

Title: The Hazards of Russianizing Marxism: The Case of *The Lay of Ulialaev*
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Abstract:

Articulating their program for the Literary Center of Constructivists, founded in 1924, Il'ia Sel'vinskii and Kornelii Zelinskii drew attention to the problems of the European Marxist origins of Bolshevism. Gesturing at Russia's history of superficial introductions of (correct and useful, in their view) Western systems of social and political organization, Sel'vinskii and Zelinskii positioned themselves to provide the answer through an aesthetic program of localization. For them, presenting Bolshevism in terms reflecting the milieu of narrative action in their works improved the chances of successful implanting its ideas. Although the principle is at heart an educational strategy of using relevant examples, the works that emerged from the Literary Center of Constructivists reflect a geopolitical imagination that belies such simplicity and reflects far more imaginative interflow between Russia and the West.

In his epic poem *The Lay of Ulialaev* (1923-4; published in 1927), Sel'vinskii deploys two representatives of Westernizing—Tata, embodying pre-revolutionary Europeanized tastes and small-scale industrialization, and Red Army Commissar Gai—into the turbulent great steppes of Russia. This doubling of Western ideals in the Civil War context is a minor complication compared to the central problem of the poem: the steppes and bands who roam it are such strong characters that any localization of a foreign concept threatens to overwhelm the essence of the concept itself. This paper presents the attraction and mutual transformations among these three forces—old West, new West, and elemental Russia—with the aim of explicating the poem's prescriptions for negotiating the Western origins of Bolshevism in Marxism and the challenges of localization.