

Epics and Byliny

Outline

- Structure and feature of bylíny
- Types of bylíny
- Poetics of bylíny
- Bylíny and history
- Bylíny and art
- *The Sword and the Dragon*

Bylína (pl. bylíny)

- Epic poems of legendary heroes
- Rediscovered mid-nineteenth century
 - Collectors recorded by hand while performers sang
- Performers
 - Byliny passed from royal courts to the peasantry
- Recitations were improvised
- Accompanied on gúslí (dulcimer, harp)

Bylína Cycles

- Mythological epics
 - Oldest bylíny
 - The giant Svyatogór
- Kievan bogatýrs of Vladímír’s court
 - Ilyá Múromets
 - Dobrýnia Nikítich
 - Alěsha (Aliósha) Popóvich
- Novgorod merchants
 - Sadkó
 - Vasíly Busláev

Bylina Structure and Features 1

- Epic Ceremonialism
- Introduction, narrative section, epilogue
- Epic Retardation
 - “The hero’s heart is ardent and impetuous; it flared up hotter than fire, hotter than burning frost.”

Bylina Structure and Features 2

- Epic Hyperbole
- Slavic Negative Analogy
 - “A Bright Falcon didn’t swoop down on the geese, on the swans, and on the small, migratory ducks. A holy Russian bogatyr swooped down on the Tatar army.”
- Fixed epithets
- Verse

What Happens in Kievan Bylíny

- Quasi-historical
- Feasts at court
- Vladímír (or later prince) assigns heroic tasks
- Bogatýrs (epic heroes) protect Rus' from foreigners (pagans), foreign warriors, monsters, robbers
- Bogatýrs defend country, widows, orphans, the poor
- Leisure time devoted to romance and hunting

Kievan Rus'



Tatars (Mongols)

- Pagans before the Tatars: Miscellaneous enemies and allies of convenience
- Genghis Khan (d. 1227) and his offspring
- 1223: Tatars appear suddenly in the southeast, defeat Rus' and Polóvtzy at the river Kálka, and then vanish as suddenly as they had appeared
- 1237–40: Tatars return and conquer Rus', which must pay tribute and provide military aid (Golden Horde)
- 1240: Kiev falls
- 1380: Dmitrii Donskói victorious at Kulíkovo Field
- 1480: Ivan III renounces allegiance to Khan

What Happens to Ilyá Múromets

- Initially lame; healed by Jesus or wise men
- Works on parents' farm
- Goes to Kiev, capturing Solovéy the Robber (Solovéy Razbóinik) en route
- Defeats Tatars, sometimes with divine aid
- Sometimes quarrels with Vladímir (and is imprisoned)
- Dragon-slaying: Cult of St. George

Bogatyr (Vasnetsov)

Viktor Vasnetsov, 1848–1926



Bogatyr at the Crossroads (Vasnetsov)



Bogatyр
(Vrubel')
(1898)



The Great
European War
c. 1915



Russia—for Truth!

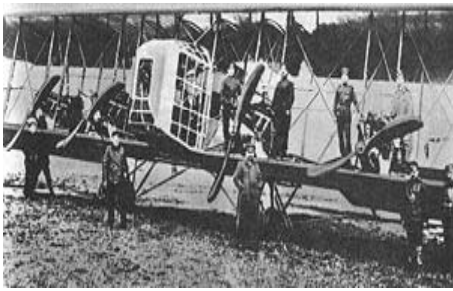
WWI Poster



Heroic Deeds of the Grandsons



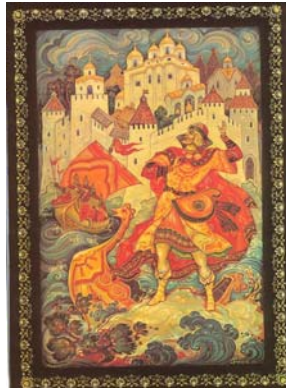
Recycling of the legend: Ilya Muromets (bomber, 1912)



Ilya Muromets (Palekh)



Sadko
(Kholui)



The Sword and the Dragon

- History
 - *Ilyá Múromets* (USSR, 1956)
 - *Epic Hero and the Beast* (UK, 1956)
 - *Sword and the Dragon* (US, 1960)
- Director: Aleksáandr Ptushkó (1900–73)
- “Ilyá Múromets and the Dragon” (Afanas’ev 569–75)

The Sword and the Dragon (1)

- MST3K (1994)
- Borís Andréyev (Ilyá)
- Cast of 106,000; 11,000 horses
- Vladimir (10th/11th century)
- Tugars (= Tatars; 13th century)
- (Self-serving tablecloth)
- (Three-headed dragon)

Viewing Guide

- Vasnetsov’s “Bogatyr at the Crossroads”
- Solovéy (Nightingale) the Robber (Wind Demon / Whistler)
- Vladímir’s wisdom
 - Horse’s tail (“Shemiáka the Judge”)
- Banquet at Vladímir’s court
- Ilyá produces the Wind Demon

Epic Tales

- “Ivan the Simpleton” 142–45
- “Foma Berennikov” 284–87
- “Ilya Muromets and the Dragon” 569–75
