

Hodgson

Voicing the Soviet Experience

The Poetry of Ol'ga Berggol'ts

This is a long overdue examination of a poet whose career offers a case study in the complexities facing Soviet writers in the Stalin era. Ol'ga Berggol'ts (1910-1975) was a prominent Russian Soviet poet, whose accounts of heroism in wartime Leningrad brought her fame. This volume addresses her position as a writer whose Party loyalties were frequently in conflict with the demands of artistic and personal integrity. Writers who pursued their careers under the restrictions of the Stalin era have been categorized as 'official' figures whose work is assumed to be drab, inept, and opportunistic; but such assumptions impose a uniformity on the work of Soviet writers that the censors and the Writers Union could not achieve. An exploration of Berggol'ts's work shows that the borders between 'official' and 'unofficial' literature were in fact permeable and shifting. This book draws on unpublished sources such as diaries and notebooks to reveal the range and scope of her work, and to show how conflict and ambiguity functioned as a creative structuring principle. Dr Hodgson discusses how Berggol'ts's lyric poetry constructs the subject from multiple, conflicting discourses, and examines the poet's treatment of genres such as narrative verse, verse tragedy, and prose in the changing cultural context of the 1950s. Berggol'ts's use of inter-textual, and especially intra-textual, reference is also investigated; the intensively self-referential nature of her work creates a web of allusion which connects texts of different genres, 'official' as well as 'unofficial' writing. This study will provoke readers into reassessing the cultural heritage of an era that can seem remote and impenetrable, but which (like Ol'ga Berggol'ts) was far more complex and intriguing.

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