

Screenplay for the film "1930 — Vladimir Mayakovsky. Historical Chronicles with Nikolai Svanidze" written by Marina Zhukova, translated by AI, and preceded by a summary also written by AI

Screenplay Summary:

The text is a dense biographical-chronicle of Vladimir Mayakovsky's life and death, woven into the wider history of Soviet repression and the 1930s. It opens with his final night, April 13–14, 1930: a seemingly ordinary Moscow evening at writer Valentin Kataev's apartment with Art Theatre actors Boris Livanov and Mikhail Yanshin, and Yanshin's wife and Mayakovsky's lover, actress Veronika Polonskaya. Around tea and Riesling, Mayakovsky tears cardboard from a candy box, writes flirtatious notes to Polonskaya, and throws them across the table as she answers in kind. From time to time he drags her into an adjoining room, insisting she leave her husband.

At three in the morning he walks the couple home to Kalanchyovka and returns to his own place. The next morning he picks Polonskaya up, they briefly stop at his office on Lubyansky Proyezd, she rushes off to rehearsal with Nemirovich-Danchenko—who will tolerate no lateness—and he is left alone. She runs out; he shoots himself. The investigator's protocol notes a Mauser handgun by his body. Yet officially Mayakovsky owned only a Browning and a Bayard. The Browning had been a gift from the powerful OGPU official Yakov Agranov. Later, the Mauser disappears from the case and the Browning conveniently replaces it in the file, although modern ballistic tests show that the fatal shot came from a Mauser firing a Browning-type bullet. From the outset, there is an implied suspicion of OGPU manipulation.

The narrative then sketches the dense political and personal network around Mayakovsky. He lives in a "ménage à trois" with Lilya and Osip Brik in Gendrikov Lane; both Briks clandestinely work with the security organs. Agranov—Lenin's and Dzerzhinsky's trusted Chekist, responsible for the execution of poet Nikolai Gumilyov, designer of early show trials, later in Stalin's inner circle—frequents their flat. Their salon mixes secret police chiefs with avant-garde artists (Malevich, Rodchenko), writers (Pasternak, Shklovsky, Pilnyak), directors (Meyerhold, Eisenstein), composers (Shostakovich), and Western visitors like Upton Sinclair and Theodore Dreiser. In parallel, the text shows a surprisingly light, intimate side through Lilya Brik's Paris letters about stockings, bare knees in the tram and her desire for a little Ford, and through the story of "Shchen" the puppy, Mayakovsky's four-legged double, whose name becomes his own household nickname.

A long section goes back to Mayakovsky's teenage years. A noble boy from Kutaisi, he enters an elite Moscow classical gymnasium, devours Engels and Lenin's Two Tactics, joins the RSDLP at fourteen and is repeatedly arrested for underground printing, "expropriations" in the countryside, and involvement in a planned prison break. His mother's tearful petition to the Moscow governor and the transfer of his case to Interior Minister and Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin ultimately secure his release. Mayakovsky later reflects that investigators forced him to realize that the "Marxist method" might be a dangerous weapon in childish hands. The irony is underlined: he will kill himself on Stolypin's birthday, and in his 1924 poem "Kiev" he refers to Stolypin with unexpected respect.

The text then widens into a panorama of 1930 Soviet reality, the context of his suicide. Forced collectivization and "dekulakization" devastate the countryside: mass confiscations, deportations,

over 2,000 peasant uprisings, long food queues in the cities, and catastrophic shortages. Women are literally harnessed to harrows in place of cattle; peasants beg to be put on rations; the village is starved and stripped of machinery, expertise and seed grain. Stalin's article "Dizzy with Success" condemns "excesses," causing confusion and panic among local officials, who begin denouncing each other to the OGPU. Simultaneously, fabricated political cases are built against economists and specialists like Alexander Chayanov, labelled as members of the "Peasant Labour Party," "Industrial Party," and "Menshevik Union Bureau." Show trials are orchestrated by the same Agranov who visits the Brik–Mayakovsky salon.

Meanwhile, Mayakovsky's own position in Soviet culture deteriorates sharply. While he writes poems praising the OGPU and is embraced by some party critics, his satirical plays *The Bedbug* and *The Bathhouse* provoke outrage and accusations of slander against Soviet reality. He is attacked as a petty-bourgeois "fellow-traveller," a "transition" figure who has not yet become a true proletarian poet. His 1930 jubilee exhibition in Moscow is boycotted by the leadership; a sign above a press wall reads "Mayakovsky is incomprehensible to the masses." An important journal pulls his portrait from a planned article after the head of the state publishing house protests at calling him a "great revolutionary poet." Around the same time, he is refused permission to travel abroad.

The text also touches on his links with Trotskyist circles via Efraim Sklyansky and Isai Khurgin during his U.S. trip, both of whom later drown mysteriously, an event that leaves him shattered. Trotsky himself remarks that Mayakovsky is weakest where he is most fully communist, and the essay dwells on his gloomy poem "Anniversary," in which he imagines a deadly encounter with Pushkin as a Stone Guest.

After Mayakovsky's death, volume 65 of *Literary Heritage* publishes his letters to Lilya Brik, provoking a scandal and a party decree that writers' private correspondence may only be printed with Central Committee permission. Only in 1935, after Lilya writes directly to Stalin to complain that his books are unavailable and his key poems have been removed from school textbooks, does Stalin issue his famous note declaring Mayakovsky "the best and most gifted poet of our Soviet era," triggering a posthumous canonization. Pasternak quips that Mayakovsky was introduced "like potatoes under Catherine the Great."

The final scene is quiet and ominous: shortly before his suicide, Mayakovsky asks the poet Mikhail Svetlov, expelled from the Komsomol for Trotskyism, whether he thinks Mayakovsky will be arrested. "What are you saying—you, the first poet of the revolution?" Svetlov answers. "That's just it, Misha," Mayakovsky replies. "That's just it."

Screenplay:

1930. Vladimir Mayakovsky

On the night of April 13–14, 1930, before his suicide, Mayakovsky spent the evening at the home of the writer Valentin Kataev. Also present were Moscow Art Theatre actors Boris Livanov and Mikhail Yanshin. Mayakovsky came with Yanshin's wife, Veronika Polonskaya, an actress of the Art Theatre. Kataev recalls:

“It was an ordinary Moscow evening party. We were sitting in the dining room. Tea, biscuits, three bottles of Riesling.”

Mayakovsky was tearing the cardboard dividers out of a box of chocolates, writing notes to Polonskaya on them and throwing them to her across the table. Veronika Polonskaya – everyone called her Nora – wrote back. The little cardboard squares flew over the table, above the bowl of jam. There and back again. From time to time Mayakovsky would lead Nora into the next room and demand that she leave Yanshin immediately.

At three in the morning, Mayakovsky walked Polonskaya and Yanshin home to their place on Kalanchyovka and then went back to his own place in Gendrikov Lane. In the morning he called for Polonskaya. She was in a hurry to get to rehearsal. But they drove via Mayakovsky’s office on Lubyansky Proyezd. Polonskaya absolutely could not be late: that day the rehearsal was being led by Nemirovich-Danchenko, who did not tolerate lateness. She was a second-cast actress, not in the main company.

She ran out of Mayakovsky’s room. He shot himself.

The investigator’s report records: “Near the corpse a revolver of Mauser model, no. 312045, was found.”

According to his official papers, Mayakovsky owned two pistols – a Browning and a Bayard. There was no Mauser. The Browning had been given to him by the head of the Secret Department of the OGPU, Yakov Agranov. Mayakovsky, Lilya Brik and Osip Brik called Agranov “Yanya.” Osip Brik was Lilya Brik’s official husband. She was the main woman in Mayakovsky’s life, before and after his death. The three of them lived together in an apartment in Gendrikov Lane.

Osip Brik officially worked for the GPU. Lilya Brik had an ID as a secret collaborator, no. 15073. Agranov and his colleagues regularly came to their home – that is, to Mayakovsky’s place.

Yakov Saulovich Agranov had been with the Cheka since 1919. His specialization was dealing with the intelligentsia and old Bolsheviks. He led the investigations into the Kronstadt mutiny and the Antonov peasant uprising. He was on friendly terms with the writer Pilnyak and the poet Mandelstam.

He bore personal responsibility for the execution of the poet Nikolai Gumilyov. He personally directed interrogations and prepared the trials of the intelligentsia in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was to him, to Agranov, that Lenin and Dzerzhinsky entrusted, in 1922, the drawing up of the lists of the old intelligentsia to be expelled from Russia. In the early 1930s he enjoyed Stalin’s unlimited trust. Agranov, together with Stalin, would travel to Leningrad immediately after Kirov’s murder and head the investigation in that case.

It was Agranov who presented Mayakovsky with the Browning. The Mauser found by the body was taken away by Mayakovsky’s friend, a GPU employee named Gendin. From then on a Browning no. 268079, which Mayakovsky legally owned, began to appear in the file.

Modern ballistics has shown that death was caused by a shot from a Mauser model 1914, using a bullet from a Browning pistol cartridge. No one bothered to remove the report stating that a Mauser had been found at the scene of Mayakovsky’s death. And so the Mauser still figures in the Mayakovsky case file alongside the Browning.

Immediately after news of Mayakovsky's suicide, Agranov, the secretary of the OGPU Secret Department Rybkin, and another Lubyanka friend of the Mayakovsky–Brik household, Lev Elbert, nicknamed Snob, turned up on Lubyansky Proyezd.

Lev Elbert had been living in Mayakovsky's apartment from February 19, 1930, up to the day of the suicide. Besides Elbert, in Mayakovsky's flat there was the dog Bulka with her puppies. The Briks had left for London.

There were always dogs in the Mayakovsky–Brik household. The previous time Bulka had had puppies was in 1927. From Moscow, Lilya Brik wrote to Mayakovsky in Yalta:

“My dear Hairy-Having-Puppies. Our little bulldogs are wonderful. Screamers, gluttons, scrappers. Bulka is in complete ecstasy because of them.”

Brik's way of addressing Mayakovsky, “Shchenit,” is derived from *shchen* – “puppy.” *Shchen* was Mayakovsky's constant pet name at home. In 1920 the Mayakovsky–Briks took in a little puppy. Mayakovsky named him Shchen. He would walk with Mayakovsky to the butcher's at the corner of Ostozhenka. He slept at his feet.

Twelve square arshins of living space.
Four of us in the room:
Lilya, Olya, me
And the dog Shchenik.

This is from the poem *Good! (Khorosho)*. Later they began calling Mayakovsky himself Shchen as well. Both were big, heavy-pawed. “We're big human specimens, he and I,” Mayakovsky said. The dog lived for eleven months. He disappeared by accident; someone coaxed him away and killed him. Simply out of malice.

In his letters to Lilya Brik, instead of signing, Mayakovsky often draws a puppy. He draws well. He had even intended at one time to make painting his profession.

It was precisely during his preparatory studies at the Stroganov Art School that the short, strange and long-forgotten relations occurred between fifteen-year-old Mayakovsky and the Minister of the Interior and Prime Minister of the Russian Empire, Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin.

In 1906, a thirteen-year-old boy from a noble family enters the fourth grade of the 5th Moscow Classical Gymnasium. It is a very good school. Children of the old Moscow intelligentsia were sent there – the Vernadskys, the Solovyovs, the Favorskys, the Polenovs.

The family had come from Georgia, from Kutaisi – the mother, two daughters and a son. The father had died. In Moscow they rented an apartment on Bronnaya. In his autobiography titled *I Myself*, Mayakovsky writes about the gymnasium: “Top marks, slightly diluted with a few failing grades. Under the desk – *Anti-Dühring*,” meaning he was reading Engels. Further in the autobiography: “I distinctly remember Lenin's little blue book *Two Tactics*. I liked that it was trimmed right up to the letters. For illegal passing around.” Mayakovsky is thirteen.

At the beginning of 1908, that is, at fourteen, Mayakovsky joins the party. Moreover, in his autobiography he writes that he was elected a member of the Moscow Committee of the RSDLP. He leaves the gymnasium and is arrested for the first time, in a case involving an underground printing press.

The investigator decides to indict Mayakovsky with belonging to an anti-government party. If found guilty, the penalty is up to eight years of hard labour.

Fourteen-year-old Mayakovsky is summoned for questioning. The interrogation is conducted by a special investigator for particularly important cases, Voltanovsky. He is described in his obituary in the newspaper *Utro Rossii* of January 15, 1917, as follows: “He was an inflexible bureaucrat. The basis of his career was the ruthless application of the harshest dictates of the law.”

This same investigator, the day after questioning Mayakovsky, issues the following order: “Taking into account the state of health of the accused, as well as the fact that he is fourteen years old and that his testimony appears trustworthy, the said Mayakovsky is to be placed under police supervision at his place of residence.”

Then came the trial. The underage nobleman Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky was sentenced to be handed over to his parents for correction. The thick newspapers *Moskovskie Vedomosti* and *Birzhevye Vedomosti* reported this in their “Court Chronicle” sections.

Mayakovsky was arrested a second time in January 1909. In file no. 463 of the Moscow Security Department, it is stated that the hereditary nobleman Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky was detained in a case of a gang of robbers. The gang had been broken up in the suburban dacha district of Losiny Ostrov. The gang was mixed in composition – members of the RSDLP and SRs. Its task was robbery for party purposes. This was the traditional occupation of revolutionary terrorists in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The warrant for the detention of fifteen-year-old Mayakovsky and the search of his apartment on Dolgorukovskaya Street was signed by Moscow’s governor-general, Major General Adrianov.

At this point the purely police story is interrupted. What follows is an episode worthy of Russian classical literature – Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Chekhov – take your pick:

“To His Excellency the Governor-General of Moscow.

From the widow of a collegiate assessor, Alexandra Alexeyevna Mayakovskaya.

Petition

My husband served for twenty-four years in the Caucasus and died while serving as a forester, leaving me without means, with three school-age children. And now my boy, Your Excellency, the son of a father who served twenty-four years selflessly and blamelessly, is accused of political crimes. During the search, nothing incriminating was found, except for a revolver that happened to be in an unlocked trunk. The presence of this revolver horrified me.

I beg you to order the Security Department to release the boy into my care, under my recognizance.”

The letter of Mayakovsky’s mother seems made to be read aloud by an actress of the Art Theatre, the future People’s Artist of the USSR Anastasia Platonovna Zueva. Zueva, unlike other Moscow Art Theatre actors, was not friends with Mayakovsky. She was friends with Pasternak.

Boris Pasternak studied at the same gymnasium as Mayakovsky. In the summer of 1914, in a coffee house on the Arbat during a literary debate, Pasternak saw Mayakovsky. Pasternak recalls: “The appearance of the young man, beyond my expectations, was familiar to me from the corridors of the 5th Gymnasium, where he had studied two grades below me. His shock of tousled hair reminded me of a young terrorist from Dostoevsky, one of his provincial characters.”

In the winter of 1909, fifteen-year-old Vladimir Mayakovsky was released from prison, and in June he was arrested a third time for involvement in organizing an escape of prisoners from Taganka Prison in Moscow. The escape was being organized by the SRs. Once again, Mayakovsky's arrest was authorized by a personal order of the governor-general of Moscow. Governor-General Adrianov reported on the participants in the case, including Mayakovsky, to the Minister of the Interior.

The Minister of the Interior in 1909 was Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin. He was also Prime Minister of Russia. Mayakovsky was held in turn in the Sushevsky, Basmanny and Myasnitsky police jails. In Myasnitsky he was elected cell elder. At fifteen. He was allowed to receive drawing supplies. He was granted permission to visit the cells of other prisoners involved in the escape case. He drew his fellow prisoners from life, with Italian pencil and watercolours.

The transfers from one jail to another were due to his extremely free behaviour. So free that the Security Department received a complaint from the head of the Myasnitsky jail: "I humbly ask you not to refuse to issue an order for the transfer of Mayakovsky to another place of detention. He was transferred to me from the Basmanny jail already for disturbances."

On August 17, Mayakovsky was transferred to Butyrka Prison, to solitary cell no. 103 in the left wing.

On August 24, he filed a petition to the Security Department asking for his release:

"In view of the fact that the Security Department has not, and evidently cannot have, any facts or even clues against me, I most humbly beg you to release me."

From September 21 to October 20, 1909, Mayakovsky's name appears on the list of prisoners receiving "improved meals." An improved meal in Butyrka meant food cooked in butter and a meat dish for the second course.

On October 7, Alexandra Alexeyevna Mayakovskaya went to see the governor-general of Moscow. The same day, Mayakovsky himself wrote a petition to the governor-general:

"I have now been in detention for three months and five days. First, I have missed my exams. Second, my health is starting to deteriorate. I suffer from neurasthenia and anaemia. I most humbly beg Your Excellency to review my case and release me."

The reply came: "He cannot be released, as he is subject to exile to the Narym district for three years. The documents have been forwarded to the Minister of the Interior. A reply is awaited."

The Mayakovsky case was transferred from the Moscow Security Department to the Ministry of the Interior. Immediately after that, the governor-general allowed him a visit from his family.

A Special Council reviewed the circumstances of the case of the nobleman Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky. Minister of the Interior Stolypin decided to close the case. Mayakovsky was released.

What Mayakovsky wrote after his release can be taken as words of gratitude to Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin:

"If I stay in the party, I must go underground. Underground – you cannot learn. If you shake out everything I've read, what will remain? The Marxist method. But hasn't this weapon fallen into childish hands?"

Apparently the investigators had succeeded in driving this idea home to the fifteen-year-old hereditary nobleman Mayakovsky. They probably did not even need any special cooperation on the

part of the underage offender in exchange for his release. Most likely, the Minister of the Interior Stolypin was simply a normal human being.

In 1930, Mayakovsky would shoot himself on Stolypin's birthday. In 1924 he wrote the poem "Kiev." Nine lines in it are devoted to Stolypin, with unmistakable personal respect, even though there was no longer any trace of a monument to Stolypin.

The entire story of Mayakovsky's arrests and releases was published in 1958 in volume 65 of the series *Literary Heritage*. That same year the book was banned and removed from public libraries. However, the scandal that followed was not primarily about the story of the young Mayakovsky and the Security Department.

Among other things, volume 65 of *Literary Heritage* contained the correspondence between Mayakovsky and Lilya Brik. The well-known Soviet journalist and political commentator for *Pravda*, Yuri Zhukov, responded to the book's publication with a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU: "The correspondence between Mayakovsky and Brik can be used by hostile foreign propaganda." The Central Committee adopted a resolution: "Private correspondence of writers may be published only with special authorization from the Central Committee of the CPSU."

Lilya Brik wrote to Mayakovsky in Paris in 1924:

"With the fur coat – twenty-two misfortunes. And when I put it on for the first time, I provoked wild enthusiasm in the tram with my bare knees."

Again from Paris, to Mayakovsky in 1927:

"I very much want a little car. Bring one, please. We've thought about it a lot with Papa. And we decided: a Ford is best of all."

By "Papa," Lilya means her husband, Osip.

Again from Paris in 1928:

"Tell Elichka to buy a lot of stockings for me like the one I gave you as a sample. And three pairs that are absolutely shiny. I mean that they should shine really a lot. And also not too light."

Elichka is her sister, Elsa Triolet, wife of the writer Louis Aragon, who had previously married a French officer named Triolet and left Russia with him. Mayakovsky had courted her before Lilya. In Paris, Mayakovsky lived in Aragon's house, and Elsa looked after him.

His romance with Elsa had started back in 1913. At that time he was a dandy: he rented a frock coat, a top hat and a cane from a cheap shop on Sretenka. He would take Elsa on the tram past the square that would later be named after him. Elsa Triolet recalls: "What a heavy, heavy man he was."

Lilya Brik recalls: "It was my sister Elsa who introduced Volodya to me in Malakhovka in the summer of 1915. We were sitting in the evening on a bench near the dacha. Mayakovsky came and went off walking with Ella."

On September 19, 1915, shortly after meeting Brik at the Malakhovka dacha, Mayakovsky was drafted for military service. With Gorky's help, he was assigned as a draftsman to the military automotive school in Petrograd. Gorky pulled strings because he loved Mayakovsky's pre-revolutionary poems. Before the Revolution, Mayakovsky was an excellent lyric poet.

Soviet literary scholarship took a long time to forgive him this lyricism. In June 1930, immediately after Mayakovsky's death, a well-known literary critic, Vyacheslav Polonsky, wrote in a commemorative article: "Mayakovsky's path is a remarkable one – that of a petty-bourgeois

intellectual toward the proletariat. He ceased to be a fellow-traveller. But he has not yet become a proletarian poet. Some intellectual traits remain. Mayakovsky is a transition piece.”

In 1915, while Mayakovsky was serving in the automotive school thanks to Gorky’s patronage, Lilya’s husband, Osip Brik, served in the same company as a volunteer thanks to the patronage of the famous tenor Sobinov. Lilya visited both Mayakovsky and her husband.

Osip Brik was the son of a hereditary merchant, owner of the trading house “Pavel Brik, Widow and Son” in Moscow. Osip was training as a criminologist. As part of his academic work he studied the lives of prostitutes, walked the boulevards, had heart-to-heart conversations with them, represented them free of charge in conflicts with the police. Grateful prostitutes called him “the whores’ daddy.”

In 1916, a painting hung in the Briks’ apartment entitled “Lilya at Razliv.” The artist was Boris Grigoriev. Lilya Brik was depicted larger than life, lying in the grass against the backdrop of a bright red sunset. Or of a fire. The painting was lost in the revolution.

Lenin would visit Razliv after Lilya Brik. In the summer of 1916, Lilya was travelling by train to Tsarskoye Selo with a friend. She recalls: “Sitting diagonally across from me was a strange man who kept glancing at me. I looked at him for a long time, shamelessly. He completely turned his eyes in my direction. It turned out his eyes were blue and merry. Suddenly he covered his face with his little beard and snorted. It made me laugh, and I started exchanging glances with him.”

On the platform at Tsarskoye, her friend told her it was Rasputin. On the way back, they again shared the carriage. Rasputin said:

“You must definitely come visit me.

We’ll have some tea. Bring your husband too. Just call first. Here is the number.”

She didn’t go; Osip wouldn’t allow it.

In 1916, alongside Mayakovsky, the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich – soon to be one of Rasputin’s killers – also tried to court Lilya. General Vladimir Dzhunkovsky, commander of the Separate Corps of Gendarmes who oversaw surveillance of Rasputin, in 1921 joined the Cheka as a consultant for operations “Trust” and “Syndicate-2,” which ended with the arrest, abduction to the USSR and death of the famous SR terrorist Boris Savinkov. Before becoming a consultant to the Cheka, General Dzhunkovsky had been in prison. His release was requested by Nezhdanova, Ermolova, Nemirovich-Danchenko, and Knipper-Chekhova. Dzerzhinsky personally spoke with Dzhunkovsky.

Lilya Brik told Mayakovsky: “Collaboration with the Cheka is an honourable thing. Osip and I have long been working with the organs.”

In the Mayakovsky–Brik apartment in Gendrikov Lane, Lilya Yuryevna ran a salon. This Soviet high-society salon easily blended OGPU officials and artistic bohemia: the art scholar and Akhmatova’s husband, Punin; Boris Pasternak; the prose writer Shklovsky; the artists Kazimir Malevich, Natan Altman, and Alexander Rodchenko; the film directors Barnet and Eisenstein; the writer Lev Kassil; the director Meyerhold; the composer Shostakovich; the actress Yulia Solntseva. American writers also dropped in – Upton Sinclair and Theodore Dreiser. And, on top of all that, always the top brass of the OGPU.

In 1927, Mayakovsky wrote: “Dzerzhinsky’s soldiers guard the Union.” He wrote many verses about the OGPU.

A little later, a similarly mixed salon would exist in the home of Vsevolod Meyerhold and his wife Zinaida Reich. A third Moscow salon in the mid-1930s would be run by the wife of People's Commissar for Internal Affairs Yezhov, then the chief executor of Stalin's terror. In 1930, Yezhov was still deputy people's commissar for agriculture. The main task of the commissariat of agriculture was the completion of dekulakization and collectivization. The first extremely brutal wave of destruction of the most able-bodied peasantry had swept through in the winter of 1929–1930. The healthy backbone of the village was destroyed in one lightning blow, in only three months. Once and for all.

On March 2, 1930, Stalin's article "Dizzy with Success" was published. Its main message: "Excesses" had been committed in dekulakization. Stalin could not avoid taking a pause. At the beginning of 1930, the supply of food to the cities had completely collapsed. Since February 1929, the country had been living on ration cards. In 1930, due to the devastation of the countryside, even a unified rationing system had become an unaffordable luxury. The population was divided into four categories. Those who were allowed to eat the most were workers in large enterprises. In small factories, rations were reduced. The third category comprised the rest of the Soviet public. The countryside received nothing. It was supposed to produce grain and deliver it to the state.

In the villages they begged: "Take everything, just put us on rations." They were not put on rations. But there was already nothing more to take from them. In 1929, all the grain and seed had already been seized.

In February 1930, OGPU reports began coming in about the growth of peasant unrest in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Siberia. From January to March more than 2,000 peasant uprisings took place, involving more than 800,000 people. Food protests also broke out in the cities. From one OGPU report: "In the queues people say: 'They're just smearing our eyes, and they give us a piece of bread and rotten herring. The best goes abroad.'" This was pure truth.

Stalin wrote to Molotov: "We must furiously accelerate the export of grain. We export one and a half million poods a day; we must raise the daily norm to three or four million poods at minimum. Otherwise we risk being left without machine-building factories." On the ground, people tried to keep up. In the Ural commune "Comintern," they came up with a stunt – shaving the women commune members bald in order to buy a tractor with the money from the hair.

In fact, the first reaction of local leaders to Stalin's article "Dizzy with Success" was one of shock. From a GPU report: "In the Volga region, one district party secretary, after reading the article, got drunk in despair and tore up a portrait of Comrade Stalin."

As for the rural population, after Stalin's article, everyone rushed to leave the collective farms. In one district of Kurgan region, a rumour spread that an airplane had landed in a vegetable garden, with Stalin and Krupskaya on board. Stalin himself was handing out confiscated property to the peasants, while Nadezhda Konstantinovna scolded and beat the village council chairmen. The district party secretary, hearing of this, started phoning the regional committee, the regional secretary phoned Moscow. Only then did people calm down.

In March 1930, collective property was quickly taken back home from the kolkhozes. For a time they even managed to drive the cattle back to their own yards. Depriving themselves of their last reserves, they began feeding the animals. In the kolkhoz yards, only the cows of the exiled kulaks remained. No one took them in, and they lowed with hunger.

Local party and Soviet officials, after overcoming their initial shock from Stalin's article, pulled themselves together and launched a campaign in support of that same article. This was expressed first of all in the fact that village council chairs, secretaries of party and Komsomol cells, prosecutors' employees who had been particularly brutal during dekulakization began denouncing each other to the OGPU. Those who had distinguished themselves most blatantly by pogroms, violence and drunkenness were reassigned to party work in other districts. Those who had shown particular cruelty were sent to party work in other regions. By the summer of 1930, many villages saw the arrival of these unknown party cadres. Their bloody past was unknown in their new locations. They smiled and courted the half-starved local women.

By spring 1930 it became clear that the machinery and tools confiscated from dispossessed and exiled peasants had not been repaired during the winter in the kolkhozes. Let alone the machinery: during the autumn and winter of dekulakization, no one had even cut firewood. People hauled wood from the houses left empty after the deportation of neighbours. Those who joined the kolkhozes were technically illiterate. As commissioners reported, the kolkhoz farmer would sit at the tractor wheel in a state of intoxication above the average.

There were no specialists in the kolkhozes capable of handling technology. Those who had known how to use machinery and had taught others had been deported. Tractor tillage would cover less than one-sixth of the collective fields. There were no seeds in the villages. Seed grain would be issued strictly by norm and in stages, so that it wouldn't be eaten or taken home.

Because of the catastrophic situation in the countryside, the 1930 sowing season began later than usual. Officially, the delay was explained by unfavourable weather. In reality, in the spring and summer of 1930, the weather was wonderful. And only thanks to this weather was the harvest good. For one year, the weather postponed the onset of terrible famine. In 1930 the countryside was merely destitute.

The late sowing even led to the postponement of the XVI Congress of the VKP(b) from June 15 to June 25.

In his speech at the congress, Stalin, addressing the West, said: "I could say that we have achieved astounding successes, but I do not like to frighten people, so I will say that we have achieved favourable results. You will yet find out, gentlemen, what things in the language of the Bolsheviks are called astounding."

By autumn, the number of those wishing to leave the kolkhozes grew. But no one was allowed out any more. In effect, the peasants were tied to the land. This was serfdom in pure form. Three years later, in 1933, serfdom would be definitively consolidated in the USSR. It would be formalized in the so-called Law on the Prohibition of *otkhodnichestvo* – that is, of leaving one's village to work elsewhere. Peasants would be forbidden to leave the kolkhoz without special permission.

The pretext for fastening the peasants to the land would be famine. Starving peasants with their children would rush to the cities in the hope of surviving. In response, the state would chain them to the soil. Peasants would not be given passports. Only in 1974 would they be made equal in rights with urban residents. They would begin to receive passports, and they would get freedom of movement within the country. The passportization of the peasantry would only be completed on December 31, 1981.

In 1930, during the day people ploughed with cows. In the evening they milked them – of blood.

That same year, 1930, district directives appeared: “Transfer the harrows from cows to women!” One person alone could not drag a harrow, so they harnessed women four at a time. A woman received the ration of half a head of cattle, or an eighth of a horse. Even pregnant women were harnessed.

On July 21, 1930, Alexander Chayanov was arrested. He was a scholar with a European reputation, a professor at the Agricultural Academy. His main thesis: the free family peasant household, given cooperation and a market economy, possesses extraordinary stability and survivability. The successes of Russian agriculture before the revolution confirm this theory.

Back in December 1929, Stalin, speaking at a conference of Marxist agronomists, called Chayanov’s theory a prejudice and used his name as a generic label for an entire group of Soviet economists.

In reality, in 1930 three groups of specialists were arrested simultaneously – scholars, engineers, planners from Gosplan and the Supreme Council of the National Economy. At the GPU, a separate political case was fabricated for each group. Thus were born the mythical “Peasant Labour Party,” “Industrial Party,” and “Menshevik Union Bureau.” Stalin demanded that their ties with émigré organizations be uncovered. He insisted that confessions be obtained regarding preparations for foreign intervention. In addition, Stalin pressed for the exposure of links between these “parties” and old Bolsheviks, above all Bukharin. Bukharin had already been removed from the Politburo in 1929.

Initially, Stalin demanded that the arrested be shot. A few days later he decided that public show trials would be more expedient. Stalin said: “Do our gentlemen defendants not think of admitting their mistakes and decently spitting on themselves politically, at the same time recognizing the correctness of collectivization? That would be not bad.”

The organization of the show trials of these “specialist-wreckers” was entrusted to Yakov Agranov, the same “Yanya” of the Brik–Mayakovsky household.

The countryside did not interest Mayakovsky. He did not care about the village. In 1929, he wrote – and Meyerhold staged – the satirical play *The Bedbug*. Music by Shostakovich. The main role was played by Ilyinsky. The result was savage criticism, aimed primarily at Mayakovsky. The play was branded slanderous. Mayakovsky went to France. In Nice, he sat in a little restaurant with the artist Annenkov. Mayakovsky asked:

“When are you going back to Moscow?”

Annenkov replied:

“I no longer think about going back, I want to remain a painter.”

Mayakovsky said:

“I’m going back, because I’ve already stopped being a poet.”

And he burst into tears. The waitress was frightened. Mayakovsky said:

“It’s nothing, I just choked on a stone.”

At the very beginning of 1930, Mayakovsky suddenly joined the extremely official Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, RAPP. RAPP was headed by Leopold Averbakh, a relative of Sverdlov and Yagoda, and editor-in-chief of the journal *On the Literary Front*. A year after Mayakovsky’s death, RAPP would be dissolved. Averbakh would be shot in 1939. But in 1930, RAPP was all-powerful.

Mayakovsky's recommendation for RAPP membership was signed by a literary functionary and RAPP member, Vladimir Sutyurin. In 1923, he had played Batka Makhno in the cult action film of early NEP times, *The Red Devils*. Shortly after Mayakovsky's death, Sutyurin left literature. In the mid-1930s he was head of a camp on the Kola Peninsula. Among the prisoners there was the future actor Vaclav Dvorzhetsky.

In the 1960s, Sutyurin returned to literature. He became secretary of the party organization of the Moscow Writers' Union.

On February 6, 1930, Mayakovsky was unanimously accepted into RAPP. And on March 16, at Meyerhold's theatre, the premiere of Mayakovsky's play *The Bathhouse* took place. After the performance, the press stated in black and white: "*The Bathhouse* is a slanderous portrayal of Soviet reality." The premiere came four weeks before the suicide.

Once, to Gendrikov Lane, to the Mayakovsky–Brik flat, came the Mexican painter Diego Rivera, showing great interest in the figure of Trotsky. In essence, the high OGPU officials who visited Mayakovsky's home in the late 1920s were Trotskyists as well. The famous adventurer, Soviet resident, SR and Trotskyist Yakov Blumkin was called "Blumochka" by Mayakovsky.

In 1925, Mayakovsky went to the United States with Ephraim Sklyansky. Until recently, Sklyansky had been Trotsky's first deputy in the Revolutionary Military Council, Trotsky's unchanging right hand, and the second man in the Red Army during the Civil War. After Trotsky's removal as People's Commissar for Military Affairs, Sklyansky became director of the trust "Mossukno."

In New York, Sklyansky and Mayakovsky were hosted by an influential Trotskyist, the chairman of the joint-stock company "Amtorg," "the main Soviet merchant in America," Isai Khurgin. Mayakovsky lived in Khurgin's house. It was Khurgin who obtained him a U.S. visa. Before that, Mayakovsky had tried to get a visa through his friend, the émigré artist David Burliuk. Burliuk had failed.

Khurgin came to the rescue. He organized all of Mayakovsky's trips around the United States. Khurgin introduced him to Elizabeth Jones, the Russian émigré Elizaveta Alekseeva. The affair was short.

From Mayakovsky, she kept photographs and letters. From her, he had a daughter.

On August 27, 1925, on Long Lake, Khurgin and Sklyansky drowned during a boat trip, under unclear circumstances. At the memorial service, Mayakovsky wept bitterly. He crumpled up the programme of his stay in America and returned to Moscow.

Trotsky said of Mayakovsky: "Mayakovsky is at his weakest in those of his works where he is most complete as a communist." In the poem "Anniversary," written for Pushkin's 125th birthday, Mayakovsky is not quite complete enough as a communist. And that isn't even the main point. The poem turned out frankly joyless. It is hard to understand how school textbooks managed to present it as a model of optimism.

Mayakovsky was fatally drawn to Pushkin. He invented a game: Me and Pushkin. Pushkin steps off his pedestal. It is a game of the Stone Guest, except here the guest is Pushkin and Mayakovsky plays Don Juan. The ending is obvious: the deadly handshake of the stone hand. Final words: "I perish – it's over."

In “Anniversary,” a little-known surname slips by: Rodov. Meanwhile, the proletarian poet and party cell head at the Institute of Russian Literature in Leningrad, Semyon Rodov, deserves special attention. From Rodov’s poetry:

There were doubts in the soul of the Chekist,
But his hand never trembled.
And only little Petya knew
How tender and small his daddy was.

In Rodov’s biography, one fact is especially striking. In 1930, the proletarian poet Rodov moved with his family and maid into Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin’s apartment on the Moika embankment. Rodov felt perfectly at home in Pushkin’s flat. Only one thing spoiled it: people walking along the street looked up at the windows, because between them was a memorial plaque: “Here, on January 29, 1837, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin died.” This irritated Rodov. The plaque was soon removed.

On April 12, two days before his death, Mayakovsky spoke with the film director Alexander Dovzhenko. In 1930, Dovzhenko had made his famous film *Earth*. Its theme was collectivization. Its artistic solution had nothing to do with socialist realism. In 1958, *Earth* would be included among the ten greatest films of all time. In 1930, Stalin ordered: “Remove from the film the pornographic and other elements contrary to Soviet policy.”

Mayakovsky barely knew Dovzhenko. He said to him: “What is going on around us is intolerable and impossible. We need to resist and unite the masters of culture.”

Dovzhenko wrote down this conversation fifteen years later, in 1945.

At the end of 1929, Mayakovsky had for the first time been denied permission to travel abroad.

On January 21, 1930, in the Bolshoi Theatre, on the sixth anniversary of Lenin’s death, Mayakovsky read his poem *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*. The applause lasted five minutes. The friend of Stalin’s wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, Regina Glaz, recalls: “Nadezhda Sergeyevna and Stalin were absolutely delighted with Volodya. He carried himself wonderfully; he did not look at their box and did not bow towards it.”

On February 1, 1930, an exhibition opened devoted to the twentieth anniversary of Mayakovsky’s creative work. The artistic design of the exhibition was by his friend, the photographer and artist Alexander Rodchenko. They were expecting the entire leadership, including Stalin. No one came. On the third day the chief Soviet censor, Platon Kerzhentsev, turned up.

Lunacharsky’s wife recalls: “Mayakovsky’s pallor, his distant air, his silence, remained in the memory of everyone who came to the opening. One felt like crying.” At the start of his speech, Mayakovsky said: “Well, the ‘beards’ didn’t come. We’ll manage without them.”

On the eve of the exhibition opening, the premiere of *The Bathhouse* in Leningrad had been a total flop. Mikhail Zoshchenko recalls: “The audience met the play with deadly coldness. Not a single burst of laughter. Not a single clap after the first two acts.”

During the month that followed, the play remained on the bill, but audiences did not come and the newspapers attacked it.

In Moscow, at the jubilee exhibition, above the wall of newspaper clippings about Mayakovsky, there was an inscription: “Mayakovsky is incomprehensible to the masses.”

The only piece about the exhibition appeared in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* on February 2. A series of articles on Mayakovsky’s work, with his portrait, was planned in the journal *Press and Revolution*. Publication was delayed until April. At the last moment, Mayakovsky’s portrait was removed from the issue.

The removal of Mayakovsky’s portrait resulted from a letter from the head of Gosizdat, Artemy Khalatov, to the journal’s editorial office. Khalatov wrote: “How has the Press of the Revolution dared to call the fellow-traveller Mayakovsky a great revolutionary poet?!”

In 1935, five years after Mayakovsky shot himself, Lilya Brik wrote a letter to Stalin: “Mayakovsky’s books are not available in the shops; it is impossible to buy them. By order of the Commissariat of Education, the poems *Lenin* and *Good!* have been removed from the 1935 literature textbook. I am turning to you because I see no other way to bring to life Mayakovsky’s enormous revolutionary legacy.”

On Brik’s letter, Stalin wrote a resolution:

“To Comrade Yezhov. I earnestly ask you to pay attention to Brik’s letter. Mayakovsky was and remains the best and most gifted poet of our Soviet era.

Greetings. I. Stalin.”

In 1935, Yezhov was a secretary of the Central Committee. Less than a year remained before his appointment as People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs. Yezhov undertook the organization of a Mayakovsky museum and the publication of his collected works.

Pasternak said: “They started introducing Mayakovsky like they had introduced the potato under Catherine.”

Shortly before his death, Mayakovsky spoke with the poet Mikhail Svetlov, who had been expelled from the Komsomol for Trotskyism. Mayakovsky asked him:

“Tell me, Misha, do you think I’ll be arrested?”

“What are you saying – you, the first poet of the revolution!”

“That’s just it, Misha. That’s just it.”