sanitation trials had assiduously avoided condemning individual prostitutes, who were viewed as victims of social conditions beyond their control, later trials emphasized the importance of shaming defendants and forcing them to admit their wrongdoing. Indeed the fictional defendant on stage now sometimes carried the name of a real member of the audience.

The case study of agitation trials provides Wood with a powerful means of deconstructing the notion of a unitary Stalinist state constructed at the top and foisted on the masses. On the basis of scripts and reports of performances, she argues that the trials' increasing emphasis on discipline and shaming likely appealed to local organizers whose authority such trials extended. While recognizing the difficulty of assessing audiences' responses to the plays, she also suggests that giving actors the names of real local troublemakers may have increased audience interest in mock trials, which by the late 1920s had lost much of their novelty. She finds, in short, support among political organizers (and perhaps audiences) for "the culture of blame and censured" (p. 9) that animated the later mock trials.

In the final chapter, Wood briefly explores the "direct kinship" (p. 194) between the 1928 Shakhty trial of fifty-three engineers charged with sabotage and contemporary agitation trials. The new unforgiving tone of the agitation trials and their emphasis on personifying dramatic (or melodramatic) threats to the Soviet state became the dominant notes of the very real "show trials." The 1928 show trial also seems to mark the limits of mid-level agents' abilities to shape Soviet political culture. As Wood notes, after 1928, no agitation trial defendant was acquitted, and agitation trials ceased to be performed after 1933. Focusing on the role of mid-level cultural and political workers in the creation of Soviet power, Performing Justice will appeal to a broad range of scholars interested in the origins of the Stalinist state.

Lisa A. Kirschenbaum


The revolutionary Soviet government faced a huge problem in communicating with and mobilizing the country's people. How could the state's representatives address a population comprised overwhelmingly of peasants and workers who were illiterate or barely able to read and write? How could such folk be drawn, cajoled, or forced into compliance with the regime's goals? Trotsky and Lenin, among other leaders, expressed much concern about the low level of peasant culture; given the inarticulateness of the masses, it proved difficult indeed to engage them in discussions of how to build Soviet consciousness.

Michael Gorham approaches these and other issues through a study of Bolshevik "language culture" in the first ten or twelve years of the new regime. He argues that since the leadership lacked material and social bases for its rule, it had to depend on ideas "about the proletarian state and revolutionary world order to legitimate its power symbolically."
Speaking in Soviet Tongues explores the various attempts of the leadership and of ordinary communists, worker and peasant correspondents, linguists, and writers of fiction and poetry to reach and involve the narod in such ideas. An intermediary but essential goal was to raise the general ability to use the Russian language; the ultimate object was to generate "real civic enthusiasm" (p. 30). At first, the "manner of speaking and writing" that accompanied the "new Bolshevik ideology" was often "most confusing" to the masses (p. 15).

No easy way to deal with the situation emerged. Anatolii Lunacharskii's notion of "returning the living word" to the people often resulted in stilted, mundane, and poorly developed contributions from the uneducated folk. The rabkory and selkory had to be told at times that their work was poor. Catering too much to their mode of speech would mean reverting to the unconscious discourse of the masses. The "language of the streets," as Vladimir Maiakovskii described it (p. 52), too often became simply noise. And as spokespersons emerged from the people, they tended to pick up "slogans and expressions that do not mean anything," as the LEF critic Grigorii Vinokur put it (p. 41).

In the early 1920s, the great penchant for solving problems through engineering spread to language. Lenin and Trotsky emphasized improving people's use of Russian, which they believed was becoming corrupted. These two and other leaders represented the "classic" voice or approach to language culture, which Gorham also calls the "national" or "culturalist" model. Figures who advocated this approach cited pre-revolutionary writers, or at least those of conservative style.

To this emphasis others, especially linguists, replied by embracing a "party-state" voice. It resembled the national voice "in its underlying concern for state building and its reliance on a written canon," but it relied above all on the "sacred writings of the founding fathers" of the new country, Lenin and Stalin (p. 121). By the late 1920s, the idea of a single party language predominated. Its success was measured by the "extent to which students were prepared to become organizers" (p. 124).

Gorham does not make the new party language entirely clear, perhaps because it continued to evolve. Obviously it entailed mastery of certain words and slogans proffered by the new state. But the desired language required "dual competency — mastering . . . the forms of the standard literary language and . . . the content of the party-state ideology" (p. 178). To this one might add that experimental fiction all but disappeared by the early 1930s, while Stalin frequently alluded to literature in public speeches before 1941 but cited only pre-revolutionary authors.

Gorham describes the final result of Soviet language culture as "a membership-driven cant of sacred authority" (p. 21). Yet he also notes that people used the new language for their own purposes and that they "may well have maintained old speech habits" in personal conversations (p. 131). He recognizes that any fundamental regime change involves new language, and that success and advancement in social class depend on mastering it. Certainly a look, for example, at the ads on a Russian or Ukrainian metro today demonstrates the point.

Gorham seems undecided about the power of language to produce legitimacy or to mold people. Since the early, direct intervention in discourse by the poets and linguists did not work well, the whole process of creating a Soviet language turned to a great extent into slow work, compromise, and acquiring traditional language skills. Studies of propaganda in Germany and elsewhere indicate that people accept its validity, yet do not