

## 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.