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## **The Poet as Prophet: Public and Private Self in the Poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky**

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Oral Presentation 4.3

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**THE POET AS A PROPHET: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SELF IN THE  
POETRY OF VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY**

It was Stalin who first authoritatively declared that “Mayakovsky was and remains the greatest poet of our times.” But even before Stalin canonized the name “Mayakovsky” in the history of the Russian revolution, his presence was ubiquitous. And there is an aspect of the great poet that survives his passing; the name is more a legend than it was ever a man. But uncertainty arises in the realization of this status. And complications compound in an environment of oppression. What is the legend of Mayakovsky? What command do the name and the works evoke to receive the blessings of Stalin? What tragedy impelled the legend, in a glaring detail strategically omitted by some, to eventually take his own life? In this essay, I will explore the tumultuous and enigmatic relationship of a poet and his time; the former characterized by exceptional talent and passion, the latter, oppressive to the creative facility.

In a irony worth recognition, Mayakovsky was, in his own words, a “worker-poet”, and offered his work to the service of the regime that, in the esteem of some, was a subsisting factor to his suicide. It is evident that while the “public self” was openly content with the Soviet regime, there was a much more complex “internal self” that was discontent with the former, thus impelling the poet to take his life. What can be said of this division given the autobiographical leaning of much of Mayakovsky’s poetry? Moreover, what is the disposition of the “internal self”? Of the “public self”? Was Mayakovsky driven to compliance out of weakness? Or was it out of the strength of his conviction that he supported the Revolution? This research project endeavors to analyze the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky through the prism of his life as a public and a private person and establish the lost connection within the creative persona under the suppression of a totalitarian regime.