

Pen Prison Poetry, Second Place To Valdimir Mayakovsky*

by Judith Clark

History
has been unkind to you
 Mayakovsky
 making fools
 or lunatics of
us
who chased the rainbow
blinded by its shimmering radiance
 fading
 like dreams
 disappearing
 into morning

Your life a warning:
poets who would be prophets
may lose their lyrics
 their lives

History's stern judgements:
he sold his soul to dictators
 his craft to technocrats
he loved too much he loved too little
he gave in
 he gave up

Today
the New World you championed
 the dreams I fought for
are consigned to history books
 written
 in black and white
 bereft of poems

A middle school teacher
in America

wraps it up so neatly, to his pupils
in one simple sentence:
 Communism was bad
 from start to finish
 bad and it lost.

A child
stands
 hands on hips
 chin out to challenge:
 "That's your opinion
 and too simple
My grandparents were Communists
It was an idea a dream
People Tried

but they made mistakes
It's not so simple as good and bad."

In the prison visiting room
the child looks her mother
in the eye. She says,
 "Your intentions were good
 but you went about them
 wrongly."

And I
her mother

 who grew up
dancing
 to your rhythms and rhymes
 Mayakovsky
then plunged
 from poetry
 to war
find my way back
 to you

Reading your rebellious lyrics
I contemplate your end
 Mayakovsky
 caught
in the iron jaws of history
and your own intimate demons

This I know:
 despite my failures and defeats
 my sorry solitude
 my burden of guilt
 and the death of dreams
despite the cold winter morning
walking to cinderblock walls and
rows of barbed wire
robbed
 of every warm blanket
 of illusion

Still
 I crave life
 Mayakovsky
child
 poems
 dreams

-May Day 1993

**Note* - Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), a Russian poet and dramatist, was considered 'the premier voice' of Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. But his relationship to the Soviet government grew more contentious. He died, by his own hand, at the age of 37.