



Soviet Heroic Poetry in Context: Folklore or Fakelore

Margaret Ziolkowski

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Key issues surrounding the composition and recording of folklore include its frequently intensely political aspect and its preoccupation with chimerical cultural authority. These issues are dramatically displayed in Soviet epic compositions of the 1930s and 1940s, the so-called *noviny* ("new songs"), which took their formal inspiration to a great extent from traditional Russian epic songs, *byliny* ("songs of the past"), and their narrative content from contemporary political and other events in Stalinist Russia. The story of the *noviny* is at once complex and comprehensible. While it may be tempting to interpret the excrescences of Stalinism as unique aberrations, the reality was often more complicated. The *noviny* were not simply the result of political fiat, an episode in an ideological vacuum. Their emergence occurred in part because of specific trends and controversies that marked European folklore collection and publication from at least the late eighteenth century on, as well as because of developments in Russian folkloristics from the mid-nineteenth century on that assumed perhaps exaggerated proportions. The demise of the *noviny* was equally mediated by a host of political and theoretical considerations. This study tells the story of the rise and fall of the *noviny* in all its cultural richness and pathos, an instructive tale of the interaction of aesthetics and ideology.

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