

Title: “Nado pisat’ voinoiu”: Maiakovskii and World War I
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“Today, we need a poetry of struggle, a military regiment in which each word is a soldier made of healthy, red meat!” Thus Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893–1930) defined the purpose of his poetry in his 1914 manifesto “Give Us Meat Too.” Fond of using militaristic and masculine metaphors, he elsewhere named his verse a “rasp to grind human brains” and “the matador’s scarlet cape.” While much scholarship exists on Maiakovskii’s attitude to the Russian Revolution, including discussion by prominent thinkers (Trotskii 1924; Marshall 1942; Brown 1973; Kristeva 1984), less work exists on his attitude toward World War I. My study traces the impact of WWI on Maiakovskii’s vision of masculinity, arguing which led him not to idealize literal violence, but towards a defense of experimental poetry as a kind of regenerative violence. Indeed, Maiakovskii’s writing in this period reveals a certain “soldier envy,” as he appropriate the tropes of battlefield violence to describe the responsibility and activity of the poet. My paper not only augments our understanding of Maiakovskii and World War I, but also adds a Russian chapter to the growing literature on Modernism, World War I and Masculinity (e.g. Fussell 1975; Caesar 1993; Cole 2005).

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