

Title: Stalinist Objectives and Invented Suitors: The Role of Romance in World War II Hero Narratives

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“Stalinist Objectives and Invented Suitors: The Role of Romance in World War II Hero Narratives” analyzes patterns in Stalin-era literary works about Heroes of the Soviet Union Liza Chaikina and Zoia Kosmodemianskaia, asking why Soviet authors incorporated fictional suitors into works about these war martyrs—hagiographic biographies, poems, and plays. After briefly discussing how these works depart from the heroic culture of the 1930s and pre-war socialist realist novels, this paper discusses how, through the invention of suitors, authors accomplished what anthropologist Sharon MacDonald posits is a typical societal response to the advent of women soldiers: cultural treatments of these soldiers emphasize traditional femininity. This paper argues that these invented romantic interests help shape these heroes into more traditionally feminine women, necessary for their canonization as quasi-Soviet saints for post-war youth, addressing potential problems in their biographies. Through the invention of suitors, authors emphasized the maternal potential of these war martyrs and by doing so, they supported pro-natalist policies that would be promoted in the media beginning in 1944. This paper engages with work on Stalinist culture, socialist realist literature, World War II, heroism, and gender.