

Title: The Poet and the Propagandist: Mayakovsky's Apprenticeship at ROSTA  
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Between 1919 and 1921 Vladimir Mayakovsky worked in the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA). There he "starred" as both publicist and poet, simultaneously creating agitation propaganda window dressings and advertising jingles alongside his avant-garde poetry. The poet later identified his time at ROSTA as a period of important personal and professional growth. The ROSTA period served as a determinative moment in his development, an apprenticeship during which he negotiated the divide between publicist and poet. By 1924 he emerged as the poet-craftsman of a new world with the poem of mythic proportions, "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin."

This paper examines in what manner Mayakovsky's active participation in the production of agit-prop informed his grasp of the new Soviet social reality, refined his poetic language, and augmented his deference toward the raw power of fundamental imagery. Not surprisingly, ROSTA figures prominently in two poems from this period: "An Extraordinary Adventure of Vladimir Mayakovsky" (1920) and "Order No. 2 to the Army of the Arts" (1921). In the former, the persona finds the work at ROSTA to be tedious, a contradiction to the glory of a poet. In the latter, however, agit-prop becomes the means of promoting new art forms in the New Russia.

After briefly surveying Mayakovsky's apprenticeship in ROSTA and the issues that led to the writing of "Adventure" and "Order No. 2," this paper will demonstrate how he draws on that experience to combine the offices of publicist and poet in "Vladimir Ilych Lenin." In this 1924 work, Mayakovsky creates a new Soviet myth by co-opting religious and archetypal imagery to agitate for the new ideology. This increasingly sophisticated understanding of the interrelationship between form and content, between aesthetics and ideology, between poetry and publicism marks an important threshold in Mayakovsky's evolution. From this source flow all subsequent themes and imagery complexes. Like a new god, he builds a new world with the generative word.