

Title: Imagined Community in Konstantin Simonov's 1930s War Poetry  
Author: Elise Thorsen, University of Pittsburgh

Abstract:

Soviet war poetry of the 1930s was a site of dynamic development for the imagined communities of international socialism and the Soviet Union, in particular as these two concepts continued to diverge aesthetically over the course of the decade. In Konstantin Simonov's poetry of the 1930s, this development is clearest in the comparison between his Spanish Civil War poetry and poetry from his time as a correspondent during the Japanese-Soviet border conflicts in Manchuria in 1939. While this aesthetic development is in part explained by the shift from the romanticized representation of a foreign war to the act of witnessing the shocks of war experienced more directly, the spatial aesthetics of these poems suggest that there is also a realignment of what a socialist or Soviet imagined community can be.

If Simonov's representations of the Spanish Civil War nurture a complex vision of world socialism temporarily mediated by Moscow as its cosmopolitan center, his Manchurian war poetry tends toward a simpler dynamic of center and periphery, Moscow and the contested borderlands of socialism. This simplified dynamic arguably allows for a more complex articulation of imagined community. The subject is far from Moscow and what were arguably its ideologically rigid prescriptions of devotion to the cause before comrades; as such, he is in fact free to cultivate an affective connection with others deployed to the borderlands, in part through shared melancholy for Moscow. One of the results of this kind of imagined community operating at the border is a strong investment in a neo-imperial Soviet Union, even if this is at complete odds with the imagined community of international socialism with which it had identified in the 1920s.