

Title: Nekrasov and Literary Sincerity in Russian Criticism
Author: Erik McDonald, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Whether Nikolai Nekrasov was sincere was a perennial subject of debate among Russian critics from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The question can hardly be resolved today to everyone's satisfaction, but past attempts to answer it tell us a great deal about contemporary ideas of sincerity in literature, a concept which varies in importance and meaning in different times and places.

The body of writing about Nekrasov shows that in late nineteenth-century Russia there were at least six competing models of sincerity that fall into three groups. Sincerity could be interpreted as "saying what you mean," which yielded the models of *impartiality* and *confession*; as "being what you claim to be," as in the models of *authenticity* and *originality*; or as "practicing what you preach," in the case of the final two models, *consistency* and *unity*. These several models underlie numerous critiques and defenses of Nekrasov, including Martynova-Pavlova's poem "It Cannot Be (To N. A. Nekrasov)," Antonovich's invective against his former colleague after the end of *The Contemporary*, and the relevant passages of Turgenev's reminiscences about Belinskii. In the early twentieth century, the unity model espoused by Grigor'ev and Strakhov was inverted by modernist writers like Voloshin and Merezhkovskii, who were convinced of Nekrasov's sincerity precisely because of his disunity and contradictions.

This paper concerns the reception of one author in a single country over a limited period. It is intended as a piece of a broader history of the concept of sincerity, in combination with existing and future descriptions of what sincerity has meant in other cultures and centuries.