

Title: Transcending the Body in Soviet Literature of WWII
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While violence in the form of mass arrests and petitions for the death penalty surrounded the Soviet population in the 1930s, the official literature steered clear of its realistic depictions. World War II provided a psychological and artistic release by presenting an enemy whose very actions seemingly justified a violent response. As a result, a language of physical struggle that was based on a new war mythology emerged. Typically, the official discourse of WWII works towards establishing murder as self-defense and avoids portraying the Soviet warriors doing anything remotely morally suspect; there is a clear and unambiguous line between right and wrong, the Russians and the Nazis. Within this mythology of particular interest is the treatment of the human body, with its inconvenient needs and the tendency to encroach on the life of consciousness, ideological or otherwise.

Soviet war stories often show the Nazis going to impossible lengths in their torture of captured partisans, and the Russians persevering through ostensibly impossible hardships. While Elaine Scarry demonstrates that torture creates the balance of power which destroys the victim's world (identity) and turns him or her into a body, in Soviet war stories the bodies of the tortured partisans all but disappear. If, according to Victor Erofeev, the prostitutes in the works of psychological realism sold the bodies they did not have, in Russian war stories the partisans submit to torture the bodies that are immune to pain. Without disputing the issue of historical accuracy, this paper will investigate this masochistic stylization and its various vantage points in the context of Socialist Realist aesthetic.

Erofeev, Victor. *Muzhchiny. Moskva: Podkova*, 1998.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.