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Classical Allusions and the Specter of Empire in Vladimir Maiakovskii's *Pro eto*

In his long poem *Pro eto*, Vladimir Maiakovskii depicted the persistence of bourgeois forms of everyday life and love in the Soviet era, and questioned whether it was possible for new forms of living to emerge, and under what conditions. The author handles and interweaves a multiplicity of spatial scales, from the private room to the cosmos, at each point tying them to his despairing autobiographical lyric subject. Thus, in addition to depicting a lyric point of view on family life and the urban street, Maiakovskii, in whirlwind journeys through Soviet and international space, also takes up questions of the responsibility of his individual lyric subject to the imagined community of the Soviet Union and whether it is the same as his responsibility as a “distinguished contributor to *Izvestiia*.”

Allusions to classical Russian poetry in *Pro eto* help to explore the lyric subject's frustrations specifically on this scale of the larger imagined community and space of the Soviet Union. While these allusions are not Aesopian language, given their contextualization in an open critique of the status quo, they are a means to break from the polemical frameworks of geopolitical discussions of the 1920s. Prominent citations include Aleksandr Pushkin's *Mednyi vsadnik*, especially in interaction with Maiakovskii's personal mythology of the flood, and the reworking of Mikhail Lermontov's biography and works in the “final death” of Maiakovskii's lyric subject in the Caucasus. Both allusions add further historical dimension and affect to the travails of the lyric subject, and also open up questions about the persistence of the spatial modes and dynamics of old empire in the “new” Soviet Union—in other words, imperial habits depicted as yet one more form of the persistence of the old way of life.