



Citizen tax collector!
 Forgive my bothering you...
 Thank you...
 don't worry...
 I'll stand...

My business
 is
 of delicate nature:
 about the place
 of the poet
 in the workers' ranks.

Along with
 owners
 of stores and property
 I'm made subject
 to taxes and penalties.

You demand
 I pay
 five hundred for the half year
 and twenty-five
 for failing to send in my returns.

Now
 my work
 is like
 any other work.

Look here—
 how much I've lost,
 what expenses
 I have in my production
 and how much I spend
 on my materials.

You know,
 of course,
 about "rhyme."

Suppose
 a line
 ends with the word
 "day,"
 and then,
 repeating the syllables
 in the third line,
 we insert
 something like
 "tarara-boom-de-ay."

In your idiom,
 rhyme
 is a bill of exchange
 to be honored in the third line!—
 that's the rule.

And so you hunt
 for the small change of suffixes
 and flections
 in the depleted cashbox
 of conjugations
 and declensions.

You start shoving
 a word
 into the line,
 but it's a tight fit—
 you press and it breaks.

Citizen tax collector,
 honestly,
 the poet
 spends a fortune on words.

In our idiom
 rhyme
 is a keg.

A keg of dynamite.
 The line
 is a fuse.

The line burns to the end
 and explodes,
 and the town
 is blown sky-high
 in a strophe.

Where can you find,
 and at what price,
 rhymes
 that take aim and kill on the
 spot?

Suppose
 only half a dozen
 unheard-of rhymes
 were left,
 in, say, Venezuela.

Conversation With A Tax Collector # About Poetry -

By Vladimir
 Mayakovsky
 [1926]



And so
I'm drawn
to North and South.
I rush around
entangled in advances and loans.

Citizen!
Consider my traveling expenses.
—Poetry—
—all of it!—
is a journey to the unknown.

Poetry
is like mining radium.
For every gram
you work a year.

For the sake of a single word
you waste
a thousand tons
of verbal ore.

But how
incendiary
the burning of these words
compared
with the smoldering
of the raw material.

These words
will move
millions of hearts
for thousands of years.

Of course,
there are many kinds of poets.
So many of them
use legerdemain!

And,
like conjurers,
pull lines from their mouths—
their own—
and other people's.

Not to speak
of the lyrical castrates?!
They're only too glad
to shove in
a borrowed line.

This is
just one more case
of robbery and embezzlement
among the frauds rampant in the
country.

These
verses and odes
bawled out
today
amidst applause,
will go down
in history
as the overhead expenses
of what
two or three of us
have achieved.

As the saying goes,
you eat forty pounds
of table salt,
and smoke
a hundred cigarettes
in order
to dredge up
one precious word
from artesian
human depths.

So at once
my tax
shrinks.

Strike out
one wheeling zero
from the balance due!

For a hundred cigarettes—
a ruble ninety;
for table salt—
a ruble sixty.

Your form
has a mass of questions:
"Have you traveled on business
or not?"

But suppose
I have
ridden to death
a hundred Pegasi
in the last
15 years?

And here you have—
imagine my feelings!—
something
about servants
and assets.

But what if I am
simultaneously
a leader
and a servant
of the people?

The working class
speaks
through my mouth,
and we,
proletarians,
are drivers of the pen.

As the years go by,
you wear out
the machine of the soul.

And people say:
"A back number,
he's written out,
he's through!"

There's less and less love,
and less and less daring,
and time
is a battering ram
against my head.

Then there's amortization,
the deadliest of all;
amortization
of the heart and soul.



And when
the sun
like a fattened hog
rises
on a future
without beggars and cripples,
I shall
already
be a putrefied corpse
under a fence,
together
with a dozen
of my colleagues.

Draw up
my
posthumous balance!
I hereby declare—
and I'm telling no lies:

Among
today's
swindlers and dealers,
I alone
shall be sunk
in hopeless debt.

Our duty is
to blare
like brass-throated horns
in the fogs of bourgeois vulgarity
and seething storms.

A poet
is always
indebted to the universe,
paying,
alas,
interest
and fines.

I am
indebted
to the lights of the Broadway,
to you,
to the skies of Bagdadi,
to the Red Army,
to the cherry trees of Japan —
to everything

about which
I have not yet written.

But, after all,
who needs
all this stuff?
Is its aim to rhyme
and rage in rhythm?

No, a poet's word
is your resurrection
and your immortality,
citizen and official.

Centuries hence,
take a line of verse
from its paper frame
and bring back time!

And this day
with its tax collectors,
its aura of miracles
and its stench of ink,
will dawn again.

Convinced dweller in the present
day,
go
to the N.K.P.S.
take a ticket to immortality
and, reckoning
the effect
of my verse,
stagger my earnings
over three hundred years!

But the poet is strong
not only because,
remembering you,
the people of the future
will hiccup.
No!

Nowadays too
the poet's rhyme
is a caress
and a slogan,
a bayonet
and a knout!

Citizen tax collector,
I'll cross out

all the zeros
after the five
and pay the rest.

I demand
as my right
an inch of ground
among
the poorest
workers and peasants.

And if
you think
that all i have to do
is to profit
by other people's words,
then,
comrades,
here's my pen.

Take
a crack at it
yourselves!

