Pablo Neruda, his "power, tenderness and wrath remain unparalleled as models of poetic accomplishment". Mayakovsky helps progressive poets to denounce false idols, to seek new revolutionary pathways for the development of their national culture. This is well reflected in the words of the French poet Jean Chabrault. "In medieval days the trip from Marseilles to Paris was made by ox-cart. Today it takes 50 minutes by air. And yet in medieval times we had François Villon. If we survey the best poetry of our own day, it scarcely appears to have scored any such miracles of progress.

"Only when I read Mayakovsky I felt that now our hearts, our poetry can at long last dispense with the old ox-cart. I think he is still half-a-century ahead of

us all."

While dedicating "all his resonant power of a poet" to the fight for a better future for all mankind, Mayakovsky also marked a new stage in the development of Russian poetry, and a big step forward in world art in general. He glorified "the joy of life, the buoyancy of the hardest of marches—the march into communism".

It's hardships

that really give taste to our life.

This song, then,

will be a song

of our worries,

triumphs

and everyday strife.

Mayakovsky's entire work is just such a song which shall sound forever, calling men to create, to work, to perform new feats in the name of communism.

VICTOR PERTSOU, Ph. D.

MORNING

The sullen rain cast a glance askance. Beyond the still clear grille the iron reasoning of wires strung overheada featherbed. And on it rested lightly the legs of rising stars. But as the streetlamps—tsars in crowns of gas began to die, they made more painful for the eye the petty wars of the bouquet of boulevard whores. And horrid. the lurid pecking laughter that jokes leave after from the yellow roses' poisoned rows in a zig-zag. But at the back of all the wracking horror and the squalor the eye rejoiced, at last; the slave of crosses sufferingly-placidly-indifferent, the coffins of the brothels full of riff-raff were flung into one flaming vase by the dawning East.

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 salmon I read the calls of lips yet mute. And you,

could you have played a nocturne with just a drainpipe for a flute?

GREAT BIG HELL OF A CITY

Windows split the city's great hell into tiny hellets—vamps with lamps. The cars, red devils, exploded their yells right in your ear, rearing on their rumps.

And there, under the signboard with herrings from Kerch an old man, knocked down, stooping to search for his specs, sobbed aloud when a tram with a lurch whipped out its eyeballs in the twilight splurge.

In the gaps between skyscrapers, full of blazing ore, where the steel of trains came clattering by, an aeroplane fell with a final roar into the fluid oozing from the sun's hurt eye.

Only then, crumpling the blanket of lights, Night loved itself out, lewd and drunk, and beyond the street-suns, the sorriest of sights, sank the flabby moon, unwanted old junk.

LISTEN!

Now, listen! Surely, if the stars are lit there's somebody who longs for 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, 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 afraid?
All right?"
Now listen,
it must be for somebody stars are set gleaming,
somebody who longs
that over the rooftops
one star at least should come alight?

YOU

You, wallowing through orgy after orgy, owning a bathroom and warm, snug toilet! How dare you read about awards of St. Georgi¹ from newspaper columns with your blinkers oily?!

Do you realise, multitudinous nonentities thinking how better to fill your gob, that perhaps just now Petrov the lieutenant had both his legs ripped off by a bomb?

Imagine if he, brought along for slaughter, suddenly saw, with his blood out-draining, you, with your mouths still dribbling soda-water and vodka, lasciviously crooning Severyanin²!

To give up my life for the likes of you, lovers of woman-flesh, dinners and cars? I'd rather go and serve pineapple juice to the whores in Moscow's bars.

AN ODE TO JUDGES

Convicts row their galley along over the sea in a sweltering crew covering the chain-clang with a snarling song about their home—Peru.

About Peru, the flower of the planet full of dances, birds and love, where blossoms crown the green pomegranate and baobabs reach to the sky above.

Bananas! Pineapples! Joy galore! Wine in sealed buttles shining through.... But then, God knows where from and what for, judges overran poor Peru.

They came along and imposed their bans on birds, dances and Peruvians' sweethearts; the judges' eyes glinted like old tin cans picked up by pavement sweepers.

A peacock painted orange and blue was caught by their eye, as strict as Lent; a moment, and off through its native Peru with his tail bleached white, the peacock went.

It's said in the prairies there once had been wee little birds—colibri they're called.

Well, the judges caught them and shaved them clean,

down, feathers and all.

In none of the valleys today will you find live volcanoes, those wheezy croakers; the judges choked them by putting up signs: "VALLEY FOR NON-SMOKERS".

Even my poems, by the law's letter are banned in Peru. What for, do you think? The judges, you see, declared them "no better than alcoholic drink".

Shaking the equator, chain-gangs trudge.... Poor people-less, birdless Peru! Only, scowling under the penal code, a judge survives, hearty and well-to-do.

Those galleys,—things could scarcely be worse! I pity Peruvians! don't you? Judges are a bane for dances and birds, for me, for you, for Peru.

LILY3 DEAR! IN LIEU OF A LETTER

The room's a chapter of Kruchonikh's Inferno. Air gnawed out by tobacco smoke. Remember at the window. for the first time. burning, with tender frenzy your arms I'd stroke? Now you're sitting there, heart in armour; a day, and perhaps, I'll be driven out. To the bleary hall: let's dress: be calmer, crazy heart, don't hammer so loud! I'll rush out, raving, hurl my body into the street, slashed by despair from foot to brow. Don't, don't do it, darling, sweet! Better say good-bye right now. Anyway, my love's a crippling weight to hang on you wherever you flee. Let me sob it out in a last complaint, the bitterness of my misery. A bull tired out by a day of sweat can plunge into water, get cooled and rested. For me there's no sea but your love, and yet from that even tears can't wrest me a respite. If a weary elephant wants some calm, lordly, he'll lounge on the sun-baked sand. ľve

only your love for sun and balm. yet I can't even guess who'll be fondling your hand. If a poet were so tormented he might barter his love for cash and fame. For me the world holds no other delight than the ring and glitter of your dear name. No rope will be noosed, no river leapt in, nor will bullet or poison take my life. No power over me, your glance excepting, has the blade of any knife. Tomorrow you'll forget it was I who crowned you, who seared out a flowering soul. The pages of my books will be vortexed around you by a vain existence's carnival whirl. Could my words, dry leaves that they are but, detain you with throbbing heart? Ah, let the last of my tenderness carpet your footfall as you depart!

OUR MARCH

Beat the squares with the tramp of rebels! Higher, ranges of haughty heads! We'll wash the world with a second deluge, Now's the hour whose coming it dreads.

Too slow, the wagon of years, The oxen of days—too glum. Our god is the god of speed, Our heart—our battle-drum.

Is there gold diviner than ours? What wasp of a bullet us can sting? Songs are our weapons, our power of powers, Our gold—our voices; just hear us sing!

Meadow, lie green on the earth! With silk our days for us line! Rainbow, give colour and girth To the fleet-foot steeds of time.

The heavens grudge us their starry glamour. Bah! Without it our songs can thrive. Hey there, Ursus Major, clamour For us to be taken to heaven alive!

Sing, of delight drink deep, Drain spring by cups, not by thimbles. Heart, step up your beat! Our breasts be the brass of cymbals!

CLOUDS UP TO TRICKS

High

in the sky

sailed clouds.

Just four of them-

none of your crowds.

From the first to the third

they looked men,

while the fourth

was a camel.

Then.

when they were well adrift, they were joined

on the way

by a fifth,

from which,

absolutely irrelevant,

ran elephant

after elephant.

Till—

perhaps a sixth

came and gave them a scare—

the clouds

all vanished

into thin air.

And after them,

champing the clouds into chaff,

galloped the sun,

a yellow giraffe.

1917-1918

KINDNESS TO HORSES

Hoofs plod seeming to sing, Grab. Rib. Grub. Rob. Ice-shod. wind a-swing, the street skidded. On the roadway a cob toppled, and immediately, loafer after loafer, sweeping the Kuznetsky⁵ with trousers bell-bottomous. came mobbing. Laughter rang over and over, "Horse flopped! Boo, hippopotamus!" The Kuznetsky guffawed. Only I didn't mix my voice in the bestiality. I came up, glimpsed in the horse's eye: the street, up-turned, swam in all its reality. I came up and saw huge drop after drop roll down the muzzle, hide in the growth... And an animal anguish I couldn't stop spilled out of me, rippling, and flooded us both. "Now, don't, please, horsie! You know what remorse is? They're human. but why do you suppose you're worse? we're all of us a little bit horses. 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.

AN AMAZING ADVENTURE OF VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

at Pushkino, Akulov Hill, Rumyantsev's dacha, 27 versts from Moscow by Yaroslavl railway.

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, roofs like a warped-up frill. Behind the village was a hole; by evening, sure though slow, into that hole the sun would roll. to sleep, for all I know. And then, next morning, crimson-clad, the sun would rise and shine, till finally it made me mad the same each blasted time! Till once so crazy I became that all turned pale with fright. "Get down, you loafer!" to the sun I yelled with all my might. "Soft job, sun," I went on to shout, "this coming up to roast us, while I must sit, year in, year out, and draw these blooming posters!" "Look here," I cried, "you Goldy-Head,

it's time you changed your ways. Why not step in for tea, instead of rise, and set, and blaze?" My lucky stars! What have I done! Corona, beams and all, itself. with giant strides the sun is coming at my call. I try to cover up my fear, retreating lobster-wise; it's coming. it's already near, I see its white-hot eyes. Through door and window, chink and crack it crammed into the room. Then stopped to get its hot breath back, and blimey, did it boom! "I'm changing my itin'rary the first time since creation. Now, poet, out with jam and tea, else why this invitation?" Myself scarce fit to match two words, half-barmy with the heat, I somehow nodded kettlewards: "Come on, orb, take a seat!" That hollering won't come to good. My impudence be dashed! Thought I and sat as best I could upon the bench, abashed. But strange to say, with every ray I felt the stiffness ease.

"Look here," I cried, "you Goldy-Head, it's time you changed your ways. Why not step in for tea, instead of rise, and set, and blaze?"

An Amazing Adventure



and cramped formality gave way to frankness by degrees. I spoke of this and spoke of that, about the beastly ROSTA6 "There, there," he said, "don't sulk, my lad, there's things worse than a poster. You s'pose it's easier to shine all day up there? Just try. But since the job's been earmarked mine, my motto's do or die!" This way till dark we chatted on, till former night, precisely. Huh. dark indeed! All shyness gone, we got along quite nicely. And pretty soon right chummily I thump him on the shoulder, and he hits back. "Why, you and me, that's two, so let's be bolder! Come, poet, up! Let's sing and shine, however dull the earth is. I'll pour the sunshine that is mine, and you your own, in verses!" The walls of gloom, the jails of night our double salvo crushed, and helter-skelter, verse and light in jolly tumult rushed. The sun gets tired and says good night to sleep away his cares, then I blaze forth with all my might, and day once more upflares. Shine up on high, shine down on earth, till life's own source runs dry—shine on—for all your blooming worth, so say both sun and I!

1920

ORDER No. 2 TO THE ARMY OF ARTS

This is to you, well-fed baritones, from Adam to the present day shaking the dives called theatres with the groans of Romeo and Juliet or some such child's play.

To you, maitres painters fattening like ponies, guzzling and guffawing salt of the earth, secluded in your studios, forever spawning flowers and girlflesh for all you are worth.

To you, fig-leaf-camouflaged mystics, foreheads dug over with furrows sublime, futuristic, imagistic, acmeistic, stuck tight in the cobwebs of rhyme.

To you, who abandoned smooth haircuts for matted, slick shoes for bast clogs *a-la-russki*, proletcultists⁷ sewing your patches on the faded frock-coat of Alexander Pushkin.

To you, dancing or playing the tune, now openly betraying, now sinning in secret, picturing the future as an opportune academic salary for every nitwit!

I say to you, I, whether genius or not, working in ROSTA, abandoning trifles; quit your rot before you're debunked with the butts of rifles!

Quit it, forget and spit on rhymes, arias, roses, hearts and all other suchlike shit out of the arsenals of the arts.

Whoever cares that "Ah, poor creature, how he loved, how his heart did bleed!" Master-craftsmen, not long-haired preachers, that is what we need.

Hark!
Locomotives groan,
draughts
through their floors and windows blow;
"Give us coal from the Don,
mechanics,
fitters
for the depot!"

On every river, from source to mouth, with holes in their sides, river-boats too lie idle, dismally howling out: "Give us oil from Baku!"

While we kill time, debating the innermost essence of life, "Give us new forms, we're waiting!" everything seems to cry. We're nobody's fools till your lips come apart to stare, expectant, like cows chewing cud. Comrades, wake up, give us new art to haul the Republic out of the mud!

1921

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Spanish stone

rose in cliff and wall

dazzling white,

jagged as saw-teeth.

Till twelve

the steamer

stood swallowing coal

and drinking

its fill

of water.

Then it swung round

its iron-clad snout

and

exactly

at one

weighed its anchors

and wheezing

pulled out.

Europe shrank to a pin

and was gone.

Great mountains of water

run past me,

thundering.

Enormous as years,

at the ship they pound.

Birds fly over me.

Fish swim under me.

Water

lies

all around.

For weeks,

heaving

its athletic chest,

now nose to the grindstone,

now drunk as a lord,

the Atlantic Ocean,

never at rest,

perpetually

sighed or roared.

"Oh, to lap the Sahara!

It isn't so far-off.... A funny old trinket this ship on the blue! Carry or sink it what shall I do? If I leave them dry in the sun they fry. No good, these men, too small to feed on. O.K.—bien. let them speed on." There's nothing like waves to thrill and stir one. To some they bring childhood, to somea loved voice. I, though, see banners once more unfurling. There it startsthe commotion go to it, boys! Then again all's quiet and the hubbub's through: no doubts, no excitement, just nice and warm. But suddenlyhow, if I only knewfrom the depths arises the sea revkom 8 And the militant spraylike water-guerillasgo clambering up from the ocean's bed,

then downward spilling,

hurtling skyward,

tearing

the crowns

of froth

into shreds.

Then again

the waters

fuse into one

commanded to boil

by somebody's power.

And from under the clouds

a wave dashes down

pouring orders and slogans

in a ceaseless shower.

And the billows swear

to the sea CEC⁹

not to down

their battle arms

till the end.

Now they've won

and throughout the equator—

see-

droplet Soviets

their limitless power

extend.

The last little rallies

of quietening waves

keep debating

something

in lofty style,

and now the ocean,

washed clean and shaved,

for a time relaxes

with a peaceable smile.

I look through the railings:

on with it, boys!

Under the gangway

hanging

like a latticed bridge.

the waves' T.U. local

its wisdom employs

on issues

on which

ocean-destinies hinge.

And under the water in business-like quiet grows a coral palace with spire and gable weaving its wickerwork to make things more bright for the hard-working whale, his wife and baby. There nowthe moonbeams their carpet spread as if on dry landjust step down, go ahead! Not for enemies, though; the Atlantic's eye, watchful as ever, looks up at the sky. Chilly and still, all varnished with moonshine, or groaning and tossing when old wounds smart, the longer and closer I look at you, Ocean, the nearer and dearer you are to my heart. Your tumultforever I'm glad to hear it; your blue my eyes drink in like no other--in breadth, in blood. in cause, in spirit. my revolution's elder brother. 1925

CONTAGIOUS CARGO

The steamer hove in,

hooted,

roared,

and,

runaway convict,

they've chained 'er.

700

humans on board.

Negroes-

the remainder.

Out of a launch

to the steamer decks.

Popping

up

for inspection,

the doctor squints

through tortoise-shell specs:

"Anyone got infection?"
Pimples well-powdered,

features well-washed.

swaying and swaggering coyly,

the first class

filed

as the doctor watched

with smile

urbane and oily. From double-barreller nostrils

exhaling

blue smoke

in a cunning ring,

headmost came

in a diamond halo

Swift—

the porker king.

A yard

from his snigger

the stinkpipe stuck.

Go,

pry into clients like these!

Under cambric vest,

under silken trunks,

go and discern

disease.

Island!

To abstinence

take recourse.

Don't let him beyond the docks.

But no-

the captain

salutes, in due course,

and Swift is let loose

with the pox.

First class done with,

the second class goes

in

for examination.

The doctor pokes

into ear and nose,

the picture of irritation. The doctor sneered,

and the doctor scowled,

jowls

all askew

with spleen.

then sent three blokes

from the second class crowd

for a couple of days' quarantine.

After the second class

loomed the third,

black

with niggers

as ink.

The doctor

looked at his watch,

disturbed,

"Cocktail-hour,

I should think.

Off!

and shut 'em up in the hold.

III-

clear as day!"

he stated.

"Dirty vagabonds!

And, all told,

not one of 'em

vaccinated."

Down

in the hold

he sprawls, Tom Jackson,

hell of a pain

in his noddle.

Tomorrow

they'll jab him

with smallpox vaccine

and home

Tom Jackson'll toddle.

Tommy,

he's got a wife on shore; hair—like a soft black cushion.

and skin—

the sleekest you ever saw,

just like

Black Lion shoeshine.

While Tom

went tramping

for work

abroad

—Cuba's got eyes

for beauty-

his wife

got sacked

for what the boss called dodgin' her nat'ral duty.

The moon chucks coins

on the ocean bed-

dive in

and all ills will mend.

No meat whole weeks,

no meal 'n' no bread.

just pineapples

weeks on end.

Another steamer

screwed in by its screw—

's weeks

till the next'll be comin'.

Hunger's no help

in pulling through.

Ah, Tommy don't love me, Tommy ain't true, shares his mat with a white, does Tommy. No way of earning, no chance to stealpolice under parasols everywhere. And Swift those exotics make him feel lascivious as a terrier. Old Sallow perspired under trunks and vest at flesh so juicy and black. He poked his bucks at the face, the breast at the moons with famine slack. Then grappled hunger, that lifelong foe, with heavy-weight faithfulness. Inside was the clear decision yet lips broke huskily: Already pushing the door with his shoulder was festering Mister Swift. And time wasn't

a minute older when up they were whisked by the lift.

Tomturned up in a week or so and a fortnight through slept fast, glad that they'd be with bread and dough and the smallpox bogy was past. But there came a day when on Negro skin ominous patterns were etched and children their mothers' wombs within grew dumb, blind and wretched. The calendar skimmed from day to day crippling legs and arms, eating half their bodies away, stretching their palms for alms. And special note of the Negro

was made

when the flock

collected for prayer.

Pointing towards

this visual aid

Parson Dry

would declare:

"It's God

who punishes

man and wife

for her

bringing visitors home."

And rotting black flesh

for the rest of life

peeled from rotting Negro bone. Nosing in politics?

Not my vocation.

I just

jot down

what I see.

Some folks

call it CIVILISATION,

others-

CO-LO-NIAL PO-LI-CY.

1926

A SKYSCRAPER DISSECTED

Take

the biggermost

New York house.

scan it through

from bottom to top:

you'll find age-old cubbyholes

fit for a mouse,

a very

pre-October

Yelets or Konotop. 10

First floor-

1

jewellers

in unrelieved vigil.

Locks hitched fast

to the shutter's brow.

Film-star policemen,

grey-clad, rigid;

hound-like they'll die

guarding others' dough.

Third floor—

offices,

gains and losses.

Blotting-paper

rotting

'in slavish sweat.

So the world

shan't forget

who the boss is-

doorsigns

in gold:

"William Sprat".

Fifth.

After counting

the slips in her trousseau

an over-ripe miss

lies in dreams about grooms.

Her bust

raising lace

whose finesse

rouses awe.

she scratches

her armpits'

prodigious brooms.

Seventh.

Having built up

his strength

through sport

a mister

towers

over the domestic hearth;

discovering

marital infidelity

of some sort,

he gives a polishing

to his better half.

Tenth.

A honeymoon-couple in bed.

Connubial bliss

written large on their faces.

Busy reading

a New York Times ad:

"Buy our cars

on a monthly basis."

Thirtieth.

Shareholders in conference jam, dividing billions

with snarl and scuffle—

the profits of a firm

manufacturing ham

out of top-quality Chicago

dog-offal.

Fortieth.

By the bedroom of a music-hall beaut', focussing his fervour

on th

on the keyhole of the said,

to wrest a divorce from Coolidge, 11

a sleuth

waits to catch a husband

red-handed

in bed.

A free-lance painter

of bare-arse portraits

dozes in the ninetieth,

contemplating

how to win the favour

at the landlord's daughter

and simultaneously

get him

to buy a painting.

Penthouse.

Tablecloth

white past believing.

Alone

in the restaurant

next to the sky

a Negro cleaner

eats sizeable leavings,

while rats

clean up crumbs

of lesser size.

I look

in a blend

of anger and boredom

at the inmates

of the ninety-storey shack.

I'd meant

to go 7,000 miles forward,

but it looks,

I've been taken

seven years back.

1929

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 stilling 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 peddlars, it's the windows of boats bound north and southtinier than the tiniest pebbles. I pride in the stride of this steel-wrought mile. Embodied in it my visions come realin 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 braidingshe'll tell: it came after steam, their era. Here people already hollered by radio.

here folks had already soared up by aero. Here life for some was a scream of enjoyment, for othersone drawn-out, hungry howl. From here the martyrs of unemployment dashed headlong into the Hudson's scowl. And further my picture unfurls without hitchby the harp-string ropes, at 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.

like a tick on a cat Yeah, Brooklyn Bridge. . . . It's something, that!

1925

SERGEI ESENIN

You've departed,

as they say,

to another world.

Emptiness...

Fly on,

with stars colliding.

No money to collect.

No beershops.

In a word—

Sobriety.

No, Esenin,

this is not a sneer.

No chortles in my throat,

but a lump of woe.

A sagging bone-bag

in my vision

you appear,

red runnels

from your slashed-up wrist-veins42 flow.

Stop,

leave off!

Are you in your right mind?

To let your cheeks be smeared

with deathly lime?

You,

who'd pull off pranks

of such a kind

that no one

could have matched at any time!

Why?

What for?

There's really no accounting.

Critics mumble,

it was all because

this and that-

but chiefly poor class-contact

which resulted

in too much strong drink,

of course.

"Had he given up bohemians for the class it'd influence him, he'd have less time for fights..." But that classyou think it slakes its thirst with kvass¹³? Yeah the classit doesn't mind a booze on pay-day nights. If, they say, he had been supervised by someone "at the post"¹⁴ he'd have got a lot more gifted as to content. He'd have written verse as fast as prose (long-drawn-out and dreary as Doronin¹⁵).... But if some such thing had happened, I should think you'd have done itslit your wrist-veinslong before. I'd rather, if vou ask me, die of drink than be bored to death or live a bore. Whether it was boredom or despair neither you nor penknife can explain. Maybe, had there been some ink in the Angleterre there'd have been no cause

to slit a vein.

Imitators jumped at it encore! Dozens hurried to repeat the bloody deed. But, listen, why increase the suicidal score? Better make more ink to meet the need! His tongue's now locked between his teeth forever. To bandy words is just a shame and waste of breath. The people, that supremest language-weaver, has lost a lusty young apprentice with his death So now they bring along funereal scrap. verses scarce rebotched since the last decease, and line the grave with lines obtuse and drab. Is that the homage that a poet should receive? Although the monument that you deserve has not been cast--where is it. ringing bronze and hard-grained granite?-

The drain of memory's

already thick with dust:

remembrances

and dedications set upon it.

Your name is being snivelled into hankies. With your words maestro Sobinov¹⁶ hanky-pankies and trills beneath a stillborn birch, as if he'd die. "Oh not a wo-o-ord. my friend, ah, not a si-i-igh!"17 Bah! I'd like to talk a bit more briskly with that selfsame Leonid V. Loengrinsky! 18 I'd stand up in their way, a thundering brute: "How dare you mumble verse like cows chew cud?" I'd deafen them-I'd whistle and I'd hoot: "Your blank-blank mother, grandmother. your blinking soul and God!" So all the giftless scum skedaddle off to hell, flapping their inflated jacket-skirts, so P. S. Kogan¹⁹ should go scattering pell-mell. piercing all he meets with whisker-darts. Riff-raff hasn't scarcened much as yet. There's lots to do. so hurry, mates, along.

```
Life must first
              be thoroughly reset,
rebuilt—
         remade--
                   and only then extolled in song.
These days-
             they are a little hard
                                  upon the pen.
But tell me,
            cripples,
                    cripplesses,
if it please you,
whoever of the great ones,
                           where and when
chose paths
           that were both better-trod
                                      and easier?
Words
      command and muster
                             human strength.
March!
       Let time explode like gunshells,
                                        far behind.
so that back to the old days
                            the wind should fling
only hairscraps,
                twisted up and twined!
It isn't much equipped for merriment,
                                      our world.
Let's wrest joy
               from the grips
                              of a future day!
Dying
      in this life
                 is not so hard.
Building life
             is harder,
                       I daresay.20
1926
```

TO COMRADE NETTE—STEAMER AND MAN²¹

Not in vain I start.

No ghost-tale rubbish, reader.

Through the harbour's molten sunshine,

past the jetty

steams

the very self

of Comrade THEODORE

NETTE.

Yes, it's he;

all in a hurry to arrive,

through those lifebuoy-saucer spectacles

he looks.

"Hullo, Nette!

How I'm glad that you're alive with the smoking life of funnels,

ropes

and hooks.

Pull up here!

I hope it's not too shallow.

Tired,

I fancy,

boiling all the distance from Batum.

Once you were a man....

Remember,

dear old fellow,

the tea that on a train we would consume?

One eye cocked

towards your red-sealed cargo,

nights on end,

while others snored away

about old Romka Yakobson²²

you'd argue,

memorising poems

in your funny way.

Off you'd drop at dawn.

Is that revolver there?

Better mind their business,

if they're wise!

Could I think

that only in a year

I should meet you

in this cargo-steamer guise?

There's the moon come up.

A stirring sight, I'll say!

Slashing space in two,

astern she's looming;

as if, it seems,

from that last battle in the passageway your deathless hero-track

were trailing,

blood-illumined.

Your print-and-paper communism's not believed so readily. "Balloney, boy!

It's true in books alone."

But things like these

will show you communism bodily transforming "fancies"

all at once

to flesh and bone.

We live under a pledge

that grips in iron unity,—

no crucifix will nail,

no guns on earth will crush us,-

that's for humanity

to live in one community,

not in a world all parcelled into Latvias

and Russias.

Blood

runs in our veins,

not lukewarm water.

Marching

through revolver bark and blast,

when we die,

it's to become immortal,

cast in steamers,

verse

and other things that last.

I could forge ahead

through years and years,

but when life is done,

there's nothing better

I should wish

than meet the end

when my time nears

in the way that death was met b

by Comrade Nette.

1926

DON'T YOUR SHOULDER BLADES ITCH?

Whenever a rainbow

hangs down its bow

or the sky

shines blue

without patch or stitch,

tell me,

don't your shoulder blades-

both

begin to itch?

Don't you wish

that from under your jersey

where a drudge-born hump

used to hide,

throwing off

the shirt's dull burden,

a pair of wings

would go winging wide?

Or when night

with its nightliest stars

rolls along

and the Bears—

Great and Little—

prowl and growl,

don't you feel restless?

Don't you long...?

Oh yes, you do,

and how!

We're cramped.

And the sky

has no bounds,

no border.

Oh,

to fly up

to God's apartments

and show

old Savaoh

an eviction order

from the Moscow Soviet's

Housing Department!

Kaluga, dug in among meadow and grove, dozing down in your earthly pit! Now then, Kaluga, come on. Tamboy! Skyward like sparrows Isn't it fine, with marriage on your mind, swish!to wing off over land and sea, to pluck out an ostrich's feather from behind and back with a present for your fiancé? Saratov! On what have you fixed an eye? Charmed? By a birdie's dot? Upsoar swallow-like into the sky; it's time you grew wings, that's what! Here's a good thing to dono deed more audacious: choose a night and dash through it, devil-me-dare. to Rome; give a thrashing to a Roman fascist

```
then back
          in an hour
                     to your samovar in Tver.
Or else-
         the dawn's opened up
                               vou see
and go racing:
               who's faster-
But. . . .
        all this is nothing
                          but imagination.
People
      so far
            are a wingless nation.
People
      are created on a lousy plan:
a back
      good for nothing but pains.
So to buy an aeroplane each,
                              if you can.
is really
         all that remains.
Like a bird then with tail.
                           two wings
                                     and feathers
you'll whet your nose
                      all records to beat.
Tear off the ground!
                     Fly, planes, through the heavens!
Russia.
      soar up
              in a sky-bound fleet!
Quicker!
         Why,
              stretching up like a pole.
admire from earth
                  the heavenly hole?
Come,
      show your bravery,
```

1923

avio!

PAPER HORRORS

(experienced by Uladimir Mayakovsky)

If I held

in my hands

the planet's reins

I'd stop the earth for a minute:

"Hark,

d'you hear

pens scraping,

fountain- and plain,

as if

the earth's teeth

were grating in the dark?"

Men's pride,

subside,

be forever forgot!

To a dot

humanity's future

tapers.

Man

is gradually

becoming a blot

on the margins

of enormously important papers.

Men are wedged like shadows

in domestic cubbyholes.

Ten square feet per nose—

yet for papers' glee—

whole castles of offices—

sprawl over tables

or lie back in safes

as content as can be.

Queues trail out

for cloth

at a shop.

No galoshes for feet,

not a glove for your paw.

Yet for papers

there's baskets.

a bumper crop,

No more to beg
for one day as a dole
And then to age
in endless sorrow drowned,
but to see all the world
at the first call
of "Comrade!"
turn in glad response around.



and for "cases" carcassesfolders galore. Rubles for travel how many have you? Ever been in Madrid? I bet you no! Yet for papers, to enable them to sail and travel they're even erecting a new G.P.O.! Thin as clips turn the legs of the former strong. Instructions oust brainsno one feels the loss. Men degrade into errand-boys running along in the service of paper turned boss. Papers burst from portfolios stodgy, baring their white-toothed hem; soon people will crawl into portfolios for lodgings. as for flats papers will move into them. I foresee in the futureno fantasy of mine, but a prophecy blared out by paper trumpets: papers shall sit at tables and dine and mannikins lie under the tables crumpled.

I'd unfurl

a storm

of rioting banners-

tear papers with my teeth

and, indignant, yell:

"Every inch

of useless paper,

proletarians,

hate like your enemy,

abhor like hell!"

1927

A CHAT IN ODESSA HARBOUR

between s.s. Soviet Daghestan and Red Abkhazia

Clouds.

come,

lend the sunset west,

canary-feathers!

Fall on sea and land.

black voke of southern night!

Two ships at anchorage

begin a chat together:

one blinks—

the other answers with a light.

What are they signalling?

I strain my forehead's furrow;

a red light flashes on

then fades

and turns to green.

Probably

he wants a date tomorrow,

or perhaps

just frets in jealous spleen?

Or perhaps

he's asking, "Red Abkhazia,

it's me,

the gunboat

Soviet Daghestan.

Sulking all alone-

what can be crazier?

Come here, baby,-

let me hold vour hand."

Silence.

Then Abkhazia replies at last,

"Can't get on alone?

You'll have to learn.

'Coz I'm now in love

up to the mast

with the grey

three-funnelled cruiser

Komintern."

"All you women

are just sluts

and nothing else.

What's she see in him,

that lumbering old braggart?"

And again he signals

with short yells:

"Hear me, someone,

send us some tobacco!

It's dull here, on the searoads-

dripping wet.

Fit to give one cramps

and rust one's armour."

The whole world sleeps,

the shimmering Black Sea shed—

a giant tear of blue—

upon Odessa harbour.

1926

TASTES MAY DIFFER

The horse

saw the camel

and laughed herself hoarse.

"Such

a tremendous

freak of a horse!"

The camel rejoined:
"You—a horse?

not nearly!

You're an underdeveloped camel,

merely."

And only God,

omniscient indeed,

knew they were mammals

of different breed.

1929

A LETTER FROM PARIS TO COMRADE KOSTROU²³ ON THE ESSENCE AND MEANING OF LOUE

Comrade Kostrov,

I'm sure you won't mind-

I know,

generosity's one of your merits—

if part of the lines

for Paris assigned

I'll squander

on petty lyrics.

Imagine:

a beauty

enters a hall

framed

in necklace and furs.

and I

says to her

with no preface at all

these very selfsame words:

l've

just come

from Russia, comrade.

In my country

I'm a figure.

I've seen women

far more comely,

women

prettier

and slimmer.

Girls

go crazy

over poets,

and I'm

vociferous

and smart.

Come along!

Just watch me go it.

Snub me?

No one's got the heart.

You won't catch me

double-dealing,

dabbling

in petty lust.

Deep down in my heart's

that feeling,

carry it through life

or bust!

I'll not measure

love by weddings.

Leave me, would you?

Very well.

I don't give a damn,

I've said it,

for a bleeding wedding bell.

So, my girl,

don't let's be dainty.

Let's not joke,

Almighty God!

Mademoiselle,

I'm long past twenty-

better call it thirty odd. Love doesn't mean

just eternal unrest,

nor the way

one can burn and flare.

It's that

which heaves

under mountain-breasts,

behind

the jungle of hair.

To love means to rush out

into the yard

and right until ravening night with a flashing axe

to chop faggots hard

in a fireworks

of manly might.

To love

is to break

from insomnia-torn sheets, with jealousy of Copernicus

swallowing saliva;

him. not the husband of Mrs. Sugar-and-Sweets regarding as your most deadly rival. Love for us isn't Eden and so on. Love for us booms that once again our heart's too-long-cooling engine will go on working against all odds and pain. You've severed with Moscow every thread, it's years since you and it came to part. Then how shall I hammer into your head the gist of that state of heart? Lights cover the earth right up to the sky. The sky's full of stars go, count the lot. If I wasn't already a poet would turn astronomer, honest to God!

A hubbub fills both alley and square. The traffic

speeds past like mad. while I go sauntering here and there and jot down rhymes in a pad. The cars that race along the street won't knock me down by chance. They understand, and so take heed: the bloke's in a lyric trance. A vortex of images, ideas, and visions the sizzling city brings. Why, even a bear in such conditions would grow a pair of wings. And then out of one of the third-rate bars after stewing inside for a time a word zooms upward straight to the stars like a comet, all ashine, its tail stretched out over half the skies, its plumesthe heavens' highlight, for lovers to sit and feast their eyes while smelling their arbour's lilac;

to rouse

and lead

and enthuse

and uphold 'em,

those

whose spirit is wavering,

to saw off enemies' heads

from their shoulders

with a glittering

long-bladed

sabre.

I'll stand

till the very last beat in my breast

as if

on a rendezvous,

and listen

to love

booming on in its nest,

simple,

human

and true.

Sea-tide,

hurricane,

tempest and flame

rumble inside me

and swell!

Who'd take such a pet

to own and tame?

You would?

Very well!

1928

MY SOUIET PASSPORT

I'd rip out

bureaucracy's guts,

I would

No reverence for mandates—

good riddance!

Pack off to very hell

for good

any old paper,

but this one....

Past berths and compartments

drawn out in a line

moves a customs official,

most courteous-looking.

Folks hand in their passports

and I hand in mine,

my crimson-jacketed

bookling.

Some passports

bring smiles

in a matter of instants.

Others

are fit but to fie on.

Special deference

is shown, for instance

for those

with the double-bed

British Leo.

Bowing non-stop,

as if rocked by a ship,

eating their eyes

into the "kind old uncles",

they take,

as if they were taking a tip

the passports

of lanky Yankees.

At Polish passports

they bulge out their eyes

in thick-skulled

policemen's

donkeyness,

as if to say:

what

the devil are these

geographical

novelties?

Without even turning

their cabbage-like heads,

hardly deigning

to touch them,

they take,

absent-minded,

the passports of Swedes

and all sorts

of other Dutchmen.

But suddenly

Mr. Officer's face

turns awry,

as if

he has smelled disaster.

You've guessed it:

the officer's taken my

red-skinned hulk of a passport.

He handles it

like a hedgehog

or bomb,

like a bee

to be nipped

by the wings,

like a twisting rattlesnake

three yards long

with a hundred

deadly stings.

The porter winks;

to tell the truth,

he'd carry your luggage

free

all the way for you.

The gendarme

looks questioningly

at the sleuth,

the sleuth looks back:

what to do with this wayfarer?

```
With what delight,
                   by the gendarmes,
                                     damn it,
I'd be flayed,
             crucified,
                       hanged
for the crime of holding
                         a sickled,
                                   hammered
Soviet passport
               in my hand!
I'd rip out bureaucracy's guts,
No reverence for mandates-
                             good riddance!
Pack off to very hell
                     for good
any old paper,
              but this one....
As
  the most valuable
                    of certificates
I pull it
        from the pants
                      where my documents are:
read it-
        envy me-
                   I'm a citizen
of the USSR!
1929
```

CLOUD IN PANTS

PROLOGUE

Your thoughts day-dreaming in a pudden'-soft head like an overfed lackey on a greasy sofa, I'll tease with my heart's blood-streaming shred, deride you, audacious, till you smart all over.

In my soul there isn't a single grey hair, no senile tenderness does it hold!
My voice thundering everywhere,
I go,— handsome,
twenty-two-years old.

Tender lovers with violins vie.
The ruder compete with cymbals.
But can anyone turn inside out like I to be nothing but lips, bodiless and limbless?

Come and I'll teach you, Miss Now-Now-No-Fooling, angelic, stiff as the wall of a precipice. Come you, too, who skim over lips as coolly as a cook skims through books of cooking recipes.

If you want—
I can be all crazy flesh,
the antipode of polite romance.
Or
sweet and delicate as you wish;
not a man but a cloud in pants.

I'll never believe there's a flowery Nice. Today once again I sing glory to men who've sinned till they're sick of vice, to women worn as a trite old story.

1

You think it's delirium? Malaria? No! It happened in Odessa when "I'll come at four," said Maria. Eight. Nine. Ten.

Already the evening, gloomy, decemberly, departs from the windows into the horror of night.

Into its flabby back, chortling with devilry, chandeliers stick their light.

You wouldn't recognise me a sinewy mountain groaning and contorting, jowls all knots. What can a hulk like that be wanting? Lots!

For myself, you know, it doesn't much matter that I'm all bronze, that my heart's steel and ice. At night one wants to hide one's metal in something feminine, soft and nice.

So, enormous, hunched, in the window I show, my forehead smelting the windowpanes shiny. Will there be love or no? Big or tiny?

It can't be a big one in such a brute; must be just a lovekin, timid as a lamb, thrown into jitters when motorcars hoot, adoring the tinkle of a tram.

I wait and wait, poking my face into the rain's pocked hide. The minutes race as I stand there, splashed by the thunder of the city's tide.

Midnight, rushing along with a dagger, caught up, stabbed the day—ready!

The twelfth hour staggered and fell like the head of a felon beheaded.

Raindrops landing on the windowpane, fusing into a monstrous grimace, howled in alarm like the scowling chimeras On the Notre Dame.

Damn!
Isn't she coming yet?
Yells tear my mouth—
it's too much to stand.

Then I hear: as softly as a patient from a bed slips out a nerve

and

first slowly, scarce creeping, then running here and there, it and a couple of others go leaping in a crazy dance of despair.

Crash!—went the plaster from the ceiling downstairs

Nerves, barmy, gallop and stampede, little, big, single and in pairs, race till, exhausted, they fall off their feet.

chattered with fright.

Night oozes into the room, in quagmire fashion.

My leaden eyes stick

in the sludge of the night.

The doors in the corridor suddenly start gnashing as if the hotel's teeth

You entered, curt as a knife-thrust unparried, torturing the kid of your glove. "You know, I'm getting married!" There now, talk about love!

All right. Go ahead.
No harm.
Of course.
Look at me—
I'm calm
as the pulse of a corpse.

Remember—
you used to ask:
"Jack London,
money,
love,
passion—
aren't they real?"
And I—all I knew
was that you're the Gioconda
that somebody's got to steal.

And so they did.

Again, love-crazy, I'll plunge into games, illumining my eyebrows' arches with hellfire.

What of it? A house that has been in flames can also sometimes give vagabonds shelter.

You tease me?
"A beggar can boast more pennies
than you have emeralds of insanity."
Remember
the fate that befell Pompeii
when Vesuvius was roused into rage by humanity?

Hey,
gentlemen,
lovers
of sacrilege,
massacre,
crime;
have you seen
the most horrible of all horrors—
my face when it's absolutely serenc?

I feel that "I" is too small for me; irresistibly, I'm turning into somebody or other.

"Hullo! Who's talking?" Who can it be— Mother?

Mother!
Your son is beautifully sick.
There's no time to wait.
His heart is on fire.
Go, tell it to both his sisters, quick!
Or else it may be too late.
Every word,
be it even a joke,
that his scorched mouth belches out, Mother,
leaps like a naked whore through the smoke
out of a burning brothel.

People sniff—
something's frying.
A brigade comes in helmets
and suits
of asbestos.
Look out with your boots, Messrs. firemen,
hearts on fire should be handled with caresses!

Wait,
I'll roll out my tearfilled eyes for watertubs.
Just let me gain hold on my ribs.
Stand by; I'll escape, though escape be torturous.
They've collapsed!
This heart holds me fast in its grips.

From my lips jammed tight like a fire-licked door struggles a kisslet—the last left whole. Mother, I can't go on singing any more: The smoke is choking the choir of my soul.

Charred words and phrases of all sorts and size jump to safety from my burning cranium. So terror once stretched burning hands to the skies from the fire-gutted decks of the *Lusitania*.²⁴

To people trembling in domestic quiet the hundred-eyed fireglow streaks from the anchorage. You, at least, my last cry, groan out:
"I'm on fire!" to the coming centuries.

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 your heart that silly haddock, imagination.

Doves and nightingales, peppered with rhyme, he broils in his pot, the doddering nitwit, while the street goes writhing 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 in it.

Chest all pedestrianed—
no consumptive's more flat—
pushing off the churchporch, that trod on its throat,
out on the square the congestion it spat.

God, it seemed, with his choir of archangels following, robbed, would descend with punishing club.

But the street only squatted, hollering "LET'S—GET—GRUB!"
Churlish makeup-men, krupps and kruppsies, paint on the city a grimace boarish, while in mouths lie words—decaying corpses,

two alone live and fattening—BASTARD and, I believe, BORSHCH.

The poets, slobbering in tears and sobs, dashed clear of the street, clutching their locks: "How shall we ever get on with our jobs with only such two to sing daisies, love and pink frocks?"

After the poets the street-going nation: students, prostitutes, contractors.

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

We, brawn and sinew, robust and supple men, for us to be beggars? Rip them instead, them, hanging on as a free supplement to every double bed!

Ask them for favours?
Wait till they grant them?
Beg rhymester-pygmies for anthem and oratory?
We ourselves
are creators in a burning anthem—
the roar of factory and laboratory.

What's Faustus to me, though he may 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 have written
—All!

Listen!
Blaspheming and cursing,
here
preaches today's yell-mouthed Zoroaster.

We, lips a-blob like a chandelier, faces like grimy 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 the Ovids and Homers had nobody like us, all coal-pocked and sooty. I know, the sun would fade out, almost, stunned by our soul's Hellenic beauty.

No prayer so sure as muscles and grit.

To the devil meekness be hurled.

We—
each of us—
hold in our grip
the transmission belts of the world!

It was this that hoisted me on the calvaries of rostrums²⁵ in towns and cities, low and high,
and there wasn't a soul who with dilated 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?

I, laughed at by the contemporary tribe, like a joke that's endless and obscene, see coming over the mountains of time that which nobody yet has seen.

Where, curtailed, the eyes of mortals halt, at the head of starving hordes, I espy, crowned with the thorns of revolt the year 1916 draws nigh.

And I'm among you to be its herald, everywhere where there's pain, by every tear-drop that falls imperilled, crucified again and again.

Today all forgiveness is at the last. I've burned out souls where softness was instilled. And that's more difficult to do than blast a hundred thousand bastilles.

And when, its coming with rebellion acclaiming, you pour out to meet the Saviour, I will pull out my soul, big, bloody and flaming, a banner for you to lift on high.

3

Oh why, through the gaiety and smiling do fists, so dirty and brutal, thrust? The thought of a lunatic asylum struck me, blinding with despair and disgust.

And, just as they jump into hatches agape, choked by spasms of fear when a ship's end is nigh. So Burlyúk, gone insane, sought escape through the panic-torn hole of his eye.

From his tear-gutted eyelids, bleeding and hideous, he clambered, straightened his spine and with tenderness unexpected in so fat an individual exclaimed, "Fine!"

It's fine when your soul is muffled in a yellow blouse—safe from eyes prone to pry. It's fine, when cast into the teeth of the scaffold, "Drink Van Huten's Cocoa!"26 to cry.

That thundering moment, brighter than fireworks I'd not swap for anything, no, not for any....

But here, like a wineglass, through the cigar smoke protruded the wine-sodden face of Severyanin.

How dare you bear the title of a poet and chirrup like a sparrow, drab and dull? Today like a blackjack, you should go it, bashing the world's rotten skull.

You, disturbed by the single doubt whether or not you dance with a limp,

look how I amuse myself, I, out-and-out vagabond, card sharp and pimp.

From you, wallowing in your lovesick idylls, from you, dribbling tears from the beginning of time, I'll withdraw, sticking the sun for an eyeglass into my wide-open eye.

And thus, unimaginably dressed up, I'll go through the world to thrill and enchant, leading Napoleon for a pup tied on a string, in front.

All the world will sprawl like a woman at my feet and wobble its charms invitingly. Dead things will come alive and "Darling, sweet!" their lips will twitter excitingly.

Suddenly the clouds to the very last cloudlet started rocking as far as the eye could descry, as if white workers, seeking an outlet for their anger, picketed the sky.

The thunder, maddening, climbed from a cloud, inhaled and blew its nose briskly, and the face of the sky for a moment scowled in the sombre grimace of an iron Bismarck.

And someone entangled in the clouds' tenets extended hands to the café, simultaneously soft and tender and harsh as an auto-da-fé. You think it was the sun, maternally tremulous, patting the cheek of a café? Not a whit!
Once more, to execute rebels advances General Galliffet²⁷!

Pub-crawlers, pull your hands out of your pants. Grab bombs, cobblestones, knives, or instead, those of you who haven't got arms and hands batter at walls with your heads!

Come on, you timidlings, starvelings, sweatlings, festering in flea-ridden horridness! Let Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays be dyed with our blood into holidays.

Let the Earth recall under knives who she wanted to degrade, the Earth, bloated like the mistresses and wives by Rothschilds wedded and laid.

Lamp posts, come on, hoist them higher, shop-keepers' bloody bodies, for flags to flutter in the fever of fire as befitting proper holidays!

Begging mercy, with oaths of all size, they grappled, fighting with claw and knife.

The sunset convulsed, red as the *Marseillaise*, taking its leave of life.

Already it's madness.

Nought else can happen.

Night'll come, bite it off and swallow. See—again the heavens, like Judas, are happy with a handful of stars, treacherous and hollow.

It comes and feasts like Mamai,²⁸ even cruder, sitting on the city with its huge behind. That night—no eyes on earth could have screwed it, blacker than Azef,²⁹ the blackest of his kind.

Cramped, I huddle in the corner of a saloon, spill wine on my soul, on the tablecloth and all, while there, from across, round as the moon, the Madonna's eyes eat into my soul.

Why bless this stinking, pub-crawling herd with your gaudy stencilled aura? Can't you see— again
Barabbas is preferred to the spat-at Calvarian—our gracious lord?

Perhaps it was ordained so—
in the human sty
I'm no newer in face than the rest,
yet of all your sons
maybe it's I
who is the devoutest, most beautiful and best.

Grant them, rotting in their mundane joys, a speedy death of time so that among their children boys should grow up to fatherly prime and girls give birth and the newborn mature to the grey-haired wisdom of sages and go along and christen their seed with names they find in my pages.

I, who glorify England and its engines, perhaps I'm simply a thirteenth apostle in the succession of apostles and archangels that populate the Holy Gospel.

And when my voice goes obscenely booming its daily and nightly rigmarole, maybe Jesus Christ himself smells the blooming forget-me-nots of my soul.

4

Maria! Maria! Maria!
Let me in, Maria!
Don't keep me out in the street.
No?
Waiting until my cheeks sink in,
till, tasted by everyone,
I go to waste?—
till I come and mumble with a toothless grin
that
"Today I'm
extraordinarily chaste"?

Maria, look— I'm already getting hunched.

All over the city, everywhere, bunched in the four-storeyed gizzards of flats people will poke out their eyes through their fats, eyes threadbare with forty years' wear to giggle and pass on the infallible guess that "again he's chewing like a broken-down mare the stale crust of yesterday's caress".

All over the pavements the rain slobbers, hemmed in by the puddles, a homeless crook,

wet, licking the roads stoned to death by the cobbles, while on its hoary eyelashes—
look!—
on its frosty icicle-lashes
tears from its eyes,
from the downcast eyes of the drain-pipes—tears!—
come welling out in spasmodic splashes.

The raindrops every pedestrian licked while in carriages athlete after fat athlete glistened and burst, having grown so stout and slick, fat oozed through the cracks mixed with bits of gristle.

Dripping in streamlets the colour of mud, together with spittle-soaked bread and sauerkraut like a sort of thoroughly masticated cud week-old cutlets came flowing out.

Maria!

How thrust a quiet word into their fat-clogged ear? Birds beg for a living by singing, resonant.

And I'm just a human being, Maria, Just a human, spat out by consumptive night into the dirty hand of the Presnya.

Maria, will you have such a creature near? Let me in, Maria, or with frantic fingers I'll throttle the doorbell, pressing it.

Maria!

The cattleyards of the streets get beastlier. The rabble's stranglehold grips me tight.

Open!

It hurts!
See—my eyes are bristling with ladies' hairpins stuck in for spite.

Ha! She's opened.

Dear, don't be afraid that on my bullock neck sit sweat-bellied women in a mountain wet-skirted—a burden I'll drag till I turn to a wreck: millions of great loves, pure, without a speck, and millions of lovelets, tiny and dirty.

Dear, never fear if in fits of dishonesty I'll cling to a thousand pretty faces again. Mayakovsky's sweethearts—why, they're a dynasty of empresses ascending a mad heart to reign.

Maria! Come nearer!

In shameless nudity or in shivering fright, give me your lips' unfaded loveliness. I and my heart never saw May's delight, only April's immature slovenliness.

Maria!
One poet sings sonnets to Tiana³⁰ while I, all human, flesh all the way, just beg for your body like Christians for manna: "Lord, give us our daily bread this day!"

Maria, give!

Maria!
Your name I fear to forget
as a poet fears
to forget some word
just found, not dry or discoloured yet,
in its glory matching the glory of the lord.

Maria! Your body I'll love and tend the way a soldier, stunted by war, cherishes his only leg; Nay, more!

No? You don't want to?

Ha!

So it means I'll take up my heart once more and carry it, tear-sprayed, alone again, like a dog goes carrying its paw overrun by a train.

I bless the road with my blood's holy water. The roadside flowers kiss my garment's shred. A thousand times will the sun—Herod's daughter—dance round the globe—the Baptist's head.

And when it dances out to the ending the number of years for my life assigned, a trail of millions of blood-drops extending to the home of my father, I'll leave behind.

I'll crawl from my grave, soiled with nights spent in ditches, bend over and say, hitching up my britches:

Listen here, Mister Lord!

Don't you feel bored in the jelly of clouds daily dipping soft eyes? You know what—let's set up a merry-go-round on the tree of knowledge of virtue and vice! Omnipresent, all bread-bins will be filled up with you

and we'll put such wines on the table that St. Peter will ache to dance the ki-ka-poo, sighing for the times when he was still able. We'll fill up Paradise with Eves once more; say the word, and this very night I'll fetch the prettiest girls you ever saw from the Tverskoy boulevard—all right?

No? You waggle your head's silver ringlets, scowl at me from above? You think that fellow behind you with the winglets knows anything about love?

I'm an angel, too; used to be before, gazing with the look of an innocent lamb. But I won't make gifts to mares any more of Sèvres vases, damn!

You invented this pair of hands, Almighty, made a head to be worn by every duffer. Then why don't you let us kiss daily and nightly without ever having to suffer?

You—omnipotent? Deal out death and life? You're just an ignoramus, a petty brute. Look—I bend down, pull a cobbler's knife from inside the top of my boot. Let your feathers shiver in St. Vitus' dance; crouch in heaven, lip-serving, wing-flapping rascals! I'll rip you all up, stinking with incense, from here right down to Alaska!

Let go!

You won't stop me.
Whether I'm wrong
or right
I can't be calmer and don't think I ought to.

Look—
the stars have again been beheaded,
the sky
all red with the blood of slaughter!

Hey you, heavens, I'm coming, d'you hear? Take off your hats, or....

Silence.

The Universe sleeps, its huge ear dotted with star-ticks laid on its paw.

1914-1915

I LOUE

Usually So

Love's given to anyone born, I've noted, but between one's business, income and so on, the heart gets coated with soil too crusty for love to grow on. The heart's in the body, and that has the shirt on. But, as if it wasn't enough, somebody—idiot! invents the shirtfront. claps his paps into starch for bluff. Old age comes on she takes to make-up, while he looks to Müller³¹ to give him a shake-up. Too late! The wrinkles crop up all about. Love sizzles and fizzles andgoes out.

As a Kid

My love-gifts at birth were the average level. But another's put to drudge from a kid.

And I'd just bolt to the Rion³²—sheer devil, loafing around was all I did.

Mother scolded: to death I'd drive her.

Father:

"My belt'll teach him sense!"

But I'd get hold of a phoney fiver and gamble with soldiers under a fence.

Unburdened by footwear,

by shirt untrammeled I'd broil in the mad Kutaisi heat, poking sunward first back then tummy until that tummy would ache to eat. The sun must have puzzled: "Scarce seen, the shrimp! Yet has his feelings, and quite acute. Wherever could there be room in the imp for me, river and mountains to boot?"

As a Lad

Arithmetic, grammar and suchlike lessons, they keep you busy in adolescence. I was kicked out of school at the fifth year's turning, then chucked about jails, to go on learning. Poets are bred in your wee, snug world for bedrooms only, petted and curled. What good can be had from the lapdog lyrics? Me--I got taught to love in Butyrki.33 To moan that the Bois de Boulogne leaves me shaken?

To sigh at views of the sea? Like hell! I fell in love with an undertaker's through the eyehole of cell 103. You see the sun daily, turn up your chin "A fat lot of use, those rays!" And I for a sunspot

the size of a pin could have given worlds those days.

My University

You know your French? Distinguish clauses? Tell declinations? Well, go on telling 'em. But say can you sing in tune with houses? Do you know the language the trams are yelling in? The human chick, as soon as it hatches, gets textbooks and pads to fix its eye on. I learned ABC from signboards, by snatches, wading through pages of tin and iron. They take the earth, after pruning and cropping, then study it, shrunk to a baby's toy. I got my geography, nightly flopping down on the ground from a boy. Grand issues split Ilovaisky's head: "Barbarossa's beard was it ginger or red?" Much I care for the musty mystery! Moscow gossip that's all my history. They take Dobrolyubov³⁵ (the more to hate evil); kinsfolk, genteel, howl "heretic, sinner!" I've hated fat bellies so I could kill them always selling myself for dinner.

8 - 570

Once taught, vou sit and be nice to a lady; thoughts drip sparely from pudd'nhead brain. Ι had only the buildings to aid me, only the pumphouses to entertain. They'd listen close. chimney and eave, eager to hear, quick to perceive. And then the weather-vane tongues would creak. handing over the news of the week.

Grown-Up

Grown-ups have their business, pockets with dough. Want love? Just pay up a hundred or so. And I roamed homeless, eyes aglare, paws in pockets, all holes and air. Dressed in your best, you rest your soul on wives and widows as the nights draw over you. And me all Moscow would burn me like coal in the vice-like hug of her endless Sadovaya.36

Your mistresses' heart-clock ticks soft and mild. For bedfellows joy enough and to spare. But for me a capital's heart beat wild as I measured my length on Strastnaya Square.37 Wide open heart almost out in the air to sunshine and puddle I laid myself bare. Cram me with passions. love and lust, no longer my heart can I rule or trust. In others' I know where the heart's abode is it's in the chest—beneath the pullover. And mine mine's one of those crazy bodies one booming and thumping heart all over. Springtimes alone—all of 20 were there stuffed by the time into red-hot me. Their burden, unspent, was too much to bear, making me ache for love-to-be.

The Outcome

Bigger than dreamed by any romantic, a poet's nightmare for size and weight, the heart-lump bulged till it got gigantic, gigantic in love and gigantic in hate. Under the burden my legs go bending, —and, you know, I'm pretty well built—yet I drag along, my own heart's appendage, shoulders—a yard across—just wilt. Swollen with rhyme milk—no outlet for me, Brimming—yet still it wells up, darn! World lyric wet-nurse,—nothing before me my puny precursor by Maupassant.³⁸

1 Call

Heave-ho! I shouldered it, throbbing and thumping. In the manner strikers' meetings are called, as they sound an alarm when there's flames a-jumping, so I yelled out it's here! Take hold! When such a whopper, knuckles pocketed, stampeded, reckless. through mud and slush, off top-speed the petticoats rocketed; "We'd prefer something littler, softer...." Tush! So bore I my burden, though sure I couldn't, glad to discard it, knowing I wouldn't. The strain, it well-nigh busted the thorax. Ribs cried for mercy all in a chorus.

You

Business-like, fie-ing at growl and grit, you sized me up at a glance—mere boy!
Picked up that heart, dismayed not a whit, and set off playing—a child with a toy.
And all—as if they'd witnessed a wonder—maidens and matrons, their horror displayed: "Love such a hulk? Why, he's all blood and thunder! Must be a bear-tamer—look, unafraid!" And me—I rejoiced—no load on my back.

All but mad with delight, I capered about like a newly-wed black, so jolly I felt, I felt so light.

Impossible

Alone I'd find a piano too heavy, and, of course, a steel safe too. So with safe and piano; then how, great heavens, could I carry my heart got back from you? Bankers know. "We're rich without limit. Pockets filled up use a safe—safer in it." My love hid in you like wealth in steel, happy-go-lucky, like Croesus I feel. Tust at times, if I'm short of delight, I might take a smile, half a smile or so in that range and spend on a spree with friends in a night a handful or two of lyric small change.

The Same with Me

Fleets—even fleets sail back to shore.
Trains—even trains pull in at their station.
Well, and I—I'm pulled all the more,
pulled to you by sheer adoration.
Down to his vault goes Pushkin's knight*
to gloat over treasure by candle-light.
So I come back to you, my beloved—
my heart's own strong-box—to cherish and love it.
Men come home happy,
dirt and stubble
removed with the help of soap and razor.
You—you are my home. I come and just bubble
over with joy—
so bright those days are.

^{*} Allusion to The Covetous Knight by Pushkin.-Tr.

Earthlings return to the earth, their mother, the end of the way on which we're started. So I'm drawn back to you and no other as soon as I go, the minute we've parted.

Summary

No miles, no quarrels can blot out love, tested, thought out all through. With rhyme-fingered verse in oath raised above I swear I love you, unswerving and true.

1922

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

In this theme.

both private and trivial,

sung time and again

before

I've spun round

like a sort of poetical squirrel

and now

want to spin once more.

This theme

sounds today

in a Buddhist's prayer,

makes a boss-hating Negro

whet his knife.

On Mars,

if there's anyone man-hearted there,

he, too,

must be scraping

with his pen all his life.

This theme will come

to a limbless cripple,

grab his shoulders

and stick a pencil in his teeth,

shove his nose to a notebook

and order: "Scribble!"

and he'll eagle up,

leaving the world beneath.

It's a theme that'll come,

ring the backdoor bell,

poke its nose in,

then vanish again like a ghost,

and, giant or dwarf,

all your thoughts go pell-mell

and you drown in a rippling ocean of notes.

It's a theme that'll come

and demand:

"The Truth!"

It's a theme that'll come and order: "Beauty!" And, though nailed to the cross, you forget your ruth, a waltz-tune or something absently tooting. Let that theme touch the alphabet as it rolls a thing clear enough for the thickest headand A becomes as remote as the poles and you're dazedyou forget about sleep and bread. It's a theme that comes and never grows old, never goes out of sight, so without a word vou become a standard-bearer to hold a red flame of silk high over the world. It's a crafty old theme dives under events: preparing to leap, among instincts it hides, then "How dare you forget?" incensed. shakes our souls right out of our hides. With a growling demand: "Hand over the reins!" that theme on my door one day came battering, commented crossly on my dried-out brains

and, enraged, sent affairs and acquaintances scattering. That theme came along, made all others remote, and alone assumed undivided preeminence. It gripped me, that theme, like a thug, by the throat, like a blacksmith it hammered from heart to temples. That theme blacked out days and bade: "Ram with your rhyme at the darkness around, beneath

The name of that theme,

supreme and sublime:

and above."

.!

BALLAD OF READING GAOL

I remember standing on the brink of this glitter. Then it was called the Neva.

(V. Mayakovsky, Man)

My ballad and ballads in general The fashion for ballads

is far from young.

But when words from the heart are wrung by the pain

with which that heart has been stung then ballads are young enough

to be sung.

Lubyansky Drive.³⁹

Vodopyany Lane.40

Imagine the scene

if you're able,

She's in bed.

Lying awake.

He-

at the telephone,

by the table.

My ballad's subject

is "He and She".

Not so awfully new,

I agree.

The awful thing is

that I am that "He"

and that she

has to do

with me.

What's this talk about jail?

Christmas.

All hail.

No bars

to bar

the light.

That doesn't concern you.

I say it's jail.

A table.

Across it—

a straw pulled tight.

Call number put through the cable

I touch it to listen:

there—a blister!

The receiver flies from my hand. The trade-mark arrows* begin to glisten

and lightning-like

whirl round the telephone-stand.

From next-doors

comes the comment,

drowsy, vexed:

"Where's it come from-

a real live piglet?

What next?"

The bell's already

squealing with burns.

The telephone set's

white-hot.

She's ill!

Dying!

Go rescue her!

Out!

Ouicker!

By God!

My flesh is smoking.

I can't stop the sizzling.

Lightnings

all over my body

race.

A million volts!

Things do look grisly

as I poke my lip

at the telephone blaze.

Drilling

holes

in the house's timber, making the cable twist and curl, Bullet-like, speeds the number

^{*} The trade mark on telephones those days were two broken arrows, crossed.—Tr.

where the earth
lies bare today—
nothing but ruins
standing about—
under fathoms of rubble
hidden away
the Commune's
great edifice

Fine!

starts to sprout.



down

to the telephone-girl.

The girl's eye squints at the switchboard wonkily.

Holiday tomorrow;

yet work like a donkey.

Then-

all of a sudden

the red light goes on;

ting-a-ling!

goes the bell

and the light is gone.

Suddenly

the lamps go crazy again:

Jitters

the telephone network

seize:

"67-10!

Connect me please."

"Quick!"

"Vodopyany?

Hullo!

That you?"

Phew!

No joking with electric installations.

To be blown up

on Christmas Eve

too,

together with the telephone station! There lived

I here lived an old-timer

in Myasnitskaya Street;41

ever since then

all he did was repeat

the story

to grandchildren willing to hear, and surely it did sound queer.

"I was out

to buy ham-

cheap, if I could;

then it rattled like thunder-

earthquake,

or what?

You could hardly stand no grip underfoot. Shoe-soles burned the ground was so hot." "Go on, old man! It can't be, you know. An earthquake? In winter? At the G.P.O.?" Squeezing by a miracle runs amuck through the hair-breadth cord, stretching the ear-piece into a gaping maw. crushing the silence, the phone-bell roared in an avalanche of bell-peals from floor to floor. The screaming, deafening hell-bell pounced at the walls which were shattered beyond repair. Then in millions of echoes from the walls it bounced. scattering under bed and chair. From ceiling to floor the monster-bell crashed and again, like an out-size ball. clanging crazily, upwards it dashed, again in tinkling splinters to fall. Windows and chandeliers. pot and kettle joined in unison with the clangour, shaking the house like a baby-rattle, the phone-bell raved like a belfry in anger. The second Puffy from sleep, her dots of eves poking their pinpoints through brick-red cheeks,

The

telephone

cook makes a half-hearted effort to rise. waddles to the phone and sniffling, speaks: "Washa mean? Vladim Vladimich? Washa...?" Unaccustomed attempts at understanding squash her face into a semblance of a dried-up apple; she trundles off. with her slippers flapping. She goes like a second counting off strides; her footsteps sound farther, hardly pattering. All the rest of the world into nothingness slides; the Unknown alone aims the telephone at me. The world Speakers at every conference and congress, clears interrupting unfinished gestures in mid-air, froze and, agape, at the most incongruous and ghastliest of Christmases turned their stare. They see life only from scandal to row, their homes one endless hum-drum morass. Waiting for the mortal duel, now they gaped at me, their own looking-glass. Automobile horns were petrified; all sounds hushed up through the world's length and bread

and Doctor Time

nothing but the duel

with the boundless bandage of all-healing Death Moscow.

Beyond it

the fields lie motionless.

Seas

and behind them the mountains stride.

All the universe seen

through binoculars,

gigantic binoculars

(from the wrong side).

The horizon straightened,

level as can be,

a cord

taut as strings are

in harpsichords,

one phone in my room

connecting me

with the other

with you

in yours.

In between

with a look

never dreamed of in verse

grand,

as if proud of its new white livery,

the Myasnitskaya cut

through the universe,

a miniature

out of carven ivory.

Clarity.

Torture by transparentest clarity.

Under the Myasnitskaya

a cable like a thread,

and everything hangs

on that hair-thin rarity

artistically inlaid

in the street's white bed.

The duel One.

The phone's raised.

If hope had been

it's gone now. Two! Unerringly aiming the telephone muzzle points between my eyes half-begging and half-complaining. I feel I could yell at the slow-moving bitch. Can't you move faster? Don't stand like Dantés.42 Ouick, shoot through the cable. Now what's the hitch? At least this torture could last a bit less. More terrible than bullets, the cable swelling, dropped by the cook between two yawns, like a swallowed rabbit in a python's belly from there to me a dread word crawls. And dreader than words, from times immemorial when male won female by rule of might, out of the cord came jealousy crawling, a cave-dwelling monster,

a troglodyte.

And yet, perhaps. .

Not perhaps but of course nothing crawled from the cord

to test my fettle.

and there weren't any troglodytes' faces

or claws—

just myself in the telephone—

mirrored in its metal.

There now, VTsIK,43

go and issue your circulars, try and check the truth of these facts against Ehrfurt's.44

Through the first pangs of pain, wild and ridiculous, a beast scrapes his way, despite the brain's efforts. Beautiful sight! can happen Comrades, to a fellow try and digest it! I. this summer in Paris due. a poet and respectable correspondent of Izvestia scratching the chair with a claw through my shoe! In yesterday's human at one go fangs cut through and. a bear, I bare them. Tufts of hair from my jacket grow. Roaring into phonesis that all you know? Off to the Arctic to join your brethren! A bear driven to deadly wrath, I charge at the phone, turned foe from intimate. While the trade-mark spear

Bearification

What

drills its fatal path

through my heart,

plunging deeper and deeper into it.

It pours:

copper-red torrents fall.

Lap up the growls and blood,

my dark flat!

I don't know for sure

whether bears cry at all

but if they do,

it must be like that.

Exactly so; no one, falsely compassionate to watch them, all through the valley they squall, and exactly so their bear-neighbour Balshin wakes up and grumbles behind the wall. Exactly so I picture a bear; motionless, face turned up, he roars. howls himself out, then repairs to his lair clawing the walls with all twenty claws. Leaves come down in a showerhe's frightened, thinks gunshots are starting to crash through the skies Yes. only bears can see such nightmares through tears and fur fuzzying their eyes. My room A bed. Bars of iron. The blanket threadbare. The bear lies in irons. A numb, half-dead bear. A shudder begins and runs through the iron, rippling through the bedclothes I lie on. Water chills my foot with its touch. Water? Where from and why so much? It's I myself crying. Cry-baby, fool!

leaks

Rubbish. Nobody could cry such a pool. Damned bath! There's water behind the sofa; under the table and wardrobe it creeps. From behind the sofa, turning over and over out of the window my suitcase sweeps. In the fireplace a fag-endchucked it there myselfgot to stamp it out. But it's flaring up, dash it. What? Fireplace? No fireplace!— help! iust a bank miles away with bonfires flashing. All's been washed out even the odour of cabbage from the kitchen, sour and rank. Emptiness. Only a river, broader and broader. Far off the opposite bank. The wind from the Ladoga plays its fiddle. The river's all goose-skinned because of the chill, with me,

on a floe in the middle.

a white bear.

Not a soul. Not a sound. All's dismal. still. The icefloe I'm on, it used to be a pillow. Away run the banks, view upon view. The wind goes raising billow after billow. And away with the wind sails my pillow, too. Feverish. on my pillow-floe Only one sensation's not washed away: I've got to pass under somethingwhatmy bed or a bridge-I cannot sav. I've been through this once, years before. Whether bear or not, I begin to roar. I, the wind, this river? Not this one?! A minute or more I remain in doubt. Yes, I recall how it used to glisten.

Back!

But the river

won't let the raft out.

Closer and closer,

clearer and clearer,

the same old scene begins to appear. He (I) on the bridge—

nearer and nearer.

No going back now.

He'll be!

He's here!!!

The man from seven years back45

There,

the waves at its steel feet dancing, motionless,

fearsome and mighty in span,

in the city

built of despair

by my fancy

on its hundred-storey supports

it stands.

With its embroidery

of trellised girders,

in the sky's domain

the bridge intervenes.

I shift my eyes

further and further.

There, there

on the iron railings he leans.

Pardon, Neva!

No, it drives me back.

Have pity!

No, it won't lift its ban.

There,

chained by myself to the bridge's rack on the sky's flaming background stands that man.

his hair unkempt-

never cut it, I reckon.

I paw at my ears—

in vain, of course-

it continues,

my own,

my own voice's echo-

the knife of my voice

cuts my ears through my paws.

My very own voice:

I can hear it beg;

Vladimir,

stop!

Don't go off and leave me!

Why didn't you let me dash down then and wreck my heart on the buttresses—

that would relieve me.

Seven years

I stand here and gaze at the river,

strapped to the bridge

by your verses' wire.

For seven long years

the river's eyes drill me.

Say,

when does my term up here expire?

Perhaps you're worming your way into their caste? Kissing?

Guzzling?

Grown one of those paunches?

Want

a bit of their pie to taste?

Begging for it

upon your haunches?

Don't think,

the spectre's hand motioned downwards,

menacingly, at the river's depth;

don't think of escape!

It's I that have summoned you;

I'll find you anywhere,

hound you to death!

There's a holiday in town.

I can hear the noise of it.

So tell them to come,

the holiday marchers.

Let an act be adopted

by the city Soviet

to confiscate,

abrogate my tortures,

till down this wide

and deep-flowing river

Love

the saviour,

comes

and my spirit arouses.

You're doomed, too, to wander.

You won't be loved either.

Just paddle

and crash

on the reefs of houses.

Help!

Stop, pillow!

In vain, though,

were all my efforts.

I paddled with my paw,

a sorry oar.

The river was as relentless as ever: downstream

my pillow-icefloe

it bore.

Already I'm far,

maybe a day

from my shadow there,

at the bridge's rails.

Yet his voice-

it pursues me

all the way,

throaty menaces

filling its sails.

You think you'll forget

the sparkle of the river?

Replace it by something?

Try if you can.

Till death you'll remember the quiver that ran through the poem Man. I begin to shout.

Cover that yell?

A booming storm-

out-shout it if you can.

Somebody, help!

Help....

Help.... Help!...

There,

on the riverbridge,

stands

a man!

CHRISTMAS EUE

Fantastic reality

The banks flit past,

view after view.

Beneath me rocks

the pillow of ice.

The wind from the Ladoga howls:

whoo-hoo

while onward

the ice-raft flies.

S.O.S.

I signal with a word-lit flare.

The river ends,

grows into a sea.

S.O.S.!

my call

pierces the air

like

a thundering

battery.

It grows

into a giant square,

the pillow-island

that's under me.

The sound of the waves

grows soft and low,

dying down

after a while.

No seas any more.

I'm on the snow.

Dry land all around-

mile upon mile.

They call it dry,

but the snow's wet,

half-thawed.

I'm caught

by a vicious

snow-band.

I cudgel my brains:

what land is it, lord:

Green-,

Lap-,

or Love-land?

Agony of awakening

From a cloud

the moon-melon,

ripening, falls.

Things sort themselves out,

get clearer a bit.

Petrovsky Park.

Behind me unrolls

the Khodynka;

ahead—

the Tverskaya's46 white sheet.

O-o-oh!

to the Sadovaya

reaches my "oh!"

Knocked down by a car

or by horses,

my mug's yard-deep in the snow.

Bullet-like,

follow curses:

"Blind with the NEP?

Where's your eyes?

Nep your mother,

can't you watch your step,

you bloody ass in disguise?"

Ah yes-

I'm a bear.

No wonder they swear.

Pretty fix, isn't it?

How to explain

who I was,

who I am,

how and what I became?

Saviour

There comes

a wee little man from the corner.

bigger and bigger

every minute.

Moonshine sits on his head like an aura.

Quick,

get a boat

and bring him in it.

The Saviour—that's it!

Looks like Jesus—

his grace,

calm and kind,

crowned with the moon.

He approaches.

There's no moustache on his face!

Not Jesus at all.

Younger, softer.

Soon

he's closer.

Komsomol features displaying, hatless and coatless.

Puttees and khaki.

Now folding his hands,

as if

he's praying,

now,

as if in a speech

the void air hacking.

Woolly snow.

The boy, he walked on wool.

Gilded wool.

And now the trite old picture's full.

So sad and snivelly—

just sobbing all along—

you feel you'll slobber

in a gypsified old song.

Gypsified song

On he walked,

eyes to the sunset glued.

The sunset

was the yellowest of yellow.
The very snow was somewhat yellow-hued; with eyes unseeing, on he went, poor fellow.
Then stopped stock still,
arms' steel
in silk.*

The sunset for an hour

stayed focussed to a point,

^{*} In 1914-17 Mayakovsky went about in a yellow silk blouse.

and watched the shadow-streak he left behind. The snow kept crunching breaking someone's joints. Whose joints? What for? What reason could it find? The wind, rude burglar, searched the boy all round and read the note that in his clothes it found to all Petrovsky Parkaloud and without shame: "Good bye. . . . I've had enough.... There's nobody to blame...." No option Could anyone be so much like me? Awful. But there-I dash to the puddle to pull off the jacket, all blood and tears. Ah well! That other's in a deadlier muddle, watching it all from his bridge seven years. I pulled on the jackettight—hard to get in; then shaved the growth from my cheeks and chin. The soap wouldn't lather so my jaw went jumping; my mirror—an iceblock, my razor—a sunbeam. Almost the same as him by my look I run, in my mind revolving addresses. First to the Presnya,47 to the family nook instinct drives meyeah, that's where the place is.

After me, into the distance fading, all-Russian sons and daughters come parading. "Volodya! Bless us! Everyone's Come here for Christmas!?" barents Corridor darkness. Room electricity. Instantly relatives' faces go crooked. "Volodya! Good heavens! What is it, eh? Your coat's all red. Your collar! Look at it!" "Don't mind it, Mummy. I'll wash it in tears. There's plenty at home. All over the place. Not that it matters. Darlings, dears! You love me, don't you? You love me, yes? Then listen, Mother, sisters, Switch off the Christmas tree. Lock the door. I'll take you... You'll go with me.... No, you can't put it off. You're going. Immediately, all four. It isn't so far at alljust six hundred versts⁴⁸. mere child's play.

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He's waiting.

We'll all be there in the twinkling of an eye.

We'll board a tram straightaway."

"Volodya, calm down, dear!" But I, a bit rough, out-yell the familial squealing. "So that's your way? Tea instead of love? Sock-darning instead of feeling?" Travelling I don't mean just you, with mother my own dear Mother; the whole world's obsessed with family fervour. See therethe ship's masts bristling like sedge; it's Germany, split by the Oder's wedge. We're over Stettin, engines whirring. Next stop, Mummy, and we're in Berlin. The plane purrs on, all tense and eager: Paris— America-Brooklyn Bridge; The Sahara. A curly Negress and Negro sip teaa family too, black as pitch. Featherbeds will squash both willpower and stone, the Commune will turn into comfy bunkum. For centuries men tucked their life into home. Today too, you're cosy again with your domkom.⁴⁹ October's storm of judgement is behind. And now, in the shade of its fiery wing,

you set out your china, hang up your blinds, fire-proof, emotion-proof, proof to heart-sting. Vanish, home! Fireplace and birthplace, farewell! I fling all ties to the dickens. What's family in my predicament? Worthless! Chicken-love, fit for children and chickens. I run on and see: in everyone's presence down the Kudrinskaya,⁵⁰ blithe and bland, my own sweet self, coming loaded with presents under my arms and in either hand. Its masts strained taut in the storm like crosses, all ballast overboard my ship tosses. Ten times be confounded, emptied-out lightness! Far houses bare fangs of a chalk-cliff whiteness. No crowd. no squarethe silence is utter. Silence reigns supreme everywhere. Only snow all around. and through the shutters

Mirages on the Presnya

and through the shutters the lighted candles on Christmas trees flare. I slow down,

putting brakes on my toes. Walls loom tall.

with windows in rows.

. .

People's shadows like targets in shooting ranges bob in the windows, luring in strangers. Chilled through, eves fixed on the Neva, he stands and waits for aid. . . . Across the thresholddoor ajar-I throw my foot come what may. In the passage a drunkard. airing delirium. suddenly sobered and ran for it, bleary. Then the whole assemblage proceeded to blare; "Bear! BEAR! BEAR! Twisting his face into a question mark, the host poked out half an eye with the bark: acquaintances "Well-well, Mayakovskybear indeed!" All the bitter-sour faces turned honey-sweet. "Come in, you're welcome," he led the way. "A pleasant surprise,51 as Blok used to say. Meet Fyokla Davidovna, my wife. An' this is my daughter, our seventeen-year-old Miss. And this is so-and-so. I believe you've met,"

10-570

Fvokla Davidovna's

husband.

myself

and all the

the host went on,

true to etiquette.

Card-partners

who'd slipped into mouseholes from dread,

still holding their cards

crawled from under the bed.

With whiskers on end,

stuck up towards the ceiling

from under the table

crawled booze-mates, reeling.

And from under the wardrobe-

admirers, readers,

all the faceless populace. Name them? Needless! They come and they come in timid infinity, their beards with domestic cobwebs glinting. Age upon age,

the same old sludge:

unwhipped,

domesticity's mare won't budge.

In place of a

guardian angel⁵² there stood,

their lodger in jodhpurs;

so far, so good.

But what was most awful,

in height,

in skin,

in clothes,

in gait,

in eyes

in one of them,

like as a pin,

myself

I recognised.

From matresses

long deserving a beating

bedbugs

raised their forelegs

in greeting.

The samovar beamed

with its brazen face,

holding its handles out

to embrace.

All

the things

danced attendance around me.

The fly-blown garlands

from the wallpaper crowned me.

Angels

played

a flourish on their horns.

peeping,

pink,

from the icons' sheen.

Jesus, lifting his crown of thorns,

bowed.

polite and suavely serene.

Marx himself,

in his red frame harnessed

with the rest

hauled the philistine cart

in dead earnest.

Canaries

began to sing from their perches,

geraniums

with their fragrances smote us.

Posing diligently,

squatting, virtuous,

grandmothers

hospitably

leered from their photos.

All bowed and nodded-

courteous, very!

And in booming basses

and psalm-singing discants:

Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas!

Mer-ry

Christmas!

The host paws the armchairs,

with puff and blow

himself clears the tablecloth

of the last wee breadcrumb.

"If I'd known....

I thought you'd be home with your own;

if only I'd known! It's an honour you're welcome!" Senseless Whose own? requests My own? some specimens, they! You'd meet them, perhaps, if you turned Santa Claus. My ownthey're way off on the Ob and Yenisei, lumbering on through the woods on all fours. My home? There isn't any home I know. My home? Home? No! I floated away from it hours ago, down the Neva on a pillow-floe. My home now is ice all stark and bare, not very nice, but there.... I varied my words, now most oratorial. now tinkling lyricsome, now frightfully roaring, from benefits turning to glory eternal, begging, threatening, agitating, imploring. "My verse is for all, see? for you yourselves. Say, Mystery-Bouffe⁵³not for my own pleasure.

Poetry's not just to stack on shelves. All-important no freak-child of day-dreaming leisure. Say, perhaps I'm a bear, to put it roughly. but my poetryflav me and take itmy hide. With a lining of rhymesthere's a coat for you, Then sipping tea at the fire, side-by-side: "It's a trifleten minutes, no more by boat. But it must be now, else it might be too late. P'raps a pat on the shoulder: 'Don't lose hope!' It's urgent, I tell you, it can't be delayed." Rolling breadballs, in courteous mockery they listen, smiling, to the eminent buffoon. My words bounced like peas from foreheads and crockery, till one drank himself maudlin and started to croon: "Wait a minute. . . I know which is which. It's easy as toffee c'mon, ol' hoss! I'm goingyou say he waits on a bridge?

I know-

it's the corner of Kuznetsky Most.

Lemme go,

you hear—

lemme...

listen..."

"He's sizzled!

the wine-soaked table

went hissing.

Dammit,

don't whine.

Better have

some wine.

S'pose that's fixed? Now back to 66!*

To hell with theory—it's practice, this NEP!

Your glass, futurist, show us some pep!"

Undaunted by the imminent threat to their jaws, they set off champing

with hee-hees and haw-haws.

Belched between glasses,

poetic discussions

from their artesian throats

came gushing.

"Good night!" said the bedbugs

and went back to sleep.

Age-old dust

resettled on things, inch deep.

While he

still stood

to the railings nailed,

believing,

waiting,

hoping:

soon!

So I with my word-rams

again assailed

the wall of domestic welfare,

goon.

^{*} Popular card-game.

Again I attacked both this way and that. But strangely, the words went through, and fell flat. Extraordinary My bass hushes down to a mosquito-trill. Once again empty, the china gets still. Drowning in greys, into etchings wrinkling, walls and wallpaper fade and fade. Spreading from the walls to the city, Boecklin⁵⁴ etched out Moscow in an island of the dead. It's been long, long since, all the more so now; quite simple, simple as anything. There in his boat, cerements round his torso, sits the Ferryman, numb as a mannequin. The fields look like seaswhich is which, you wonder. Every whisper silence has erased. The skeletal poplars, painted yonder, their deadness towards the heavens raise. All right. I stepped out and the poplars stirred into motion,

Calm and quiet,

marching without a word.

an impressive sight,

they've turned into watchmen, militiamen of the night.

White Charon,

splitting in four

at one go

turns into the columns

of the G.P.O.

No escape So murderers burst

into people's sleep,

splitting

sleepy

heads

at one sweep,

and everything vanishes

out of those heads

with the first sight of axes

glimpsed over beds.

So the streets' drums

break up sleep with their roll

and straightaway

you recall

that here's despair

and there's the wall

and beyond it

she

who's to blame for it all. Covering the windows with the corner's palm, I pulled out

sideways

pane after pane.

I've staked all my life

on these window-cards.

Just overdraw

and I lose again.

Night, the sharper,

deals out hallucinations

marking the glass

with merriment's light.

The pack of windows

glares,

audacious,

from the scurrilous hold of swindler-night.

0, to be able, as before, on rhyme-wings right through the window-pane! But nojust cling to the wall's damp slime: neither my rhyme nor the time's the same. The wall-stone numbs, as chilly as the grave. Brooms here, it seems, neglect their chores. On my bare feet, feeling far from brave, I climb the spittle-smeared porch. The chain of heartache will not break off, clamping new link to new link. Thus, after killing, Raskolnikov⁵⁵ went up the steps to ring. The guest-crowd's filing up the stairs; I jump off the steps and float mid-airs. flattening myself against the wall, and then I hear the guitar-strings' call. Maybe she simply sat down to play for the guests, the public, so to say. And her fingers, driven by sheer despair. mocking grief, picked this rollicking air? And those ravens, the guests! The crazy door-wing

Friends

strikes the passage wall, grazing and bruising it. A maelstrom of guffaws, an avalanche of roaring came staggering down to me, stumbling boozily. Light appears through a crack: whispers come from the back. "Annushka, just turn round! I sav. aren't you a red-cheeked peach today!" Over in the oven pastry smoulders. He helps her with her coat, slips it off her shoulders. The one-step tempo deadens the words. yet some of them tear through the one-stepping herd: "What's there so funny?" she asks. "What? Where?" "Oh no, you don't say!" "You want me to swear?" A gap then a new phrase blares out in a burst. its words unintelligible at first, just gossip, (not really out of spite): "You know, a bloke broke a leg here today. And we-we're having some fun tonight: dancingthank Godin our own small way." Yes, it's their voices, I've no more doubt. In dumb recognition I freeze into stone.

whole sentences out,

From the hubbub I make

yes, it's they and it's me they mean, me alone. "Broke his leg, you say? Oh my, what a scream." And again goes clinking toast after toast: glass-lit sparks hit the cheeks of guest and host. And again the drunken, "Oh, goodness me, so you say he just split in two? Tee-hee!" "No, I must disappoint you, he didn't quite split. Oh no, poor fellowjust cracked a bit." And again the cackling and the slamming of doors, and again the one-step shuffling on floors. And again the walls like a blistering steppe sigh and ring with the damned two-step. Let life be ground but not you into one long nightmare. let it get going from bad to worse, anything, anything, God almighty, but not that unbearable voice of hers! Days and years I've betrayed to humdrum tedium, got myself choked with the daily delirium. It ate out my life with domestic fumes.

Anyone.

and urged me to jump down to hell from my rooms.

I fled from the yawning window's lure, fled to love,

though not all of me fled,

to be sure.

Let it be but in verse,

in pacing the dark:

when you scribble,

your soul lies bare and stark,

and your love becomes verse,

while in prose you are dumb.

No, I couldn't speak out.

But, darling, come,

say, where in my songs

was I false to my love?

Never-

they weren't of such fickle stuff.

Every word

confessed and appealed

all along:

but—

not a word can be dropped from a song.

I'll run in

amid the guitar trills and gamuts,

my both eyes

levelled point-blank

at the targets.

boasting two legs—

as firm as a mammoth's,

"Stay where you are,

you blinking maggots.

I'm whole!" Then to her, "See,

love, even here

shattering their humdrum hell with my verses I spare the name that I hold most dear, bypassing you in my curses.

Come, love,

respond to the poem's despair. I've been appealing to all I knew: Quick! To the bridge! No time to spare! And now the one last hope is you.

My neck like a bull's bowed to meet the blow, I'll drive myself out where I ought to. Another second and out I'll go, a volunteer come what may for slaughter. That very last second, Strides of rhyme the last before that second became a beginning, the beginning of an incredible roar. All the North ioined in in the dinning. By the quiver as if from a far-off fan. I can guessit's somewhere over Lyuban.56 By the flapping door, by the chilling air, I feel it's somewhere round about Tver.57 By the windows burst ajar from the din it's tearing along to Klin.58 Now Razumovskoye's⁵⁹ under its blast. And now-Nikolaevsky Station,60 the last. Though only a breath and nothing else. the steps on which I was standing foundered. turned into rocking, swerving hells with foam from the raging Neva surrounded. The terror's come, it's filling my brain, it tightens my nerves

with a jolt.

Bigger and bigger

becomes the strain

then explodes and nails me:

Halt!

I've come here

from seven years ago, from six hundred versts

away.

I've come all that way

to command you:
"No!

Leave off!"

I've come here to stay.

Leave off!

No need for talking and pleading.

It's ridiculous-

you alone succeeding.

What I ache for's

the whole loveless world to be happy, to be joined in a planet-wide human mass.

Seven years

I've been waiting for that to happen, and I'll stand on.

nailed here.

as centuries pass,

on the bridge of time,

abused and despised,

redeemer of earthly love,

I'll keep

my vigil here

and for all be chastised,

I'll pay for all

and for all I'll weep.

Lo Rotonde The two-step tune

went splitting the walls

into halves,

into quarters,

into a thousand splinters.

Somehow, in Montmartre, already old, clamber on a tablethe umptieth instance. All the visitors have long since got sick, knowing in advance like a fiddler knows his score, that again they'll be calledthe same stale trick!to go somewhere, save someone, god knows what for. In apology for the foozy way I rush on. the host explains: 'Don't you know, he's Russian!" The women, bundles of flesh and rags, scream, laughing and drag me down by the legs. "Go? Not us! Toots! We're prostitutes!" O that the Seine were the Neva. a splash-back of a future day! I space the Seine's black boulevards, an outcast of today. A seven-footer, jeered at, iailed and hit,

I roar

over brasshats,

in boulevards booming:

"To the Red Flag!

March!

From domestic shit!

Through the brain of man,

through the heart of woman!"

Today it was something special,

the booing.

Wasn't it hot!

I'm all wet,

just stewing!

Half-death Got to get out for a bit of fresh air.

I'll go,

yes, I'll go,

I don't care where.

Below me police-sergeants

blow their whistles.

Street-cleaners

sweep me,

corpse-like, listless.

Dawn.

Away from the Seine on my way

I set,

veiled by shadows of cinema grey.

There-

I saw it long since

from a schoolkid's desk;

France's map skims by,

opaquely picturesque.

Next,

by pangs

of remembrance

seized

I dragged off

to take my leave of the East.

Chance stop Jerked

to a standstill,

like ships on banks,

I'm hitched to something

by the seat of my pants.

I inspect it:

slippery,

shaped like an onion,

big,

all gilded-

not a very funny one.

Under the onion

bells go boom!

Evening

hems

the wall-teeth with gloom.

I'm on Ivan the Great,

it appears.

The Kremlin towers

stand around like spears,

with Moscow's windows

on the darkness trespassing.

Jolly!

Green fir-trees

peep out, Christmassy.

The Christmas surge

of singing and bells

thrusts its waves

at the Kremlin's bastions.

Rolling down

from its seven hills,

like the Terek,

Moscow tosses in its festiveness.

My hair's on end.

Like a frog

I sit strained,

afraid-

at the slightest slip or error

down the Myasnitskaya

to be whirled again

amid

the familiar

Christmas terror.

Recapitulation With arms spread crosswise—

like a cross on the dome-

I catch my balance,

waving crazily.

No prayer so sure as muscle and grit To the devil meekness be hurled. We—each of us—hold in our grip the transmission belts of the world.

Cloud in Pants



Night thickens.

Nothing is seen in the gloom.

There's the moon.

Beneath me,

the Mashuk looms hazily.

Struggling for balance

begins to tire me.

Like a toy doll

all cardboard up to my fingertips.

They'll spot me.

Here I'm visible entirely,

and the whole of the Caucasus

teems with Pinkertons.

Yes, they've spied me,

announced it to all by a signal.

Sweethearts, friends stream in, crueller and crueller,

from all the universe the signal brings them.

In a haste to get even with me

come duellers.

more and more of them,

glaring, bristling.

Spitting on their palms,

they slap me juicily

with their hands,

with the wind,

countless,

past listing,

my cheeks

to a bloody mess reducing.

Glove-booths cluster

in shopping-centres:

scent-reeking ladies

all over the place

take off their gloves

and hurl them by centners,

whole gloveshops

flinging themselves at my face.

Newspapers!

Magazines!

Don't stand there gaping,

come to the aid

of the slapping leatherware!

Soar up in curses,

paper after paper!

Box my ears,

rumours.

slurs, catch me everywhere!

As it is

I'm a cripple

that love's been maining;

Why can't you dump your slops in pails?

I'm not in your way,

so why come and flay me?

I'm only poetry,

soul.

nothing else.

But below sounds "No,

you're our age-old foe.

One of your sort—

a hussar⁶¹— we've debunked.

Have a whiff

of powder and lead-ho-ho!

Come on,

unbutton your shirt!

Don't funk!"

Final death

Sharper than a thunderclap,

swashier than a shower,

lined up,

eyebrow to eyebrow,

trousers to trousers,

from rifles and cannon

with all their power,

from each of a million brownings and mausers, from a hundred paces,

then ten,

then two,

charge after charge,

point-blank,

they stop for a breath,

then start anew,

scattering lead,

with a boom and bang.

Finish him off!

Stuff his heart full of lead!

Not even a tremor to flutter through! In the final end, everything must end. So the tremors ended too. Left-overs The massacre's over. Gaiety ahead, grinning over details, they swagger back. Only on the Kremlin the poet's last shred glows in the wind like another red flag. And the stars, lyrical as ever, stare from the sky in wonder —blinking old stars! The Great Bear, tootroubladouring up there what's she up towants to become queen of bards? Great sister, bear me over the ages' Ararats. through the sky of the deluge in your dipper-ark, Ursus! Bearwise, from my starship, straining my guts, I roar my stanzas through the noise of the Universe. Quicker! Quicker! Quicker! Off into space!

Look out sharper!

Sunbeams

up on the mountains

flicker,

new days smile

from the piers in the harbour,

APPLICATION TO (name, surname)
(PLEASE, COMRADE CHEMIST, FILL IN YOURSELF)

The ark heaves in.

Arc-lights play on the quay,

light up the dock

where she's to be moored in.

And here

immediately

my shoulders give way,

weighed down

by the windowsill's stony burden.

The sun's

dried the deluge of night

with its glare.

At the window

the day

looks bright and hot.

Kilimanjaro's

all I can see on the map.

Kenya

in Africa's

all I can spot.

Like a bald head

my globe stands aglow

and I pore over it,

bent with woe.

The world,

piled up

with calamities gruesome,

longs to hug

some comforting mountain bosom

so tight

that from pole-caps

through every vein

lava would pour

with stones and flame.

Just the same

I, too,

a communist-bear

would hug it now, sobbing in sheer despair. My father came of hereditary gentry; it's somewhat too soft, my gentle-born skin. Perhaps I'll scoop out my days with poetry and never see a machine-tool spin. But with every nerve-twitch, voice-trill and pulse, every hair-pike standing on end, revulsed. with my nostril-pits, with both eyesknives aflash. with my tooth-saw, grated, gritted and gnashed. with my skin-crawl, my eyebrows' wrath-knit foldswith the billions of pores that my body holds, in summer, winter, spring or fall. while sleeping, at night, and by day, awake,

loathe and hate

by the slavish past,

I denounce and reject,

all hammered into us

all.

all that though swept off again and again settled and settles like domestic dust even on our red-bannered domain. I won't give them the pleasure of seeing me bent, my spirit broken, my courage spent. It won't be soon you'll start whining and mourning: "What talent he had, the deceased, God bless him!" You can get me with a knife. from behind a corner. but my forehead won't be a target for Dantés's. Four times I'll age and grow young anew before the cemetery gets its due. Wherever I die it'll be with a song. In whatever wilderness I may sag I know-I'm worthy of lying along with those who lie beneath a red flag. But whatever for, death's the same everywhere: terrible not to love; horrible-

not to dare.

For you knife and bullet can hush any doubt. But what about me? Where's my way out? In childhood, perhaps, in my memory's dregs I can find ten days not totally wrecks. The luck others getwouldn't it be enough? But I never got itin life or in love. Oh, to believe in another world! Easy to tryjust aim a gun back and instantly to the next world you're hurled, with a bullet tracing your thundering track. But what can I do if despite my plight, with all my mental and spiritual powers, I've believed and believe, whether wrong or right in this world. this blessed life of ours. Let the waiting Faith be stretched out to desperation, yet I see it clear as hallucination. So clear, it seems just finish with these rhymes and loyou land in the most magnificent of times. Not for me to query on which and what.

I see,

I see it clearly,

to a dot!

Air on air,

as if it's stone on stone,

impervious

to crumbling and rust,

it towers beyond the ages,

all aglow,

the workshop for reviving human dust.

Here he is,

the chemist,

silent,

lofty-browed,

wrinkling his nose,

a new experiment contriving.

Through the World Who's Who

he leafs

and thinks aloud:

"XXth century.

Let's look who's worth reviving.

Mayakovsky...

surely not among the brightest.

Decidedly,

his face is far too plain."

Then from today's worn page

I'll holler to the scientist,

Stop turning over pages!

Make me live again!

Put a heart in me,

knock thought into my skull,

pump blood into my veins-

give me new birth.

I had no chance of loving,

living to the full.

Believe,

I didn't get

my earthly share on earth.

I'm six foot four.

Who wants such stature when

for jobs like mine

a guinea-pig would suffice.

Caged in a house, I scribbled with a pen crammed in a room-hole fit perhaps for mice. I'd take any old job and never ask a bob! Clean, sweep, wash. scrub or simply run around. Why, I'd be glad to get a doorman's job if doormen in your days will still be found. A jolly chap I was: much sense in being jolly when all we knew was misery and rigour. These days, when people bare their teeth, it's solely to sink 'em in, to bite. to snarl. or snigger. Anything may happenany sort of trouble. Call me, do, for joking helps superbly. I'll amuse you till you actually bubble with ting-a-linging allegory and hyperbole. I loved... Sure, raking up the past is not much use. (Painful? Never mind! At least pain lives when all has ceased)

Have you still got zoos?

I did love beasts, though.

Then let me be a keeper for your beasts. I love the creatures. When I spot a pup there's a funny one all baldhangs round the baker's-I feel like I could cough my own liver up: Here, doggie, don't be shy, dear, take this! Love And then, perhaps, some day down pathways that I'll sweep (she too loved beasts), she'll come to see the zoo smiling the same as on the photo that I keepthey'll bring her back to lifeshe's nice enough, she'll do. Your umptieth century will leave them all behind, trifles that stung one's heart in a buzzing swarm, and then we'll make up for these loveless times through countless midnights, starry, sweet and warm. Revive me, if for nothing else, I, poet, cast off daily trash to wait for you. Revive me never mind under what clause. Revive me, really, let me live my due, to lovewith love no more a sorry servant

of matrimony,

lust

and daily bread,

but spreading out

throughout the universe

and further,

forsaking sofas,

cursing boudoir and bed.

No more to beg

for one day as a dole

and then to age

in endless sorrow drowned,

but to see all the globe

at the first call

of "Comrade!"

turn in glad response around.

No more a martyr

to that hole one calls one's hearth,

but to call everybody sister,

 $\ brother,$

to see your closest kin

in all the earth.

aye, all the world

to be your father and your mother.

1922-1923

ULADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

To the Russian

Communist Party

I dedicate this poem

The time has come.

I begin

the story of Lenin.

Not

because the grief

is on the wane,

but because

the shock of the first moment

has become

a clear-cut,

weighed and fathomed pain.

Time,

speed on,

spread Lenin's slogans in your whirl!

Not for us

to drown in tears,

whatever happens.

There's no one

more alive

than Lenin in the world,

our strength,

our wisdom,

surest of our weapons.

People

are boats,

although on land.

While life

is being roughed

all species

of trash

from the rocks and sand

stick

to the sides of our craft.

But then,

having broken

through the storm's mad froth,

```
one sits
        in the sun
                  for a time
and cleans off
              the tousled seaweed growth
and oozy
         jellyfish slime.
Ĭ
 go to Lenin
             to clean off mine
to sail on
         with the revolution.
I fear
      these eulogies
                    line upon line
like a boy
          fears falsehood and delusion.
They'll rig up an aura
                       round any head;
the very idea—
                I abhor it.
that such a halo
                poetry-bred
should hide
            Lenin's real,
                         huge,
                               human forehead
I'm anxious lest rituals,
                        mausoleums
                                    and processions,
the honeyed incense
                    of homage and publicity
should
      obscure
              Lenin's essential
simplicity.
I shudder
          as I would
                      for the apple of my eye
lest Lenin
          be falsified
                     by tinsel beauty.
```

Write!votes my heart, commissioned by the mandate of duty. 2 All Moscow's frozen through, yet the earth quakes with emotion. Frostbite drives its victims to the fires. Who is he? Where from? Why this commotion? Why such honours when a single man expires? Dragging word by word from memory's coffers won't suit either me or you who read. Yet what a meagre choice the dictionary offers! Where to get the very words we need? We've seven days to spend, twelve hours for diverse uses. Life must beginand end. Death won't accept excuses. But if it's no more

a matter of hours.

if the calendar measure

falls short,

"Epoch"

is a usual

comment of ours.

"Era" or something of the sort. We sleep at night, busy around by day, each grinds his water in his own pet mortar and so fritters life away. But if. single-handed, somebody can turn the tide to everyone's profit we utter something like "Superman", "Genius" or "Prophet". We don't ask much of life, won't budge an inch unless required. To please the wife is the utmost to which we aspire. But if, monolithic in body and soul. someone unlike us emerges, we discover a god-like aureole or appendages equally gorgeous. Tags and tassels laid out on shelves.

neither silly nor smartno weightier than smoke. G_0 scrape meaning out of such shellsempty as eggs without white or yolk. How, then, apply such yardsticks to Lenin when anyone could see with his very own eyes: that "era" cleared doorways without even bending, wore jackets no bigger than average size. Should Lenin, too, be hailed by the nation as "Leader by Divine Designation"? Had he been kingly or godly indeed I'd never spare myself, on protest bent; I'd raise a clamour in hall and street against the crowds, speeches. processions and laments. I'd find the words for a thundering condemnation. and while I'd be trampled on, I and my cries. I'd bomb

> the Kremlin with demands for resignation,

12*

hurling blasphemy into the skies. But calm by the coffin Dzerzhinsky⁶² appears. Today he could easily dismiss the guard. In millions of eyes shines nothing but tears, not running down cheeks, but frozen hard. Your divinity's decease won't rouse a mote of feeling. No! Today real pain chills every heart. We're burying the earthliest of beings that ever came to play an earthly part. Earthly, yes; but not the earth-bound kind who'll never peer beyond the precincts of their sty. He took in all the planet at a time, saw things out of reach for the common eve. Though like you and I in every detail, his forehead rose a taller, steeper tower;

the thought-dug wrinkles

round the eyes

went deeper,

the lips looked firmer,

more ironical than ours.

Not the satrap's firmness

that'll grind us,

tightening the reins,

beneath a triumph-chariot's wheel.

With friends

he'd be

the very soul of kindness,

with enemies

as hard

as any steel.

He, too,

had illnesses

and weaknesses

to fight

and hobbies

just the same as we have,

reader.

For me it's billiards, say,

to whet the sight;

for him it's chess-

more useful

for a leader.

And turning

face about

from chess

to living foes,

yesterday's dumb pawns

he led

to a war of classes

until a human,

working-class dictatorship

arose

to checkmate Capital

and crush its prison-castle.

We and he

had the same ideals to cherish.

Then why is it, no kin of his, I'd welcome death. crazy with delight, would gladly perish so that he might draw a single breath? And not I alone. Who says I'm better than the rest? Not a single soul of us, I reckon, in all the mines and mills from East to West would hesitate to do the same at the slightest beckon. Instinctively, I shrink from tram-rails to quiet corners, giddy as a drunk who sees the lees. Who would mind my puny death among these mourners lamenting the enormousness of his decease? With banners and without. they come, as if all Russia had again turned nomad for a while. The House of Unions⁶³ trembles with their motion. What can be the reason? Wherefore?

Snow-tears

from the flags' red eyelids

run.

The telegraph's gone hoarse

with humming mournful rumours.

Who is he?

Where from?

What has he done,

this man,

the most humane

of all us humans?

×

Ulyanov's short life

is well known

to men in

every country

among every race.

But the longer biography

of Comrade Lenin

has still

to be written,

rewritten

and retraced.

Far,

far back.

two hundred years or so,

the earliest beginnings

of Lenin go.

Hear those brazen,

peremptory tones

with their century-piercing motif?

It's the grandfather

of Bromley's and Goujon's,64

the first

steam locomotive.

Capital,

His Majesty,

uncrowned,

as yet unknown,

declares the gentry's power overthrown. The city pillaged, plundered, pumped gold into the bellies of banks. while at the workbenches, lean and humped, the working class closed ranks. And already threatened, rearing smokestacks to the sky, "Pave your way with us to fortunes, grip us tighter! But remember: he is coming, he is nigh, the Man. the Champion, the Avenger, the Fighter!" And already smoke and clouds get mixed together as when mutineers turn orderly detachments into crowds. until the tokens of a storm begin to gather the sky brews trouble ugly smoke blacks out the clouds. 'Mid beggars

a mountain of goods arises.

bald beast,

The manager,

flips his abacus, blurts out "crisis!" and pins up a list:
"DISMISSED:...." Fly-blown pastries in dustbins found graves, grainin granaries with mildew cloved. while past the windows of Yelisevev's.65 belly caved in, shuffled the unemployed. And the call came rumbling from shack and slum, covering the whimper of kiddies: "Come, protector! Redressor, come! And we'll go to battle or wherever you bid us!" * Hey, camel. discoverer of colonies! Ahoy, caravans of steel-hulled ships! March through the desert, sunsets following, cleave through the billows on east-bound trips! Shadows of ominous ugly black

start patching the sky over sun-kissed oases. Hear the Negro with whip-lashed back muttering among the bananas and maizes: "Oo-oo, 00-00, Nile, my Nile! Splash up a day like a crocodile. let it be blacker than I at night With fire like my blood, as red and as bright, for the fattest bellies both white and black to fry and sizzle, to split and crack! Each and every ivory tusk hack and poke them from dawn to dusk. Don't let me bleed in vainif only for descendants come, O Sun-Faced, deal out justice and defend us! I'm through; the God of deaths won't wait-I've lived my while. Mind my incantation, Nile, my Nile!" From snow-bound Russia

Mind my incantation,

Nile, my Nile!"

From snow-bound Russia

to sun-scorched Patagonia
mechanical sweat-mills

went grinding

In Ivanovo-Voznesensk,66

the loom-twirling city,

brickwork

mammoths

shook with the ditty: "Cotton-mill, my cotton-mill, Gins and looms a-buzzin', It's high time he came along, Another Stenka Razin!"67

Grandsons will ask, "What does Capitalism mean?"

just as kiddies

today, "What's a Gendarme, Dad?"

So here's

capitalism

as then he was seen,

portrayed

for grandsons

full-size in my pad.

Capitalism

in his early years

wasn't so bad-

a business-like fellow

Worked like blazes—

none of those fears

that his snowy cravat

would soil

and turn vellow.

Feudal tights

felt too tight

for the youngster;

forged on

no worse

than we do these days;

raised revolutions

and

with gusto

joined his voice

in the Marseillaise.

Machines he spawned from his own smart head and put new slaves to their service: million-strong broods of workers spread all over the world's surface. Whole kingdoms and counties he swallowed at a time with their crowns and eagles and suchlike ornaments, fattening up like the biblical kine. licking his chops, his tongue parliament. But weaker with years his limb-steel became. he swelled up with leisure and pleasure, gaining in bulk and weight the same as his own beloved ledger. He built himself palaces ne'er seen before. Artistshordes of 'emwent through their chores. Floorsà l'Empire, ceilings-Rococo, walls-Louis XIV, Quatorze.

Around him with faces equally fit to be faces or the places on which they sit, keeping the peace, stood buttock-faced police. His soul to song and to colour insensatelike a cow in a meadow abloom with flowersethics and aesthetics his domestic utensils to be filliped with in idyllic hours. Inferno and paradise both his possession, he sells to old dames whose faculties fail nail-holes from the Cross, the ladder of Ascension, and feathers from the Holy Spirit's tail. But finally he too outgrew himself living off the blood and sweat of the people. Just guzzling, snoozing and pocketing pelf, Capitalism got lazy and feeble.

All blubber, he sprawled in History's way.

No getting over or past him. So snug in his world-wide bed he lay, the one way out was to blast him. I know, your critics'll grip their whipsticks, your poets'll go hysteric: "Call that poetry? Sheer publicistics. No feeling, no nothingjust bare rhetoric!" Sure, "Capitalism" rings not so very elegant: "Nightingale" has a far more delicate sound. Yet I'll go back to it whenever relevant. Let stanzas like fighting slogans resound! I've never been lacking in topics you know it, but now's no time for lovesick tattle. All my thundering power of a poet is yours, my class waging rightful battle! "Proletariat" seems too clumsy for using

to those

whom communism

throws into a fright.

For us, though,

it sounds

like mighty music

that'll rouse

the dead

to get up

and fight.

Sumptuous mansions

huddle closer, shivering.

Up their storeys

goes the cry of basements, quivering:

"We'll break free

into the sky's

wide-open blue.

out

of the abysmal stone blind alley.

He will come-

a worker's son all through,

a leader yet unborn,

the proletariat to rally."

Look,

the world's already small for Capital's ambition; with his billion-dollar

diamond-studded hands,

doomed

to dream of gain

until perdition,

Capital

goes grabbing other lands.

Off they march,

in clashing steel,

athirst for pillage.

"Kill!"

they shriek;

two moneybags must come to clutches.

Soldiers' graveyards

blot out every village.

each town

becomes a workshop

making crutches.

When it's over
they lay their tables,
unfinicky.
Victory's
the cake they carve and share.

But—
hearken to the burial mounds' ventriloquy,
to the castanets of bones

picked clean and bare.

"You will see us once again

in war aflare.

Time will not forgive

the bloody crime.

He is coming—

sage and leader—

to declare

war on you,

to end war for all time."

Lakes of tears

spread out

to flood the globe.

All too deep

grow blood-mires,

all too copious.

Till at last

lone day-dreamers

began to probe

the probabilities

of fancy-bred utopias.

But-

philanthropists—

they got their brain-pans cracked against the adamantine rock

of actual fact.

How could

footpaths

blazed by random spurts of brilliance

serve as thoroughfares

for all the suffering millions?

Now Capitalism

himself,

the blundering thief,

can't tame them,

so his cogs' wild tempo rises.

His system's carried

like a yellow

wilted leaf

over the giddy ups and downs

of strikes and crises.

What to make

of all this

gold-fed circus,

whom to blame

and on whose side

to stand?

The million-headed,

million-handed

class of workers

strains its brains

itself to understand.

*

Capital's days

were eroded and gnarled

by time

outblazing

searchlight arcs,

till time

gave birth

to a man named Karl-

Lenin's

elder brother Marx.

Marx!

His portrait's gray-framed sternness

grips one.

But what a gulf

between impressions

and his life!

What we see

immured in marble

or in gypsum

seems a cold old man

long since past care and strife.

But when the workers took-

uncertain yet in earnest-

the first short steps along their revolutionary path, into what a giant, blazing furnace Marx fanned up his mind and heart! As if he'd drudged whole shifts in every factory himself and, callousing his hands, each tool and job had handled, Marx caught the pilferers of surplus value with their pelf. red-handed. Where others quailed, eyes dropped too low to peer up even as high as a profiteer's umbilicus, Marx undertook to lead the proletariat into class war to slay the golden calf, by then a bull,

immense and bellicose.

Into the bay of communism,

still fogged

with blinding mystery,

we thought

the waves of chance alone

could bring us

from our hell.

Marx

disclosed

the deepest

laws of history,

put

the proletariat

at the helm.

No,

Marx's books

aren't merely print and paper,

not dust-dry manuscripts

with dull statistic figures.

His books

brought order

to the straggling ranks of labour

and led them forward, full of faith and vigour.

He led them

and he told them:
"Fall in battles!

The proof of theories

are concrete deeds.

He'll come

one day,

the genius of practice,

and guide you on

from books to battlefields!"

As he wrote

his last

with fingers trembling,

as the last thoughts

flickered in his eyes,

I know,

Marx had a vision

of the Kremlin

and the flag

of the Commune

in Moscow's skies.

*

Like melons

the years

came on in maturity.

Labour

grew out of childhood

at length.

Capital's

bastions

lost security

as the proletarian tide
gained momentum and strength.

In a matter

of several years or so

inklings of gales

into tempests grow.

Uprisings break out

as the climax of wrath,

revolutions

come in their aftermath.

Ruthless

are the bourgeois' bestial ways;

crushed

by Thiers' and Galliffet's⁶⁸

inhuman hammer,

from Paris,

from the wall

of Père Lachaise⁶⁹

the shadows

of the Communards

still clamour:

"Look and listen,

comrades!_

Learn

from our débâcle!

Woe to single fighters!

Let our lesson

not be missed.

Only by a party

can the enemy be tackled,

clenching

all the working class

in one great fist!"

"We leaders!"

some'll say,

then turn about and sting.

Learn to see

beneath the words

the spotted skin!

There'll be a leader

ours to the least thing,

straight as rails, simple as bread,

prepared to go through thick and thin.

A pot-pourri of faiths and classes, dialects and conditions, on wheels of gold the great world creaked along. Capital, a very hedgehog for contradictions, bristling with bayonets, waxed fat and strong. The spectre of Communism haunted Europe. withdrew, then roamed again throughout its girth. For all these reasons in Simbirsk. half-way from Moscow to the Urals. Lenin, a boy like any other, came to birth. I knew a worker he was illiterate hadn't even tasted the alphabet's salt, yet he had listened to a speech by Lenin and so knew all. I remember a story

by a Siberian peasant:

they'd seized land,

held it

and worked it

into very heaven.

They'd never even heard,

much less read Lenin

but were Leninists all,

from seven to seventy-seven.

I've been up mountains not a lichen on their sides. Just clouds lying prone on a rocky ledge. The one living soul for hundreds of miles was a herdsman resplendent with Lenin's badge. Some'll call it a hankering for pins. Fit for girlsmakes a frock look a bit more rich. But that pin'll scorch through shirts and skins. to the hearts brimful of devotion to Ilyich. This couldn't be explained by churchmen's hooks and crooks: no God Almighty bade him be a saviour. Working step by step his way through life and books, he grew to be the teacher of world labour. Look down at Russia from a flying plane. She's blue

. .

as if

with rivers

lashed all over with a willow cane or striped by a seven-tail whip. But bluer than a river ever looks through its rushes were the bruises of landlord-ridden Russia. Take a sidelong view of the woebegone land: wherever you cast your eyes mountains, pit-heads and prisons stand propping up her skies. But worse than jail, worse than war in the trenches was the lot of those who slaved at her benches. There were countries richer by far, I've heard. more beautiful. more sane. but never have I met in the whole wide world a land more full of sorrow and pain. Yet pain and contempt can't be borne

forever.

Land and Freedom!

the cry grew strong,

until lone rebels,

believers

in individual terror

took to dynamite, **bullet** and bomb. It's well to finish the tsar at a shot, but what if the bullet goes wide? And Lenin's brother Alexander is caught preparing regicide. Shoot a tsar, and another with all his might will strain to break the record in tortures. And so Alexander Ulyanov one night was hanged by the light of Schlüsselburg torches. 7 Then his brother, a seventeen-year-old youth, swore an oath that was firmer than any. "Brother. we'll take up the battle for truth and win, but by other means," pledged Lenin. Your usual herolook at the statues struts like a peacock: "I'll show you

which is which!"

Not such was the feat, arduous. plain, undramatic, chosen as the task of his life by Ilvich. Together with men from the mills and mines he sought to raise wages to a decent level. looked for ways of fighting deductions and fines and teaching good manners to a foreman-devil. But the struggle's not merely for some such claim-to sweep up a puddle and then go slow-satisfied by a trifle. No-Socialism's the aim, Capitalism the foe and the weapon no broom but a rifle. The same things again and again and again he hammers down into the work-dimmed brain. And tomorrow those who've at last understood

pass it on, making the lesson good. Yesterday it was dozens, today it's hundreds, tomorrow thousands into action rising, till the whole working world will start rumbling like thunder and break into an open uprising. We're no longer timid as newly-born lambkins; the workers' wrath condenses into clouds. slashed by the lightning of Lenin's pamphlets. his leaflets showering on surging crowds. The class drank its fill of Lenin's light and. enlightened, broke from the gloom of millennia. And in turn, imbibing the masses' might. together with the class grew Lenin. And gradually, enriched by the fertile communion,

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to realisation.

young Vladimir's pledge

they bring

no longer

each

on his own,

but a Union

of Fighters

for Working Class

Emancipation.⁷¹

Leninism spreads

ever wider

and deeper.

Lenin's disciples

work miracle after miracle,

the underground's grit

traced in blood-drops

seeping

through the dust

and slush

of the endless Vladimirka.72

Today

we spin

the old globe

our way.

Yet even

when debating

in Kremlin armchairs

there's few

won't suddenly recall a day

filled

with the groans

of chain-gang marchers.

Remember

the none-too-distant past:

beyond the eye-hole,

trams, droshkies, cars....

Who of you,

let me ask,

didn't bite

and tear

at prison-bars?

We could smash out

our brains

on the walls weighing on us:

All they did was mop up and strew sand. "It wasn't long but honest, Your service to your land...." In which of his exiles did Lenin get fond of the mournful power of that song? The peasant— 'twas urgedwould blaze his own tracks and set up socialism without hitch or wrangle. But no-Russia too goes bristling with stacks; black beards of smoke round her cities tangle. There's no god to bake us pies in the skies. The proletariat must head the peasant masses. Over capital's corpse Russia's highroad lies. with Lenin to lead the toiling classes.

They'd promise heaps,

wordy liberals and S.R.s,73

themselves

not loath

to saddle workers' backs.

Lenin made

short work of their yarns,

left them bare as babies

in the blaze of facts.

He soon disposed

of their empty prattle

full of "liberty",
"fraternity" and suchlike words. Arming with Marxism. mustering for battle, rose the only **Bolshevik Party** in the world. Now, touring the States in a de luxe coupé, or footing it through Russiawherever you be they meet you, the letters R.C.P. with their bracketed neighbour, Today it's red Mars astronomers are hunting, telescopes scanning the sky from a high tower. Yet that modest letter on paper or bunting shines to the world ten times redder and brighter. Wordseven the finestturn into litter, wearing threadbare with use and barter. Today I want to infuse new glitter into the most glorious of words: PARTY. Individual what can he mean in life?

Over the world-wide forest

of factory stacks
like a giant banner

the huge

Red Square,
millions of hands

welded into its staff,
soars

with a mighty sweep

into the air.

Uladimir Ilyich Lenin



His voice sounds fainter than a needle dropping. Who hears him? Only, perhaps, his wife. and then if she's near and not out shopping. A Party's a raging, single-voiced storm compressed out of voices weak and thin. The enemy strongholds burst with its roar like eardrums when cannon begin their din. One man alone feels down and out. One man alone won't make weather. Any old bully can knock him about even weaklings if two together. But when we midgets in a Party standsurrender. enemy, fade out of sight! A Party's

A Party's

a million-fingered hand clenched

into one fist

of shattering might.

What's an individual?

No earthly good.

One man, even the most important of all,

can't raise a ten-yard log of wood, to say nothing of a house ten stories tall. A Party means millions of arms, brains, eyes linked and acting together. In a Party we'll rear our projects to the skies, upholding and helping one another. The Party's the compass that keeps us on course, the backbone of the whole working class. The Party embodies the immortality of our cause, our faith that will never fail or pass. Yesterday an underling, today whole empires I'm uncharting. The brain, the strength, the glory of its class, that's what it is. our Party. Lenin and the Party are brother-twins. Who'll say which means more to History, their mother? Lenin and the Party are the closest kin:

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```
name one
         and you can't but imply
                                  the other.
                         ×
Crowns and coronets
                     still galore,
```

bourgeois

still blacken

like wintering crows.

But labour's lava

already starts to pour:

see-

through the Party's crater

it flows.

January 9.

Gapon,75

the "people's friend",

debunked.

We fall

in the rifles' crackle.

Tall tales

about the tsar's royal mercy

with Mukden's bloodbath

and Tsushima's débâcle.76

Enough!

No belief left

for twaddle and twiddle.

The Presnya⁷⁷

takes to arms,

done with ballyhoo.

It seemed

the throne

would soon snap across the middle

and forthwith

the bourgeois easy chair too.

Ilyich is everywhere.

Day after day

he fights

with the workers

through 1905,

standing nearby on every barricade,

innerving

the revolution

with his vigour and drive.

But soon

came the treacherous trick:

Hey Presto!

Red ribbons

blossomed

like a virgin's cheek.

The tsar

from his balcony

read the Manifesto.⁷⁸

Then,

after a "free" honey-week,

the speeches,

the singing,

the hooraying and hailing

are covered

by the treble bass of

cannon:

on the workers' blood goes sailing the tsar's butcher-admiral

Dubasov.⁷⁹

Spit in the faces

of white dross who tell us

about the Cheka's80

blood-dousings!

They ought to have seen

how, tied by the elbows,

workers

were flogged to death

by thousands.

Reaction ran amuck.

Intellectual bunglers

withdrew,

recluses,

and became the meekest,

locked themselves in

with blinking candles

and smoked incense,

god-damn God-seekers.81

Even Comrade Plekhanov⁸² himself raised a whine: "It's the Bolsheviks' fault; it's theirs, the muddle is. Shouldn't have taken up arms at the time and blood wouldn't swirl, as it does, in puddles." But here with his courage never failing Lenin cut into the traitors' wail: "O yes we should have-I'll repeat it daily only far more resolutelyand wouldn't have failed. I see the hour of new upheavals arriving again to bring out the working classes. Not defence but attack should become the driving slogan of the masses." That nightmare year with the bloody bath and the massacre of the workers' insurgent millions will pass and appear as preparatory class for the hurricanes of future rebellions.

32

And Lenin

once more

turns exile into college,

educating us

for the coming battle,

teaching others,

himself gaining knowledge,

regathering the Party,

unmanned and scattered.

Year after year

the strikes scored higher:

a spark

and the people'd

flare up again.

But then

came a year

that put off the fire—

1914

with its deluge of pain.

It's thrilling

when veterans

twirl their whiskers

and, smirking,

spin yarns

about old campaigns.

But this wholesale,

world-wide

auction of mincemeat-

with what Poltava

or Plevna⁸³

will it compare?

Imperialism

in all

his filth and mud,

false teeth bared,

growling and grunting,

quite at home

in the gurgling ocean of blood,

went swallowing up

country after country.

Around him,

cozy,

social-patriots and sycophants.

raising heavenwards the hands that betray, scream like monkeys till everyone's sick of it: "Workerfight on on with the fray!" The world's iron scrap-heap kept piling and piling. mixed with minced man's-flesh and splintered bone. In the midst of all this lunatic asylum Zimmerwald84 stood sober alone. Ever remembered is the speech Lenin made above the world uproar raising on high a voice far louder than any cannonade, thoughts more inflaming than any fire. On one side were millions writhing in the labour of war to bring would-be victory forth. on the other against both cannon and sabreone man of ordinary stature and girth. "Soldiers! The bourgeois betray and sell you,

send you to slaughter as a thousand times before. Enough of it! Hear what I tell you: Turn this war among nations into civil war. What are we, peoples, arguing for? Put an end to catastrophes, wounds and losses. Raise the banner of holy war against the world-wide bosses!" It looked as though, infernally booming, the cannon would sneeze and blow him away. Who'd ever find the fragile human? Who would remember his name? "Surrender!" one country roared to another. Looked as if they'd go on fighting for millennia. But at last it was over, and lo, no winners

except for one-

Comrade Lenin.

Imperialism,

damn you!

You've exhausted our patience,

once fit for angels.

Rebellious Russia

has rammed you

through-

from Tebriz to Archangel.

An empire's no hen no joke bagging it, the two-headed, power-vested, hook-beaked eagle. And yet we spat out like a finished fag-end their dynasty with all trappings, regal and legal. The nation scrambling out of the mire, huge, famished, blood-crust all over itwould it go on dragging chestnuts from the fire for the bourgeois, or would it go Soviet? "The people have broken tsarist fetters. Russia's boiling, Russia's ablaze!" Lenin read in newspapers and letters in Switzerland where he lived those days. But what could one fish out of newsprint tatters? for an airplane skyward to speed home, to the aid of the workers in battlethat was his only longing and need. But at last at the Party's bidding he's on wheels

If only the murderous Hohenzollern85 knew that the German goods waggon under German seals carried a bomb for his monarchy, too! Petrograd citizens still kept skipping, exulting in glee ephemeral. But already, red-ribboned, in martial frippery, the Nevsky86 swarmed with treacherous generals. Another few months and they'll reach the limit: it'll come to policemen's whistles. The bourgeois already itch to begin it, already the fur on the beast's back bristles. At first mere fry at which one might scoff, then big sharks emerged to swallow

the nation.

Next

Dardanelsky,

née Milyukov,87

and finally

Prince Mikhail⁸⁸

agog for coronation.

The Premier⁸⁹

wields power

with feathery splendour:

none of your commissar's snarling. Sings in a tenor

maidenly tender,

even kicks up hysterics,

the darling.

We hadn't yet tasted

the sorriest crumbs

of February's

freedom-prodigies

when

"Off to the front,

working thingamagums!"

the war-boys

began prodding us.

And to crown

this picture

of passing beauty,

traitors and doublecrossers

before and after that.

S.R.s and Savinkovs⁹⁰

stood on watchdog duty

with Mensheviks⁹¹

as the Tell-Tale Cat.

When suddenly

into the city

sleekening with blubber,

from beyond

the broad-banked Neva,

from Finland Station

through the Vyborg suburb

rumbled

an armoured car.

And again

the gale,

momentum gaining,

set the whirlwind

of revolution spinning.

Caps and blouses

flooded the Liteiny⁹²:

"Lenin's with us!

Long live Lenin!"

"Comrades,"

and over the heads

of the hundreds clapping

forward

a guiding hand

he thrust,

"Let's cast off

the outworn Social-Democrat trappings.

Chuck the capitalists

and their yes-men

into the dust!

We voice

the will

of the toilers

and tillers

of the whole world.

Now's the hour.

Long live the Party

of communism builders,

long live

armed struggle

for Soviet power!"

For the first time ever

without ado

before the flabbergasted

human ocean

arose

as a routine job to do once unattainable

socialism.

There,

beyond the factories roaring,

there, on the horizon

with blinding force

it shone

before us,

the Commune

of tomorrow

without bourgeois,

proletarians,

slaves

or lords.

Through the tangle of tethering yes-men's tenets Lenin's speech came crashing like an axe, indented with uproar every minute: "Right, Lenin! It's time to act!" Kshesinskaya's palace,⁹³ earned by twiddling toes, today's invaded by boots steel-heeled. It's here the factory multitude flows in Lenin's smithy to be tempered and steeled. "Munch your pineapples, chew your grouse! Your days are over, bourgeois louse!" Already we demanded the wherefore and why from those who, lording it, quaffed and guzzled, and during the dress rehearsal of July94 tickled their gizzards

with revolver muzzles.

The bosses bared fangs,

their looks spelt murder:

"Rioting slaves!

We'll show 'em!"

they thundered.

"Lenin to the wall!"

Kerensky penned the order;

"To jail with Zinoviev95!"

and the Party

went underground.

Ilvich's in Finland,

at Razliv,

safe and sound,

hidden securely

in a twig shelter.

It won't betray him

to the pack of hounds

ready

to snap him up

in the welter.

Lenin's unseen,

and yet he's near,

and time and events

don't stand.

Every slogan

is Lenin's idea,

every move

is guided

by Lenin's hand.

Each word

by Ilyich

finds soil most fertile

and falling

forthwith

promotes

our cause,

and see-

alongside

with Leninist workers

millions of peasants

into its orbit it draws.

And when

it remained

but to mount barricades.

having chosen

a day out of many,

back to Petrograd

to the workers' aid

with "Comrades, we've waited enough!" came Lenin. "The yoke of capital, hunger's prodding, the banditry of wars and thieving intervention will seem in time mere moles on the body of Grandma History, escaping attention." And looking back from the future on this day the first thing seen will be Lenin's figure, from millennia of slavery blazing the way to the age of the Commune through want and rigour. These years of privation will sink into the past and the summer of the Commune warm this globe of ours. and the huge, sweet fruit of happiness at last

will mature

from the crimson

October flowers.

And then

the readers

of Lenin's behests.

as the yellowing pages

they peruse,

will feel a hot tide

well up in their breasts,

and in their eyeshot tears, long since out of use. When I look for the grandest day of my life. rummaging I've gone through and seen. I name without doubt or internal strife October 25, 1917. The Smolny⁹⁶ throbs in a buzz of excitement. Grenades hang on seamen like partridges. Bayonets zigzag like flashes of lightning. Below stand machine-gunners belted with cartridges. No aimless shuffling in the corridors; with bombs and rifles no one's a novice. "Comrade Stalin wants to see you. Here's the orders: armoured carsto the General Post Office." "Comrade Trotsky's⁹⁷ instructions." "Right!" —he dashed forward and the man's navy ribbons flashea: "Aurora".98 Some run with dispatches, others stand arguing,

still others click rifle-boltsno two figures the same. And here, no token of greatness or grandeur, brisk but inconspicuous, Lenin came. Already led by Lenin into battle, they didn't know him from portraits yet; bustled. hollered. exchanged banter, with a quickfire of oaths, hail-fellow-well-met. And there, in that long-wished-for iron storm Lenin. drowsy with fatigue, it would seem. pacing, stopping, hands clasped behind back, dug his eyes into the motley scene. Once I saw him stabbing them into a chap in puttees, dead-aiming, sharp-edged as razors, seizing the gist

as pincers would seize,

dragging the soul

from under words and phrases.

And I knew,

everything

was disclosed

and understood,

everything

those eyes

were raking for:

where

the shipwright

and miner stood,

what

the peasant and soldier were aching for.

He kept all races

within his sight,

all continents

where the sun goes setting

or dawning;

weighed the whole globe

in his brain

by night

and in the morning:

"To all,

every

and each,

slaves of the rich

hacking and carving;

to you we appeal

this hour:

Let the Soviets

take over

government power!

Bread

to the starving!

Land

to the farmers!

Peace

to the peoples

and their warring armies!"

The bourgeois, busy

drinking their fill of

soldierly blood, shrieked in a frenzy: "At 'em, Dukhonin and Kornilov, show 'em what's what, Guchkov⁹⁹ and Kerensky!" But both front and rear surrendered without a shot when the decrees¹⁰⁰ hailed down on them, scorching. Today we know who showed whom what's what: even at illiterates' hearts they got, into steel determination forging. From near unto far it went rolling. mounting from a whisper to a roar: "Peace to cottages poor and lowly, war on palaces, war, war, war!" We fought in all factories. humble and famous, shook 'em out of cities like peas, while outside the October wildfire left flaming manors for landmarks marking its triumphant stride. The land once a mat for wholesale floggingswas suddenly seized by a calloused hand

with rivulets,

hillocks

and other belongings

and held tight-

the long-dreamed-of,

blood-soaked land.

The spectacled white-collars,

spitting in spite,

sneaked off

to where kingdoms and dukedoms

still remain.

Good riddance!

We'll train every cook

so she might

manage the country

to the workers' gain.

¥

We survived

for the time

by printing,

writing,

bellowing

from the trenches

into the German ear:

"Come out and fraternise!

Finish fighting!

Enough!"

and the front

crumbled off into the rear.

Leaking in torrents

that swelled out of trickles,

it seemed

our boat was about to careen:

Wilhelm's boot,

far heftier than Nicholas',

would smash the country

to smithereens.

Then came the S.R.s

with their infantile drivelling,

to catch the runners

in their word-traps preposterous;

dragged them back with toy swords from the scrap-heap of chivalry picturesquely to vanguish the iron-clad monsters. But Lenin curbed the gamecocks' zest: "The Party must shoulder the burden again. We'll accept the breathing-space of filthy Brest¹⁰¹: Territory we'll lose, but time we'll gain." And, so as the breathing-space shouldn't kill us. to be able, later, to knock them barmy, let discipline and conscious resolve be our drillers. Rally in the ranks of the Red Army! Historians will stare

at the posters with hydras¹⁰²:

"Did those hydras

exist or not?"

As for us,

that same hydra

reached out to bite us

and a full-size hydra it was,

by god. "All dangers we'll defy, No limit to our courage, And fighting we will die For Soviet power to flourish!" First comes Denikin. 403

Denikin gets a lickin'.

Repair work begins

on our ruined hearths.

Then Wrangel¹⁰⁴ turns up

in the wake of Denikin;

the baron kicked out,

Kolchak¹⁰⁵ comes en masse.

Our dinners—bark,

beds-any old where,

yet forward

the red-starred legion bursts.

In each lives Lenin,

each feels Lenin's care,

each along a front

of eleven thousand versts.

That was its breadth—

eleven thousand versts,

but who knows

its depth and length?

Every door

an enemy ambush nursed,

every house

to be captured

took blood and strength.

S.R.s and monarchists

with their tongues and guns

sting,

the vipers,

or bite like hounds.

You don't know the way

to Michelson's?

You'll find it

by the blood

from Lenin's wounds. 106

S.R.s talk better

than they pull a trigger,

their bullets

their own ribs ramming.

But a menace

beside which

bullets were meagre

was the siege begun by typhus and famine. Look at the crumb-collecting by far better off than we were then. queueing in the freeze for a tiny slice days on end. Fancy a giant shipbuilding works working for nothing but cigarette-lighters! Jail 'em, hang 'em, cut their heads off. how else could the workers earn grub, poor blighters? But the kulaks had heaps of both butter and flour. Kulaks, they weren't no boobies; hid and hoarded till a fitter hour their grain and their greasy rubles. Hunger hits harder. kills surer than bullets. You need a steel grip here, not cotton-wool lenience So Lenin sets out to fight the kulaks by food requisition teamsgrim expedients. How could the very notion of democracy

at such a time enter any fool's head?! At 'em and none of your mincing hypocrisy. Only iron dictatorship to victory led. We've won, but our ship's all dents and holes, hull in splinters, engines near end, overhaul overdue for floors. ceilings, walls Come, hammer and rivet. repair and mend! Where's port? all the beacons gone dead in the harbour. We careen. crossing the waves with our masts. There's risk she'll keel over, such cargo to starboard: the 100 million peasant class! While enemies howled with malicious glee Lenin alone kept his nerve: turned her twenty points leeward and she swerved upright

and entered port at a curve.

And at once,

surprisingly, no more gale;

peasants cart bread

and at every step

the familiar ads: WILL BUY-FOR SALE--NEP107 Lenin winks: we're in for repairs. Get used to the vardsticknothing to fear. The shore rocks the crew, weak with wear and tear: "Whoah! Where's the gale? What's the big idea?" Lenin points out a deep bay free of rocks with the piers of co-operatives looming over it. And smoothly into construction's docks sailed the colossal country of Soviets. Lenin himself heaves timber and iron to patch up the breaks and ruptures, marks off and measures with an all-seeing eye on future co-ops, shops and management structures. Then again he resumes his post on the bridge:

Lights on

in front,

at the sides

and back!

Since now,

systematic

everyday

will replace

both storm raid and surprise attack.

At first

we withdrew.

discreet and sober.

Anyone disgraced-

out without a word!

Now forward again-

the retreat is over.

R.C.P.—

crew aboard!

The Commune'll live centuries.

What's a decade for her?

Forward,

and this quagmire of a NEP

will be past.

We'll move

and build

a hundred times slower

so a million times longer

our edifice may last.

The morass

of petty "private enterprise"

still tethers

the tempo

of our advance,

but through the gathering clouds

of the world-wide tempest

the first streaks of lightning

already glance.

Old enemies drop

and give place to new.

Yet wait the skies over the world we'll ignite. But that is surely better than to write about. Right? Today, whether in the office of a director or running a lathe at a public-owned factory, we knowthe proletariat is victor. and Lenin the architect of victory. From the Comintern to the hammer and sickle on brand-new kopeks shining in glory, our achievements and triumphs double and triple. filling page after page of Lenin's great story. Revolutions are the business of peoples; for individuals they're too heavy to wield, yet Lenin ranked foremost among his equals by his mind's momentum, his will's firm steel. Countries rise one after the other,

fulfilling his predictions each in turn; men of all raceswhite and dark-skinnedrally under the banner of the Comintern. The imperialists and bourgeois in their thinning crowds, still pestering the world and lording over it, politely tip their top hats and crowns to Ilyich's brain-childthe Republic of Soviets. Fearing no effort or artifice by the rich, on speeds our engine in curling smoke. When suddenlythe shattering news: Ilyich had a stroke.... If you exhibited in a museum a Bolshevik in tears, all day they'd flock in the museum to see him. Small wonder you won't see the like in years. With five-pointed stars we were branded

235

neck-deep in the ground

Buried alive

by Polish voivodes.

by the bandits of Mamontov. 108

burned up in engine fire-boxes by Japanese marauders. mouths plugged with molten tin, threatened with bullets: "Renounce it!" they bellowed, but from the hell-holes of burning gullets "Long live Communism! was all that would come. Row after row, in its might unreckoned, this iron. this steel. the recess not over yet, crowded on January the twenty-second the five-storey building of the Congress of Soviets. Down they settled, ioking and grinning, affairs talked over in business-like idiom. Time to start! Why aren't they beginning? Here, what are those gaps in the presidium? Why are their eyes red as box-stall plush? Look at Kalinin¹⁰⁹ hardly keeps his feet. Something happened? What is it?... Hush! What if it's him? No, indeed. . . . Raven-like, the ceiling swooped upon us, lowering;

down dropped heads, bent floorward by their fears. Of a sudden ghastly, blackly glowering grew the swimming lights of chandeliers. Silence choked the bell's unneeded tinkle. Up Kalinin got, by will alone. Tearsgo try and chew them from moustache and wrinkle: they betray him, shining on the beard's sharp cone. Veins ablazeno hope of quenching them; thoughts confusedlike walls his head impenning: "Yesterday at 6.50 p.m. died Comrade Lenin." That year beheld a sight that ages won't set eve on. That day will keep its tale of woe forever throbbing. Horror squeezed an anguished groan from iron. The rows of Bolsheviks

were swept

with waves of sobbing.

What a weight!

Ourselves

we dragged out bodily.

Get the details!

When and where?

Why do they hide it,

damn!

Through the streets and lanes,

a white hearse modelling,

the Bolshoi Theatre swam.

Joy

crawls on like a snail.

Grief

will never go slow.

No sun shone.

No ice

gleamed pale.

All the world

from the newspapers' pail

was cold-showered

with coal-black snow.

On the worker

bent at his gears

the news pounced

and bullet-like

burned

And it seemed

a cupful of tears

on his instruments

overturned.

And the peasant,

weathered and wizened by life,

whom death

more than once

just missed,

swung round-

away from his wife,

but she saw it—

the dirt he smudged with his fist.

There were some—

no flint could be harder or colder,

yet they too

clenched their teeth,

lips awry.

Children

in a minute grew graver and older

and,

childlike,

the grey-bearded started to cry.

The wind to all the earth in sleepless anguish whined, and she, the rebel, couldn't stand up to the notion that here, in Moscow, in a frosty room enshrined lav heboth son and father of the Revolution. The end, the end, the end.... All persuasion useless! Glass and beneaththe deceased. It's him they bear from Paveletsky Station through the city that he from the lords released. The street's like a wound that'll worsen and worsen. so the ache of it cuts and hacks. Here every cobble knew Lenin in person by the tramp of the first October attacks. Here every slogan on banners embroidered was thought out and worded by him.

Here every tower his speeches applauded, would follow him anywhere, staunch and grim. Here Lenin is known both in works and offices. Spread hearts like spruce-tree boughs in his way! He led. he steeled with his victory-prophecies, and seeproletarians have taken sway. Here every peasant holds Lenin's name dearer than any of kinsmen cherished for the land that at Lenin's bidding became his owna dream for which grandsires rebelled and perished. And Communards from their graves in Red Square seemed to be whispering "Dear, beloved. live.

and no need for a lot more fair.

We'd die ten times

for fulfilment of it."

Let the word

be pronounced

by a miracle-maker

for us to die

that he be awoken;

the street-streams would swell

and flood their embankments

and all

go to death

with a joy unspoken.

But there aren't any miracles.

Only Lenin.

Lenin,

his coffin

and our bent shoulders.

This man was a human—

as human as anyone.

So just bear it-

the pain

that in humans smoulders.

Never

was there

a burden more precious

borne along

by oceans of people

than this red coffin

borne by processions

on the drooping shoulders

of marches and weeping.

The Guard of Honour

had scarcely been formed

of heroes,

heirs

of his wisdom and strength,

when crowds,

impatient,

already swarmed

through all the neighbourhood's

breadth

and length.

Into a 1917 breadline no hunger

could drive-

better eat tomorrow.

But into this bitter, freezing, dread line kids, invalids all were driven by sorrow. Alongside village and town were arrayed, child and adult, wrung by their grief's insistence. The world of labour passed in parade, the living total of Lenin's existence. Downcast, the sunbeams dropped through the trees, slanting down from the house-top slopes, vellow as whipped-into-meekness Chinese bent with their sorrow, lamenting their hopes. **Nights** swam in on the shoulders of days muddling hours and confusing dates and it seemed. not night with its star-born rays, but Negroes were here with their tears from the States. The frost. unheard-of, scorched one's feet.

yet days

were spent

in the tightening crush.

Nobody

even ventures

to beat

hands together to warm them--

hush!

The frost grips fast and tortures,

trying how tough

the love-tempered will is,

cuts into mobs,

and, freezing them stiff,

sneaks in

with the crowds

behind the pillars.

The steps expand,

grow up into a reef.

Silence.

Breathing and sighing stop:

how pass it,

fearful beyond belief,

that dismal,

abysmal

four-step drop?

That drop

from the logic of farthing and penny,

from ages

of thraldom to His Majesty Gold;

that drop

with its brink—

the coffin

and Lenin

and beyond-

the Commune

in its glory unrolled.

Lenin's forehead

was all you saw

and Nadezhda Konstantinovna¹¹⁰

in a haze....

Maybe eyes less full of tears

could show me more.

It's through clearer eyes I've looked on gladder days. The floating banners bend in the last honours, and, silken, sway. "Farewell to you, comrade, who have passed from a noble life away...." Horror! Shut your eyes and blindfold pace the infinity of tight-rope grief. As if for a minute left face to face with the only truth worth belief. What joy! My body, light as a feather, drifts in the march-tune's resonant stream. I know for surefrom now and forever the light of this minute in me will gleam. What a joy it is to be part of this union, even tears from the eyes to be shared en masse, in thisthe purest, most potent communion with that glorious feeling whose name is Class.

The banner-wings droop one after another, in tomorrow's battles again to rise; "We ourselves, dear brother. closed your eagle eyes...." Shoulder to shouldernot to fall! Flags blackened, eyes reddening, tears agleam, for the last farewell with Lenin came all. slowing down at the Mausoleum. On went the funeral ceremonial. Speeches flowed. Ay, speaking's all right; the tragedy is there's a minute only how embrace him at one insatiable sight! Out they file and with dread in their glance look up at the glowering, snow-pocked disk: how madly the clockhands on Spasskaya¹¹¹ dance! A minuteand past the last quarter they whisk! Stop at this news. mankind. and grow dumb. Life, movement. breathing—cease.

You. with hammer uplifted, be numb. Earth, lie low and, motionless, freeze. Silence. The end of the greatest of fighters. Cannon fired. A thousand, perhaps. Yet all that cannonade sounded quieter than pennies jingling in beggars' caps. Straining, paining each puny iris I stand, half-frozen, with bated breath. In the gleaming of banners before me arises darkling, the globe, as still as death. And on itthis coffin mourned by mankind, with us, mankind's representatives, round it. in a tempest of deeds and uprisings destined to build up and complete all this day has founded. 2 But now, from the bowing banners' red arch

comes the voice of Muralov¹¹²: march!" The command's so apt it needn't be given: our breathing firmer, more even and rare. leaden bodies with effort driven. we hammer our footsteps down from the square. Each of the banners above our heads in steadying hands soars up as it ought. From our marching ranks the energy spreads in circles, carrying through the world one thought: one thought from a common anxiety stemming burns in the army, at the lathe, at the plough: it'll be hard for the Republic without Lenin. He's got to be replaced, but by whom and how? "Enough of dozing on bug-ridden mattresses! Comrade secretary, here's our application: put down the whole of the factory

on the membership list of the Party organisation." Cold sweat comes oozing from bourgeois flesh as they watch on, grinding their teeth 400,000 from the workbench freshcould the Party bring Lenin a welcomer wreath? "Comrade secretary, where's your pen? Replace means replacewhy squander words? If you think I'm too old, here's my grandson then: Y.C.L.-er. one of the early birds!" Ahoy, my Navy, get into motion! Off on your missions. submarine moles! "Over sea and over ocean travel sailors, merry souls!" Hi there, Sun, come and be witness! Hurry on, smooth out the wrinkles of mourning.

children show their fitness-

In line with parents,

Tra-ta-ta-ta-aa-aa! sing their bugles in the morning. "One-Two-Three, Pioneers are we: We aren't afraid of fascists— Let them come and see!" In vain old Europe snarls like a cur. "Back!" we warn her, "better be wiser!" Lenin's very death has turned into the greatest communist-organiser! Over the world-wide forest of factory stacks like a giant banner the huge Red Square, millions of hands welded into its staff. soars with a mighty sweep into the air. And from that banner, from every fold Lenin, alive as ever, cries: "Workers, prepare for the last assault! Slaves. unbend

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rise in force!

Proletarian army,

your knees and spines!

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Long live
the Revolution
with speedy victory,
the greatest
and justest
of all the wars
ever
fought
in history!"
```

1924

FINE!

1

Time

is a thing

that goes endlessly on.

The times of the sagas—

they've been

and gone.

No sagas,

no epics,

no myths-

all extinct.

Fly, verse, like a telegram,

act!

With lips inflamed

drop down

and drink

from the river

whose name is

Fact.

This is time

humming taut

as a telegraph wire,

my heart

alone

with the truth,

whole and sole.

This happened-

with fighters,

with the country entire,

in the depth

of my own soul.

After reading this book

I want you once more

from your tiny

apartment

worlds

to forge ahead

through machine-gun roar

in the bayonet-gleam

of my poem's words.

Shine up high, shine down on earth, till life's own source runs dry—shine on—for all your blooming worth, so say both sun and I!

An Amazing Adventure



I want this book read by joyous eyes as the testimony of a lucky witness, to infuse tired muscles. tonic-wise. with builders' riotous strength and fitness. We won't hire anyone to sing our day. We'll crucify pencils on the blank page, so that pages rustling like banners asway should rustle until the furthermost age. 19 I've been hiking all over the world. life's to my liking, there's no word. but in our hustle with its pep and bustle it's better still. See that snaky highroad twine

that snaky highroad
twine
past
the houses tall?
Well,
that highroad's
mine,
houses
and all.

```
Windows aglare,
                 stand the shops.
All
   kinds of ware,
full
   to the tops.
Flies
    kept out.
Cheese-
        not a spot.
Lamps
      strung about;
"Prices
       cut!"
Getting
       operative,
my
Co-operative!
Our
    rubles
          win
the
   trade-fight
Bookstalls
          bulge
               with books in a pile;
my name,
             in the list of poetry.
Isn't that jolly—
                 proud, I smile-
there's
      my bit
             in the work
                         of my country!
Swirling
        the dust
                with fat-lipped tyre,
men
    I elect
           to sittings retire.
```

Sit and discuss my affairs without fuss, in my Moscow Soviet, and don't drowse over it! Countenance ruddy, gun-holster tan, to guard me ready is my militia-man. His baton's direction "Please turn right!" l've no objection! Fine! All right! Blue silk heavens above me shine. Sure, it's never been half so fine. An aeroplane hops over humped cloud-tops. That man in the aeroplane's mine! I watch him, glued to the spot. If it comes to war, he'll deal it out fine,

```
and be sure,
           they'll get it hot!
I skim
      through the paper:
good boys, Viennese, 113
to wallop
         their bosses'
fat bums
        with their knees!
"BURNT
         THE COURT"-
they got
        what they ought!—
Out
   flames
         break.
papers
      alight,
judges
      quake-
serves
     'em
        right!
Scurvy
       editorials
threaten us with wars....
That
    won't worry us,
though they
            go hoarse!
There comes
            the Army
marching
         before me:
drum-
      mers
           rat-
              tle,
ready for
         bat-
             tle,
```

17-570

```
feet
   beat
       loud,
faces
     look
         proud,
bayonets
         bristle,
red stars
        glisten,
I set
    my pace
to the marching
                feet;
foes
    you
       face
are
   mine
        in-
           deed.
Touch us,
         will they?
We'll knock them
                 silly!
Black smoke
           overhangs
chimney-batteries;
Puff-
     blow,
          blow-
                puff,
go
  my
     factories.
Puff away,
           my engines,
                       puff,
never
      to cease.
Make me
         heaps of cotton stuff,
```

my Komsomol girls

to please!

You feel that breeze from behind the trees?

It's

their perfume's smell!

My dear,

how

swell!

Fields

far-reaching;

peasants

in their fields,

cunning

creatures

with beards

like shields—

bushy

as heather!

When

they turn the loam, it's so damn clever, you'd think

they wrote a poem.

Take

any village;

at sowing

or tillage,

they work away the whole

blessed day;

feeding

poultry,

milking,

sowing,

-it's all

my country,

building

and growing.

Some lands

are centenarian,

```
for History's
                      graveyard
and mine's
           just a lad,
                     and a merry one:
just plan
         and invent
                    and try!
No end of joy!
               We could spare some
                                  for you to feel....
Life
    is marvellous,
                   life
                      is beautiful!
May we live
            to a hundred years
till our first
           gray hair appears,
may the future
              bring
joy in everything.
Verse and hammer
                   glory sing
to the land
           of spring!
```

1927

ALOUD AND STRAIGHT

First Prologue to a Poem of the Five-Year Plan

Comrades,

honourable descendants!

Raking

the petrified muck of today, probing the darkness that once impenned us, you may chance

to ask about me,

I daresay.

And I daresay,

one of your scientists will utter,

erudition

hushing

curiosity to awe,

that, well,

there was

such a bard of boiled water

and rabid enemy

of water raw. 114

Now,

off with your optics' bicycle,

Professor!

I'll deal with the topic myself,

yessir.

I,

muck-cleaner and water-carter,

mobilised

and enlisted

by the October call-up,

went to the front

from the manor garden

of Poetry

(wanton old trollop!)

Cottage,

pottage,

lawn and orchard,115

daughter, water-

what a beaut'!

Fancy-Nancy plants an orchid,

an' she'll water it to boot! Some grow poems by the acre, others sow 'em by the pinch. Curly-whirly like Mitreikin, fuddle-muddle like Kudreiko.¹¹⁶ Go and tell 'em,

which is which!

What's to stop

the beastly dinning?

There they'll twang

till god knows when:

Tar-ra tin-na,

tar-ra, tin-na,

Tenn-n-n!117

Not much of an honour

for me to rear

my

carvings

amid such roses, on town squares with whore and hooligan near, 'mid gobs

of tuberculosis!

Me too

agitprop*

makes sick as hell,

me too

writing love songs would suit as well—even better—for palate and purse.
Yet I—

I'd trample,

myself to quell,

on the very throat

of my verse.

Listen,

Comrades descendants,

to the agitator,

brazen-mouthed ring-leader!

Covering

all poetry's resplendence,

^{*} Agitprop-body responsible for agitation and propaganda.—Tr.

I shall crash

across the trash

of lyric-vendors,

as alive

as any living reader!

I'll come to you

into your far-off communism

not like the sing-song

of Esenin's fond creations.

My verse will reach you

over century and schism

above the heads of poets

and administrations.

My verse will reach you anyway,

but not the way

the dart gains goal

in Cupid's lyric chase,

not like the coin

that numismatists will display,

nor like a long-dead star's

belated rays.

My verse

will toil its way

through aeon-mountain-chains

and,

virile,

visible,

unvarnished,

be at home

with you

as are with us

the water-mains

worked into being

by the slaves of ancient Rome.

From burial mounds of books

that smother rhyme

these bits

of iron poems

disinterring,

you'll reverently handle them in time as weapons old, but deadly and unerring. I'm unaccustomed to caress the ear with words. The maiden auricle that nestles in its curls will blush, not touched, but shocked with half-obscenity. Seein parade my pages' troops unfurl and I march past the stanzas' front in proud serenity. There stand the smaller pieces, leaden-grim, for death as well as deathless glory ready. Muzzle to muzzle. loaded to the brim, big poems their deadly aiming headings. Best-loved of all diversely-weaponed troops, keen-pointed rhymes whipped out and gripped at knee, on the alert to plunge ahead with whoops, my fleet-foot cavalry. armed up to the teeth, with twenty years of triumph to its merit.

stand puns and quips-

And all this army,

in all its flying might,

to the last leaf,

I give away to you,

the planet's proletariat.

The enemy

of the colossus working class,

he's mine as well,

detested.

ea, hated,

mortal.

We all were bade

beneath red flags to mass

by years of toil,

by days of bread and water.

We opened Marx' every volume

in the way

we open shutters in our homes

to let in light.

But even without reading

we could say

with whom to march

and on which side to fight.

Our dialectics

weren't derived

from Hegel's cunning.

Through battle din

it burst into our verse

when bullets from our guns

sent bosses running

the same as we

had run from theirs at first.

Let widow Fame

drip tears

on genius' pile

to stir up awe

forever and anon in us.

Die,

die, my verse,

like any rank and file,

like those of us

who fought and fell anonymous.

The hell I care

for bronze's weight memorial,

the hell I care

for marble's frozen slime!

We're comrades all—

so let us share our glory,

one common monument

let's have

to tell our story

in socialism.

built in battle for all time.

Descendants.

check your dictionary floats!

You'll fish out from the Lethe

such queer words.

as prostitution,

and blockade.

For you

of iron health

and steely muscle knots

a poet licked away

consumptive's clots

with the rough tongue

of posters that he made.

With the tail of years

I'm getting like a fossil—

a long-tailed monster

seen through History's haze.

Come,

Comrade Life.

let's tramp as fast as possible

along the five-year plan

what's left us of our days. There's not a ruble in my cashbox saved by verse:

I've no mahogany

by order carpentered, and, frankly, friends,

a couple of clean shirts

is all I care to have

in this our world.

Called

to the CCC*

of Future crimson-starred.

^{*} CCC-Central Control Committee of the Communist Party.—Tr.

above the rabble of poetic thugs and crooks

I'll hold up like a Party member-card all hundred volumes

of my party-hearted

books!

1930



YOU!

- 1...awards of St. Georgi—St. George's Cross—a medal awarded for military merit in pre-revolutionary Russia.

 p. 29
- ² Severyanin, Igor—Mayakovsky's contemporary, a decadent poet, leader of the poetic grouping known as egofuturists.

LILY DEAR! IN LIEU OF A LETTER

3 Dedicated to Lily Brik.

- p. 32
- ⁴ A chapter of Kruchonikh's inferno—allusion to Games in Hell, a futurist poem by A. Kruchonikh and V. Khlebnikov (1919). p. 32

KINDNESS TO HORSES

⁵ Sweeping the Kuznetsky—Kuznetsky Most—fashionable Moscow street. p. 36

AN AMAZING ADVENTURE

8 ROSTA—abbr. for Russian Telegraph Agency, forerunner of TASS. Since Autumn 1919, under its auspices, a group of poets and artists headed by Mayakovsky, produced thousands of colourful posters with rhymed captions on current political themes.
p. 42

ORDER No. 2 TO THE ARMY OF ARTS

7 Proletcult (Proletarian Culture)—a cultural and educational society inaugurated in September 1917 for the development of amateur art among workers. Renouncing the classic heritage, proletcultist theoreticians spread the erroneous view that a "purely proletarian" culture could be created by so-called "laboratory methods". The Proletcultist doctrine was sharply criticised by V. I. Lenin. p. 44

ATLANTIC OCEAN

- 8 Revkom, military-revolutionary committee, directed the preparations for the October uprising and the uprising itself.
 p. 48
- 9 C.E.C. (TsIK)—Central Executive Committee—supreme organ of Soviet power before the adoption of the new Constitution in 1936. p. 49

A SKYSCRAPER DISSECTED

- 10 Pre-October Yelets or Konotop small provincial towns, synonymous of starnation.
 p. 57
- 11 Calvin Coolidge—President of the USA in 1923-1929. p. 58

SERGEL ESENIN

- 12 ...slashed up wrist-veins—Sergei Esenin, prominent Russian poet, committed suicide in the Leningrad hotel Angleterre on Dec. 27, 1925, writing his last verse with blood from his opened vein. p. 64
- ¹³ Kvass—popular non-alcoholic beverage. p. 65
- 14 On the Post—magazine, mouthpiece of one of the leading literary groupings of the twenties, the Russian Association of proletarian writers (RAPP).
 p. 65
- 15 Nikolai Doronin-poet, contemporary of V. Mayakovsky. p. 65
- 16 Leonid Sobinov—famous tenor who sang at the Esenin memorial meeting in the Moscow Art Theatre.

 p. 67
- 17 Not a word, my friend, not a sigh—initial words of a romance by Chaikovsky to words by Pleshcheyev. p. 67
- ¹⁸ L. U. Loengrinsky—Loengrin's part in Wagner's opera was considered one of Sobinov's finest performances.
 p. 67
- P. S. Kogan—Soviet critic, target of many sarcastic quips on the part of V. Mayakovsky.
 p. 67
- 20 Dying in this life is not so hard, building life is harder, I daresay—paraphrase of Esenin's lines: Dying in this life is not so new, yet living, certainly, is not much newer.
 p. 68

TO COMRADE NETTE, STEAMER AND MAN

- 21 Theodore Nette—Soviet diplomatic courier who was murdered by foreign secret agents in a train carriage in February 1926. p. 69
- 22 Roman Yakobson—philologist, Mayakovsky's and Nette's friend. p. 69

LETTER TO COMRADE KOSTROV

23 T. Kostrov—then editor of the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda. p. 83

CLOUD IN PANTS

- ²⁴ Lusitania—British steamship sunk by a German submarine in 1915. p. 96
- 25 ...calvaries of rostrums. Mayakovsky and other futurists undertook a tour through Russia in late 1913-early 1914. p. 99
- 26 "Drink Van Huten's Cocoa!"—the day's newspapers carried stories about a convict sentenced to death who agreed to shout out these words during his execution, the firm having promised to provide for his family.
 p. 101

- 27 General Galliffet—sponsor of massacres concluding the existence of the Paris Commune of 1871.
- 28 ... feasts like Mamai...—allusion to a Tatar custom by which victors feasted sitting on planks laid on the corpses of the defeated. Actually, it was not Khan Mamai of the Golden Horde, but the commanders of Genghiz Khan who did so after the battle on the river Kalka (13th century).
- ²⁹ Azef—an agent-provocateur in the pay of the tsarist secret police. p. 104
- One poet sings sonnets to Tiana...—allusion to I. Severyanin's poem Tiana.
 p. 107

I LOVE

- 31 Müller—author of popular physical exercise manual. p. 111
- 32 Rion—Rioni—river in Georgia which flows through the town of Kutaisi.
 p. 111
- 33 Butyrki—former Butyrskaya prison in Moscow where Mayakovsky was detained in cell No. 103 in 1909-1910 for revolutionary activity. p. 112
- 34 Ilovaisky D. I.—author of history-books written in a reactionary, monarchist spirit.
 p. 113
- Nikolai Dobrolyubov—great revolutionary democrat, critic and writer. The name means literally "lover of good". p. 113
- ³⁶ Sadovaya—one of Moscow's chief thoroughfares forming a ring round the city centre (lit., Sadovaya—Garden St.). p. 114
- ³⁷ Strastnaya Square—a square in the centre of Moscow, renamed Pushkin Square (Strast—Passion). p. 115
- 38 ... precursor by Maupassant—allusion to Maupassant's story The Idyll.
 p. 115

IT

- 39 Lubyansky Proyezd (drive)—now Serov Proyezd—street in Moscow where Mayakovsky lived at the time.

 p. 122
- 40 Vodopyany Lane-place where Lily Brik lived at the time. p. 122
- Myasnitskaya Street—now Kirov Street—the route from Lubyansky Proyezd to Vodopyany Lane. p. 126
- 42 Dantés killed the poet Alexander Pushkin in a duel. p. 130
- 43 UTsIK-Russian abbreviation for Central Executive Committee.
 p. 130

- 44 Ehrfurt programme—programme of the German Social Democratic Party adopted at a party congress in 1891. p. 130
- 45 The man from seven years back—the hero of Man, a poem Mayakovsky wrote 7 years before It in 1916-1917. p. 135
- 46 Tverskaya—now Gorky Street. p. 139
- 47 Presnya—Moscow street where Mayakovsky's mother and sisters lived. p. 141
- 48 ... six hundred versts—distance from Moscow to Leningrad. p. 142
- 49 domkom—house management committee elected from the tenants of an apartment house. p. 143
- 50 Kudrinskaya—a square in Moscow, now renamed Vosstaniye Square in honour of the 1905 uprising.
 p. 144
- 51 Pleasant Surprise—title of a collection of verses by A. Blok. p. 145
- 52 ...guardian angel—in those days tenants of large flats, afraid of having some of the rooms requisitioned, did their best to get hold of an important lodger.
 p. 146
- 53 Mystery-Bouffe—a play by Mayakovsky. p. 148
- 54 Arnold Boecklin—Swiss painter, symbolist, copies of whose picture "Island of the Dead" could be found in any middle-class family before the Revolution.
 p. 151
- 55 Raskolnikov-hero of Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment. p. 153
- 56, 57, 58, Lyuban, Tver (now Kalinin), Klin—stations on the way from Leningrad to Moscow. p. 157
 - ⁵⁹ Razumovskoye—Moscow suburb. p. 157
- 60 Nikolaevsky Station—now Leningrad Railway terminal in Moscow. p. 157
- 61 One of your sort—a hussar—refers to the poet Lermontov who served as a hussar and was killed in a duel, in Pyatigorsk at the foot of Mt. Mashuk.

 p. 165

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

- 62 Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky—then People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, staunch follower of Lenin.
 p. 180
- 63 The House of Unions—historical public building in the centre of Moscow where Lenin lay in state in January 1924.

 p. 182

- 64 Bromley's and Goujon's—foreign-owned engineering works in old Russia; after the revolution they were nationalised, renamed and considerably expanded.
 p. 183
- 65 Yeliseyev—big food-dealer with huge shops in Russia's principal cities.
 p. 185
- 66 Ivanovo-Voznesensk—big textile centre, scene of mass strikes and revolutionary upheavals for many years.

 p. 186
- 67 Stepan Razin—leader of a peasant uprising in the 17th century. p. 187
- 68 The French Prime Minister Thiers and General Galliffet headed the operations against the Paris Commune of 1871.
 p. 196
- 69 Père Lachaise—Paris cemetery where Communards were shot and buried.
 p. 196
- Alexander Ulyanov, Lenin's elder brother, a member of the Narod-naya Volya revolutionary society, was arrested on the eve of an attempt to assassinate the tsar, and executed, after court martial, at the Schlüsselburg Fortress, place of execution of many Russian revolutionaries.
 p. 200
- Name of earliest Marxist workers' organisation in Russia, embryo of the Communist Party.
 p. 203
- 72 Uladimirka—highway by which political convicts were driven from Moscow to Siberia. p. 203
- 73 S.R.s.—Socialist-Revolutionary Party, a petty-bourgeois organisation preaching individual terror; after the October Revolution it degenerated into a gang of plotters opposing Soviet power. p. 204
- 74 Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)—name used from 1918 to 1925.
 p. 205
- On January 9, 1905, the gendarmes, killing hundreds, scattered a peaceful manifestation carrying a petition to the tsar. The priest Gapon, its leader, had organised a whole system of police-sponsored workers' circles, spreading the belief that the tsar was unaware of their miserable conditions.
 p. 210
- Mukden, Tsushima—sites of land and naval battles in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), where tsarism sustained military defeat from the Japanese; one of the main events that set off the revolution of 1905, disclosing the decay of the regime.
 p. 210
- 77 Presnya—industrial district in Moscow where the street-fighting began in 1905.
 p. 210

- ⁷⁸ On October 17, 1905, the tsar issued a manifesto promising certain civil rights—a subterfuge aimed at allaying popular indignation. p. 211
- 79 Admiral Dubasov—governor-general of St. Petersburg, headed operations against the insurgent workers.
 p. 211
- 80 Cheka—Extraordinary Commission headed by Dzerzhinsky, crushed counter-revolutionary plots in the first years of Soviet power. p. 211
- Some of the intellectuals earlier supporting the revolutionary cause lost heart after the defeat of the revolution and abandoned the militant principles of the movement, indulging in "God-seeking", i.e., religious mysticism.

 p. 211
- 82 Georgi Plekhanov—prominent Marxist scholar and theoretician, who in 1905 drifted to the right and broke with Lenin. p. 212
- 83 Poltava (Ukraine, 1709) and Plevna (Bulgaria, 1877)—cities near which big historic battles were won by Russian forces. p. 213
- 84 The international socialist conference held in Zimmerwald (Switzerland, 1915) took a resolute stand against the imperialist war.
 p. 214
- 85 Hohenzollern-dynastic name of German Kaiser Wilhelm II. p. 217
- 86 Nevsky Prospekt-central thoroughfare of Petrograd. p. 217
- 87 Dardanelsky, née Milyukov—one of the leaders of the Russian counter-revolutionary forces, during World War I advocated war until victory and annexation of the Dardanelles straits.
 p. 217
- 88 Prince Mikhail—brother of Nicholas II, made claims to the throne immediately after the tsar's abdication.
 p. 217
- 89 Kerensky, A. F.—Socialist-Revolutionary; from July 1917 headed the bourgeois Provisional Government. In August 1917 Premier Kerensky ordered Lenin's arrest, secretly planning his murder. p. 217
- 90 Boris Savinkov—one of the leaders of the S.R. Party; after the revolution headed several counter-revolutionary plots.
 p. 218
- 91 Mensheviks—opportunist minority in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. The Tell-Tale Cat—folklore cat that could speak and tell stories.
 p. 218
- 92 Liteiny Prospekt—one of Petrograd's main streets. p. 218
- 93 Kshesinskaya—prima ballerina of the Mariinsky Theatre, the tsar's favourite, whose palace, a present from the tsar, was taken over by the revolutionary masses.
 p. 220

- 94 On July 3-4, 1917, Petrograd workers, soldiers and sailors held a peaceful demonstration demanding complete transfer of power to the Soviets. It was dispersed by gunfire at the orders of the Provisional Government.
 p. 220
- ⁹⁵ Zinoviev, G. Y.—joined the Russian Social-Democratic movement in 1901. After the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. (1903) Zinoviev joined the Bolsheviks. After the Revolution, one of the organisers of the anti-Party Trotsky-Zinoviev bloc.
 p. 221
- 96 Smolny—historic building accommodating the Petrograd Soviet; headquarters of the October uprising. p. 223
- 97 Trotsky, L. D.—headed the Centrist trend in Russian Social-Democracy. On the eve of the October Revolution joined the Bolshevik Party. After the October Revolution headed the opposition elements fighting against the general Party line, against the Leninist programme of socialist construction. In 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Party and deprived of Soviet citizenship for anti-Soviet activities.
 p. 223
- 98 Aurora—famous battleship whose salvo signalled the beginning of the revolution. p. 223
- 99 Dukhonin and Kornilov—white generals, Guchkov—Minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government; leaders of the planned coup aimed at preventing the imminent revolution.
 p. 226
- 100 Decrees on Peace and Land and Decision on the Formation of a Workers' and Peasants' Government—the first to be issued by the revolutionary authorities.
 p. 226
- 101 The young Soviet Government was forced to sign the inequitable Brest Treaty with the Germans, which lasted only until November 1918, when the revolution in Germany overthrew the Kaiser. p. 228
- 102 ...posters with hydras—cartoons of the civil war depicted imperialism as a many-headed monster out to devour the Soviet Republic.
 p. 228
- 1893, 104, 105 General Denikin headed the first whiteguard onslaught from the South; soon after his defeat, Baron Wrangel entered the Ukrainian steppes from the Crimea. Admiral Kolchak led the white armies based in Siberia. With equipment and financial backing from abroad, they successively and simultaneously attempted to smother the Soviet Republic, the results of which are known.
 p. 229
- ¹⁰⁶ Allusion to an attempt on Lenin's life by the S.R. terrorist Kaplan who chose the moment when Lenin was leaving a workers' rally at the Michelson engineering works in Moscow, August 1918.
 p. 229
- NEP—abbreviation for the New Economic Policy proclaimed by Lenin, envisaging temporary permission of free private commerce, purposed to help the economy recuperate; the key positions in the economy being retained by the proletarian state.

- 108 Mamontov—whiteguard general, notorious for brutality. p. 235
- 109 Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin—one of the oldest followers of Lenin; Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and later of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. p. 236
- 110 Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya—Lenin's wife, staunch Bolshevik.
 p. 243
- 111 Spasskaya-Kremlin clock-tower.

p. 245

Muralov, N. I.—then commander of the Moscow Military District. p. 247

FINE!

413 Good boys, Viennese—an allusion to the Vienna uprising of July 1927.
p. 257

ALOUD AND STRAIGHT

- 114 That there was such a bard of boiled water and rabid enemy of water raw—ironic hint at the sanitary posters which Mayakovsky supplied with captions.
 p. 261
- 115 Cottage, pottage, lawn and orchard—free re-hash of a popular sentimental ditty.
 p. 261
- ¹¹⁶ Mitreikin and Kudreiko-poets, Mayakovsky's contemporaries. p. 262
- 117 Tar-ra tin-na, tar-ra tin-na, ten-n-n—from Gypsy Waltz on a Guitar by Ilya Selvinsky.
 p. 262