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MAYVAKOVSKY



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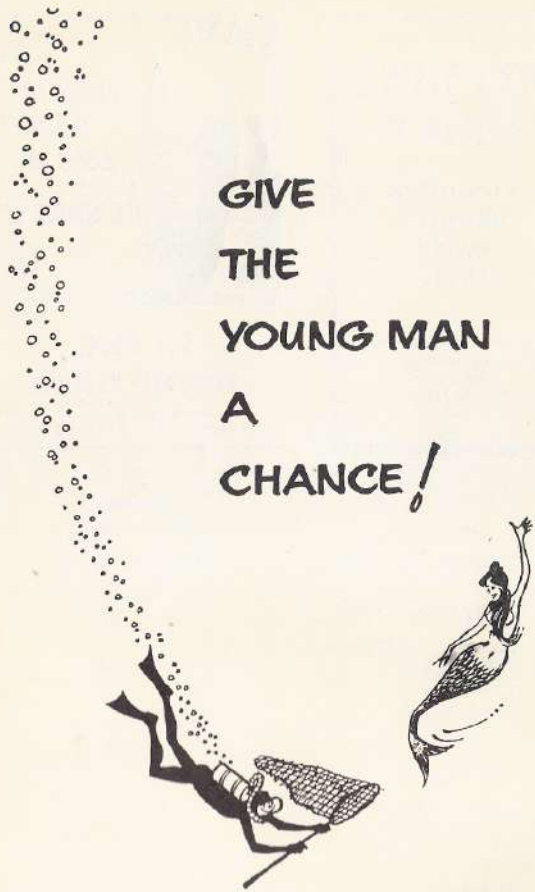
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Josephine Wilson

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The Mermaid Theatre Trust
presents

THE BED BUG

by
**Vladimir
Mayakovsky**

English translation by
Dmitri Makaroff

Directed by Giles Fletcher
Settings designed by
David Myerscough Jones
(by courtesy of the
Hornchurch Theatre Trust Ltd)
Costumes designed by
Joan Holcombe
Music composed by Leonard Salzedo
Choreography and movement by
Thane Bettany
Sound arranged by Bill Hayes
Assistant Director Josephine Wilson
This, the first professional production
of *The Bed Bug* in this country,
opened at the Mermaid Theatre
on Wednesday 14 February 1962



The Mermaid Theatre Trust gratefully acknowledges
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the man and his play

Mayakovsky, a friend of Boris Pasternak, was hailed in the early '20s as the Poet Laureate of the newly-born Soviet regime. *The Bed Bug* was written while he was visiting Paris in the autumn of 1928, and was first produced in Moscow by Meyerhold in February 1929. Its merciless social satire aroused storms of criticism. A year after its production, in 1930, the author, then aged only 37, shot himself. In his last letter he wrote: 'Mama, sisters, and comrades, forgive me. This is not a means (I Don't recommend it to others), but there is no other way left.'

For many years the play was, like its hero, kept in cold storage and only recently has it been revived on the Moscow stage. It was given a production at the Playwrights' Theatre in Greenwich Village, New York, in March 1931, and its first production in this country was that by the London University Drama Society in 1959.

The Mermaid production is the first professional one to be given in this country.

a memoir by Boris Pasternak

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

It was a hot day towards the end of May 1915. Pasternak was in a teashop when Mayakovsky and two friends entered.

'I watched Mayakovsky uninterruptedly. I think it was the first time I had observed him from near.

'His "e" for "a", a piece of sheet-iron rocking his diction, was an actor's trait. His calculated hardness was easily interpretable as a distinguishing mark of other professions and conditions. He was not alone in his impressiveness. His friends sat beside him. Of them, one, like him, was playing the dandy, the other, like

him, was an authentic poet. But all these similarities did not diminish Mayakovsky's exceptional quality but stressed it. As distinct from playing each game separately he played them all at once, in contempt of acting a part he played at life. The latter - without any thought one might have of his future end - one caught at a glance. And it was this which chained one to him and terrified one.

'Although one can see at their full height anyone who is walking or standing up, the same circumstance in the appearance of Mayakovsky seemed miraculous, forcing everyone to turn in his direction. In

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his case the natural appeared supernatural. The reason for this was not his height, but another more general and less obvious peculiarity. To a greater extent than other people he was all in his appearance It was as if he existed on the day following a terrific spiritual life lived through for use in all subsequent events, and everyone came upon him in the sheaf of its unbending sequences.

'He sat in a chair as on the saddle of a motor cycle, leant forward, cut and quickly swallowed his Wiener Schnitzel, played cards, turned his eyes all ways without turning his head, strolled majestically along the Kuznetsky, intoned hollowly in his nose like fragments of a liturgy particularly significant extracts from his own and other people's stuff, frowned, grew, rode and made public appearances, and in the depths behind all this, as behind the straightness of a skater at full speed, there glimmered always his one day preceding all other days, when this amazing initial take-off was made, straightening him so boldly and independently

'Usually his sympathies aroused perplexity. A poet with an exhilaratingly great self-knowledge, who had gone further than anyone else in stripping bare the lyrical element and in linking it to a giant theme with a medieval courage, until his poetry spoke with a voice which was almost that of sectarian identities, he seized on another more localised tradition with the same breath and strength.

'He saw at his feet a city which gradually rose towards him from the depths of "the Bronze Horseman", "Crime and Punishment", "Petersburg", a city covered with a haze which with unnecessary prolixity was called the problem of the Russian intellectuals, but which was in reality nothing more than a city covered with the haze of eternal conjectures about the future, the precarious Russian city of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

'He embraced views such as these, and along with such immense contemplations he remained faithful, almost as though it were a duty, to the pygmy projects of his fortuitous coterie, hastily gathered together and always indecently mediocre.

A man for whom truth held an almost animal attraction he surrounded himself with shallow dilettantes, men with fictitious reputations and false unwarranted pretensions. Or, what is more important: to the end he kept finding something in the veterans of a movement which he had himself abolished long ago and forever.

'Probably these were the consequences of a fatal isolation, established and then voluntarily aggravated with that pedantry with which the will sometimes follows a road known to be inevitable.'

We are grateful to Ernest Benn Ltd, for permission to reprint this extract from Pasternak's autobiography published by them in a volume of his Prose and Poems.



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the enigma of THE BED BUG

*by Dmitri Makaroff

Mayakovsky chain-smoked all through the rehearsals when *The Bed Bug* was being prepared for its first presentation at the Meyerhold Theatre, Moscow, in 1929, and yet the citizens of the Brave New Socialist World created by him gape in horrified amazement at the sight of the human parasite puffing away at his cigarette.

Mayakovsky, probably the greatest Russian poet since Pushkin, wrote the most heart-rending love lyrics, but in his world of the future 'falling in love' is an ancient, forgotten disease, as remote as the Black Death.

Mayakovsky, poet-laureate of the newborn Soviet State, shows us the communist society of tomorrow: an utterly sterilized, highly mechanized Federation of the World, a bureaucracy of automata to whom the human emotions and passions that throb in every line of verse he ever wrote are nothing but vague memories of a distant past.

Satire or self-criticism? Is this a genuine yearning for self-improvement, for a purifying fire to consume all the dross of the old life - or is it a prophetic warning? Is the poet laughing at himself as much as at the grotesque vulgarity of the Nepmen? 'Why are you laughing? You're laughing at yourselves!' Gogol cries out to his audience in that other great Russian comedy of human life, *The Inspector General*.

There is no easy straightforward answer to the many riddles posed by this 'amazingly paradoxical' pantomime. It is the enigma of the poet himself, the Soviet Virgil who for no apparent reason committed suicide on the morning of 14th April 1930 with the strict injunction to his friends not to gossip about his death - 'the deceased detested gossip'. It is the enigma of the Russian Revolution, of the death-wish of the pre-Revolutionary Russian intelligentsia, of Russia itself . . .



*the translator

Dmitri Makaroff

Dmitri Makaroff, whose translation of *The Bed Bug* you are seeing this evening, is the 32-year-old son of White Russian refugees. He was brought up in Australia, and began his work in the theatre while at Sydney University, where he acted, among other parts, the name part in Flecker's *Hassan*. Since coming to England he has produced a number of plays in Russian for the Joint Services School,

including Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, *Twelfth Night*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* in Pasternak's translations, Cocteau's *Orpheus*, Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, and Gogol's *The Inspector General*. He directed the production of his own translation of *The Bed Bug* at London University in 1959, and translated Chekhov's *Platonov* for the Royal Court Theatre.

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Herring seller DIANA CUMMING
Glue seller RICHARD BEALE
Perfume seller SUSAN BRINLEY
Book seller PETER HONRI
Scrofulovsky JOSS ACKLAND
Accordionoff BERNARD MILES
Rosalie NITA PANNELL
Zoe HAZEL PENWARDEN
Customers MICHAEL ALLABY, JEFFREY BIDDEAU, RUTH BURNS, ROGER JONES,
CHRISTINA LEES, ANTHEA MORRIS, GAYNOR OWEN, EDWARD PHILLIPS, MARY QUEST,
STEPHEN RICH, ANGELA SCOTT-PATRICK, JUNE THODY, RALPH TURNER

scene 1 'slap,
tickle and chuck'

Youth TONY BECKLEY
Cleaner ROBIN CHAPMAN
Young girl CHARLOTTE SELWYN
Inventor COLIN ELLIS
Specs youth MICHAEL ALLABY
Fitter EDWARD PHILLIPS
Scrofulovsky JOSS ACKLAND
Accordionoff BERNARD MILES
Zoe HAZEL PENWARDEN

scene 2 'don't
wiggle your nether
bosom!'

Elzivira SHEILA REID
Scrofulovsky JOSS ACKLAND
Papa JERRY Verno
Guest THANE BETTANY
Accordionoff BERNARD MILES
Rosalie NITA PANNELL
Pay clerk RICHARD BEALE
Best man PETER HONRI
Best man RONALD PEMBER
Matron of honour JOCELYNE PAGE
Bridesmaid DIANA CUMMING
Bridesmaid JUNE THODY

scene 3 'trams
from the registry
office'

Station officer MICHAEL GOLDIE
Firemen TONY BECKLEY, ROBIN CHAPMAN,
ROGER JONES, EDWARD PHILLIPS

scene 4 'with
a fork in its head'

Old mechanic COLIN ELLIS
Young mechanic MICHAEL GOLDIE
Orator PETER HONRI
Reporters MICHAEL ALLABY,
TONY BECKLEY, SUSAN BRINLEY, RUTH BURNS,
ROBIN CHAPMAN, EDWARD PHILLIPS, STEPHEN RICH, JUNE THODY,
RALPH TURNER, BILL WIESENER

scene 5 'a vodka-
sucking suckling'

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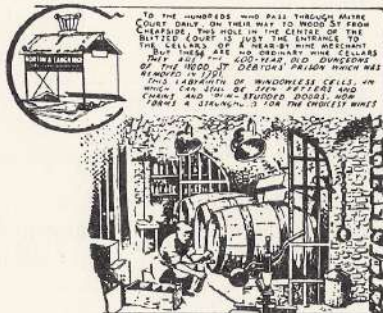
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the cast

Zoe HAZEL PENWARDEN
Professor JERRY VERNO
Surgeons THANE BETTANY,
JEFFREY BIDDEAU, ROGER JONES,
BILL WIESENER
Scrofulovsky JOSS ACKLAND

scene 6 'the movements are normal. He's scratching himself'

Chief reporter DONALD HOATH
1st man ROGER JONES
2nd man MICHAEL ALLABY
A girl SUSAN BRINLEY
Vet RALPH TURNER
A man with bottles MICHAEL GOLDIE
Charleston girl DIANA CUMMING
Dancing girls SUSAN BRINLEY, RUTH BURNS, DIANA CUMMING, CHRISTINA LEES,
GAYNOR OWEN, MARY QUEST, SHEILA REID, ANGELA SCOTT-PATRICK,
CHARLOTTE SELWYN, CAROLINE SMITH
Zoo director RICHARD BEALE
Zoo assistants PETER HONRI, TONY BECKLEY

scene 7 'the hunting of the bed bug'

Scrofulovsky JOSS ACKLAND
Doctors THANE BETTANY, JEFFREY BIDDEAU,
BILL WIESENER
Professor JERRY VERNO
Zoe HAZEL PENWARDEN

scene 8 'only don't you breathe in my direction...'

Master of ceremonies RONALD PEMBER
Negro deputies JEFFREY BIDDEAU,
ANGELA SCOTT-PATRICK
1st old woman JOCELYNE PAGE
1st old man DONALD HOATH
2nd old woman NITA PANNELL
2nd old man ROBIN CHAPMAN
Students SUSAN BRINLEY, DIANA CUMMING, ANTHEA MORRIS,
MARY QUEST, SHEILA REID, CHARLOTTE SELWYN
Zoo assistants MICHAEL ALLABY, TONY BECKLEY, PETER HONRI, BILL WIESENER
Chairman COLIN ELLIS
Councillors THANE BETTANY, MICHAEL GOLDIE, ROGER JONES
Zoo director RICHARD BEALE
Scrofulovsky JOSS ACKLAND
Crowd RUTH BURNS, CHRISTINA LEES, EDWARD PHILLIPS, STEPHEN RICH,
JUNE THODY, RALPH TURNER

scene 9 'an amazingly paradoxical parasite'

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Stage Manager CAROLINE SMITH

Assistant Stage Managers GAYNOR OWEN, STEPHEN RICH and RALPH TURNER

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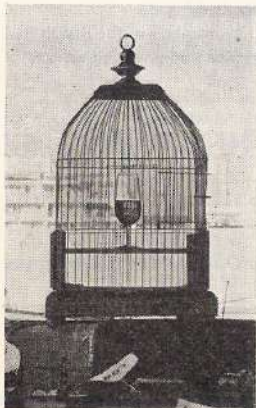
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the Russia of 'The Bed Bug'

by Wright Miller



author of 'Russians as People'

When *The Bed Bug* was written in 1928 the Russians were to some extent relaxing after a dozen years of appalling hardship, chaos and famine.

They had seen their ill-equipped and badly-organized armies pushed back by the Germans in 1916, while supplies at home grew chaotic; they had seen peasants revolting and burning landlords' houses (an almost annual event in Russian history, but this was on a bigger scale than usual); they had shared in the relief felt by the whole nation when Nicholas II had been forced to abdicate in the bloodless Revolution of March 1917, which was supported by every political party and even by one of the Tsar's brothers; they had felt uneasy as the New Provisional Government made speeches but would not decide either to make peace with Germany or to satisfy the peasants' demand for land; and they had endured the shock of the second Revolution of November 1917, which was made by Lenin and his small Bolshevik Party.

Lenin made peace, he dispossessed the landlords, he abolished all political parties but his own, and he nationalized the country's chief undertakings. As a result the country was plunged into the Civil War between Reds and Whites, and war against foreign intervention on the side of the Whites. The Bolsheviks won, to the surprise of the outside world, which had not yet realized that most of the people now supported them, if reluctantly, in preference to the Whites. But the

whole country was now at a standstill, and there was a famine which was partly alleviated by foreign relief agencies. To help get things going again Lenin announced the 'New Economic Policy', which became universally known as 'NEP'. The point of this was that small-scale capitalists were encouraged to start production again; in fact the motto of the period was declared to be 'Enrich yourselves'.

In 1928, however, the First Five-Year Plan was announced - a plan for a future which looked gloriously utopian to some, and menacing to others. NEP was soon to be superseded by full-scale socialism.

The Bed Bug was written at the very moment of transition. It shows the NEP period in the first half of the play, and in the second half a satirical view of the future which it was possible to imagine in 1928.

The small-scale commercialism of the NEP is still the only 'capitalist' or 'bourgeois' society of which most Russians have any vivid ideas. They were laughing at it uproariously when I saw *The Bed Bug* revived in Moscow in 1959.

They can afford to laugh at it now that their standard of living is at last above NEP level. But they also laughed *with* it, and there could be no doubt that their sympathies were *with* the chief character of the play rather than with the sterilized, over-launders future. At one point in the second part of the play some of the

**Thaw
that
man!**



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'girls of the future' leapt off the stage into the audience showering us with copies of an official 'newspaper' devoted to Mayakovsky and intended to show us that, in spite of everything, he had always been a believer in the glorious prospects of the Bolshevik state.

After thirty years the Bolshevik leaders feel strong enough and successful enough, it seems, to allow their people to see Mayakovsky's play once more, but they clearly do not feel that laughter should be left free to range without some attempt at guidance from above.

A VAST SHOUT FOR HUMANITY

The Bed Bug is often spoken of as a narrowly political play, a sort of anti-Soviet tract written by one of the greatest sons of the Revolution.

It is true the Co-Op herrings in Scene One proved smaller by a head than the private enterprise ones, and Scrofulovsky argues that the whole point of the Revolution was surely to get what the bourgeoisie had got. There are other cracks like 'Why did we kill His Imperial Majesty and send Mr Karensky packing?' and 'It'll be the death of me, your damned Soviet Government'. But these are surely trivial points beside the vast shout for humanity which Mayakovsky raises in the second half of the play, 'at the top of his voice', when Scrofulovsky finds himself the only human being left in a world of aseptic, over-organized and dehydrated conformity, the only cigarette-smoking, beer-swilling, bug-ridden, bed-lover, yearning for 'beatific repose in the spacious shelter of his riding breeches'. Surely that speaks for the whole of humanity?

I believe Mayakovsky saw the way humanity was heading and didn't care for it, and that the germs of this play were collected on his world travels, in Paris, Berlin, London and the U.S.A., just as much as at home.

B.M.



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the tragedy of Meyerhold and the soviet twenties

by Dmitri Makaroff

The Bed Bug was specially written by Mayakovsky for Meyerhold, a masterpiece from the pen of the leading 'futurist' poet for the leading 'constructivist' producer of the day. It is perhaps hard for us to imagine today that at that time Moscow was something of a world centre for all that was most *avante-garde* in the arts.

The years preceding the Revolution had been a period of feverish creativity in the arts, a period which produced such names as Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Stravinsky, Chagall, Kandinsky, Chaliapin. It was this period that saw the phenomenal rise of the producer Vsevolod Meyerhold who at the outbreak of the February Revolution was already well established as 'Producer to His Imperial Majesty' at the Alexandra Theatre, St Petersburg.

The Revolution was immediately embraced by such men as Mayakovsky and Meyerhold as their own spiritual revolution; all through the years of civil war

and famine, through the NEP period they produced their finest work. They evolved new forms for the victorious proletariat, worthy of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Herein lies their tragedy. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat could make neither head nor tail of Constructivism and Futurism; their aesthetic ideals remained those of the pre-Revolutionary bourgeoisie: frilly lampshades, pretty chocolate box pictures. Eventually these 'ideals' were formulated as a Party doctrine, the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

A series of 'cultural' purges followed, which Mayakovsky by his timely exit avoided, although *The Bed Bug* had already been greeted by a hostile Press.

Meyerhold did not fare so well. Accused of 'formalism', his theatre was closed down in 1938 and he himself, after a virulent attack made by him on Socialist Realism in the Soviet Theatre, 'disappeared' to perish in exile.

the director

Giles Fletcher is an Australian, and proud of it. His grandfather was hung for sheep-stealing and his great grandfather deported for poaching. Giles says that's how he came by his artistic streak. He was educated at Amaroo, Timaroo and Adelaide, then privately at Oxford where he narrowly missed getting a Degree. He came down from Oxford in 1953 and only just missed being given a big production at the Old Vic. He then went to

Paris where he worked as focus puller on three Jacques Tati films. Later, he sailed to Holland and back in an open boat, and then wrote his best seller *Twixt Wind and Wave*. Has been miner, fisherman, actor, boxer, journalist, painter, bullfighter and deep-sea diver. Is married to actress Joan Rapelle and has three children.

The Bed Bug is his first live production.

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The Death of Mayakovsky

Vladimir Mayakovsky shot himself at 10.15 am on the morning of 14 April 1930. Boris Pasternak has described what happened in the hours that followed.*

'Between eleven and twelve the waves were still flowing in circles round the shot. The news made the telephones tremble, covered faces with pallor, and urged one towards the Lubyanskoy passage, across the courtyard into the house, where the staircase was already choked with people from the town and with the tenants of the house, who wept and pressed close to one another, hurled and splashed against the walls by the destructive force of the event In the hall and in the dining-room men with and without hats were either sitting or standing. He was lying farther off, in his own study. The door from the hall into Lilya's room was open, and on the threshold, with his hand pressed against the lintel, Aseyev was crying. In the depths of the room by the window, his head sunk between his shoulders, Kirsanov was shaking with silent sobs

'My throat was constricted. I decided to enter his room once more and weep my fill.

'He lay on his side, his face turned towards the wall, sombre, tall, a sheet covering him to his chin, his mouth half open as in sleep. Turning proudly away

from us all, even when he was lying down, even in his sleep, he was going away from us in a stubborn endeavour to reach something. His face recalled the time, when he had spoken of himself as 'beautiful in his twenty-two years', for death had ossified a mask which rarely falls into its clutches.

'Suddenly there was a movement in the hall. Alone, apart from her mother and sister, who were already giving way to their grief inaudibly in the crowd, the younger sister of the dead man entered the flat. She entered possessively and noisily. Her voice floated into the room before her. Mounting the stairs alone she was speaking to someone in a loud voice, addressing her brother openly. Then she herself came into view, and walking through the crowd as through a rubbish pit, she reached her brother's door, threw up her hands and stood still. "Volodya!" she screamed in a voice which echoed through the whole house. A second flashed by. "He says nothing! He doesn't answer. Volodya. Volodya! How terrible!"

'She was falling. They caught her up and quickly began to restore her to consciousness. She had hardly come to herself, when she moved greedily towards the body and sitting down at his feet, precipitately resumed her unexhausted dialogue. At last, as I had long desired, I burst into tears.'

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moscow production

by Bernard Levin

Every dramatic critic sometimes feels that he is the only person in the theatre who understands what the play is about, and stares around him in amazement at the doltish incomprehension of all those laughing so heartily at a particularly tragic commentary on the human predicament, or sitting glum before a riot of wit. To few of us, however, is given the experience of such a feeling of lonely understanding coupled with the realization that it is objectively true.

This happened to me in 1960, when I saw Mayakovsky's *The Bed Bug* at the Satire Theatre in Moscow. This masterpiece is perhaps the bitterest comment ever made on Soviet society from inside; its contrast of the human, individual personality of Scrofulovsky with the mass society in which he wakes after his long sleep is driven home with all the resources of an outraged genius contemplating the betrayal of everything he had longed and worked for.

And there it was, thirty years later, as savage a satire on the dictatorship of the proletariat as it had ever been. But something, meanwhile, had gone wrong with the audience. *The Bed Bug* is shown, by the Soviet scientists, film of Soviet man and woman at work, at play and on parade—in awful, regimented, thousand-strong unison. He is appalled by what he is seeing; he breaks loose and dashes into the audience appealing for us to come into the cage with him. And everybody laughed. But I had spoken to the director of the play that very morning, and I knew what they thought they were laughing at. 'We satirize', he said, 'what we call the birthmarks of capitalism. Even when the Bedbug has been shown how society ought to be, he still wants the old system. So he must be educated'. With such a symbolic inversion had Soviet society corrupted the witness for which Mayakovsky had blown his brains out. And that is how I came to be the only person in the place who knew what the play was about. It was not until a week later that I began to reflect that Soviet theatre-directors might not care to tell strangers what is in their minds, and that Soviet audiences might not be quite so gullible in fact as in Soviet theory. Perhaps Mayakovsky's message, that the individual counts more than the mass, had not been quite obscured. Perhaps I had not been alone in the Satire Theatre after all.

For all our sakes, I hope so.

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