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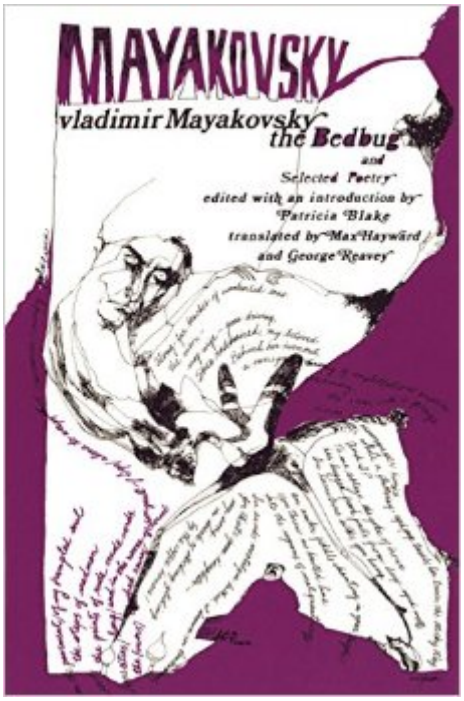
The Bedbug And Selected Poetry



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Synopsis

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

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mayakovsky was one of the foremost futurist poets of the early 20th centuary. He wrote anguished (and mildly egocentric) pieces about being alone and unrequited in love. He also wrote political poems that were supposed to moblize the workers and shock the borgeosie establishment. This book is worth buying for the two epics "A cloud in trousers" and "The backbone flute" alone. The other poems are the icing on the cake, sounding off his thundering poetic voice. His final poem, "Past one o’clock.." starkly contrasts the others with it’s muted depression. He would include part of it in his suicide note, changing the line "now you and I are quits" to "now life and I are quits." The Bedbug is a savage satire of Soviet society, and (had he not shot himself) would probably have gotten him arrested during the imminent Stalinist purges. After his death, Mayakovsky was lauded by Stalin. His pro-Bolshevik political verses were glorified and proudly shown off by the state, whilst his other poems and satirical plays were quietly supressed. Get this book if you want to see every side of Mayakovsky, and not just the one that has been publicized for years as propaganda.

I do appreciate the publishers attempting to make Mayakovsky available in English and Russian. This book features only 13 poems in and a short play, albeit in both original Russian and translated English, but none the less it’s just too few. It’s a shame how few of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poems and pieces are currently available in English, but then again it has a large amount to do with the intrinsic nature of the poem’s beauty belonging solely in its original Russian format. This book, in my opinion, is simply too big and costs too much for the content, unless you get it used. The poems need footnotes to really be understood in both English and Russian because much of it has no meaning without historical and biographical context, much like a T.S. Eliot can’t be understood without the guidance of a professor or a very, very specifically educated mind. The editors try to solve this contextual problem with a biographical and era introduction that unfortunately centers more on the too broad scope of the Russian Revolution and the too narrow times of adulations that Mayakovsky received as he impressed more people throughout his time of his fame. I believe there could be more context if we’d learned about the different life stages of the poet and and his struggles specific to each poem, not just how much attention he garnered. The only other book in English publication about Mayakovsky which is very common, When Night Wraps the Sky, tries to tell too much about Mayakovsky’s personal life, almost like a boring timeline of facts with intermittent flashes of his poetry in-between that are accompanied by overpowering and as result, blanching commentary by other writers. To conclude, if you want to read Mayakovsky, learn Russian, but if you only know English then this book is your best choice.

At twelve years of age Mayakovsky was displaying the extraordinary behaviour which was to characterise his life.In his teens he wore a yellow jacket and proclaimed himself a Nihilist.When he turned himself into a poet he never altered his extraordinary course through life.When he shot himself at the age of 36 Boris Pasternak went to the house where Mayakovsky lay, looked over him and went into a corner and wept.Akhamatova asked by Isiah Berlin if she considered Mayakovsky a great Poet replied no, but added that he was a genius.The Ferociously intelligent Marina Tsvetaeva took Mayakovsky’s side when he visited Paris and the Emigre community of Russians shunned him as a Party hack, which he had indeed become. Tsvetaeva saw more in him than this and took his side.In 1921 she had written a short but insightful poem entitled ’To Mayakovsky’it praised him as "my clumsy footed angel" Apart from his time playing the role of ’Party Hack’ Mayakovsky defies categorisation.I bought this book when it was originally published in 1960 and cherish it much as I cherish Hart Crane’s ’The Bridge’.In 1930 one year before his death in the poem ’At The Top Of My Voice’Mayakovsky showed clearly that he had begun to revert to his previous unorthodox

identity.He said clearly: "Agitprop sticks in my teeth too"Mayakovsky knew what he had become; and in 1931 shot himself through the heart.A remarkable poet who for all of his failings was adored by the Russian people.For me he stands amongst the greatest.A.Murphy.

Well, I love pre-Revolution Russian literature, so I guess I’m a little biased towards this book, but it really is good. Even the introduction is fascinating and inspiring if you ask me.

Mayakovsky’s self-distinctive tone is one style that can be taken for either some of the worst mouthing off imaginable or the most brilliant & confident declamations of personality ever to appear on the pages of poetry.His startling lines filled with bragadoccio,machismo,exuberance,wit,irony,satire & love jump from the pages in brilliantly precise metaphors intensified by some of the most passionate lyrics ever to be written.The reader is kept on hold throughout.His best poems assault relentlessly signifying at times an intruder who is irregardless of others privacy.The weakness in Mayakovsky’s verse is that the exhortant exclamations tend most of the time to thicken the surface of the subjects he assails,leaving the bottom composedly empty.This makes up for a shallowness that could have been repudiated if the poet would have seen things in a much broader level & not just within his somewhat narrow mind frame.His most accomplished poem may have been his last.And it takes on universal aspects & acceptance.The unfortunate omission of his great shorter poems is a dissapointment. The Bedbug is a funny & witty satire on the state of Soviet society at that time & where it may lead to,the way Mayakovsky saw it.The characters are enetertaining & real life,with wit present almost everywhere.The futuristic scenes in the end are impressive.And the final scene is heartachingly moving.The play could have benefited though from a more elaborate plot to give the characters & the situations more chance to stretch out.All in all a delightful read.

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