

Title: Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Letaiushchii proletarii*: "Agitpoema" or a "Joke"?

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Mayakovsky's post-revolutionary long poem *Letaiushchii proletarii* attracts little critical attention, perhaps due to its apparent simplicity of message: propaganda for a bright Soviet future. Mayakovsky himself referred to this work as "agitpoema." *Letaiushchii proletarii* is ostensibly not complicated by the self-annihilating statements of his other post-revolutionary works; its "public service" is not derailed by personal themes of unrequited love. It is in fact easy to overlook the fact that the poet uses the word "joke" to introduce a section on a day in the life of a future Soviet citizen. This paper examines the tension between this work as a statement of political propaganda and its underlying tomfoolery and poetic playfulness.

Certainly Mayakovsky's belief in technology can lead one to read the *poema* as a straightforward example of scientific utopia. His faith in science assumed religious proportions (cf. Jakobson's account of Mayakovsky's desire to understand Einstein's theory of relativity as a solution to mortality). Moreover, technology in Mayakovsky's vision was to serve humans, not to turn on them, as in the dystopian fiction of the 1920s. However, beyond the general message of *Letaiushchii proletarii*, namely that technology will ease everyday human toil in the future, the depiction of that future, I argue, stems not only from the poet's desire to propagate for aviation, but from a persistent concern with form, beginning with the realization of the internal rhyme of the *poema*'s title.

Once buffoonery and wordplay are introduced to discuss a poem that parades as a vision of socialist utopia, other questions arise. Most basically, how does Mayakovsky understand the concept of "utopia": a realizable myth or a pretext for games of imagination? And consequently, how is the latter reconciled with the image of the poet in the service of the state and its future?

Bibliography

Jakobson, Roman. "On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets." In *Language in Literature*.