

Title: The Last Place You'd Look: Humor in Mayakovsky's Political Poetry
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Mayakovsky's decision to become a propagandist split his oeuvre neatly into two periods, pre- and post-revolution, and for over 50 years, critics remained just as neatly divided as to which half was preeminent (most significant, most indicative of his individual style, etc.). Reconciling the two Mayakovskys and arriving at an integral interpretation of his oeuvre has been identified as a central problem facing post-Soviet Mayacriticism. Such is not my goal in this presentation, but certainly humor is an important and undeniable link between Mayakovsky's pre- and post-revolutionary poetry, including his agit-prop pieces. Given the long-standing critical deadlock described above, and the generally solemn tone used to describe Mayakovsky's political poetry (whether in adulation or opprobrium), they might seem an odd place to look for humor, but in fact they are permeated on many levels by humorous devices. Analysis of three political poetry—*150,000,000* (1919–20), *The Flying Proletarian* (1925), and *Very Good!* (1927)—shows that humor as both weapon and celebration was a central facet of Mayakovsky's revolutionary political consciousness, and that his propaganda hinged on it. Another issue that arises in analysis of the later two poetry is the tension between Mayakovsky's creative whimsy and the anti-aesthetic ideal of "the literature of fact" propounded by the poet and his colleagues at Lef in the mid-1920s. It will be seen that as the theorists of Lef and especially New Lef narrowed their understanding of the role of literature, Mayakovsky's most characteristic humorous devices eventually became taboo, at which point he consciously and methodically eradicated them from his verse.