

**Watering Down the Romance:  
Elizabeth Wein and the Feminist Renewal of the War Novel**

The *New York Times* described Elizabeth Wein's 2012 *Code Name Verity* as a "fiendishly plotted" success. Critics agreed awarding it a number of honors. In subsequent years, Wein has expanded the reach of this WWII novel with companion novels, including *Rose Under Fire* (2013), *Black Dove, White Raven* (2015), and *The Pearl Thief* (2017). Although these four novels do not stand as a unified set, each of the latter three books includes multiple links to *Code Name Verity*—a shared historical setting (1935-1945) or a portrait of female pilots or crossover characters. All of the books feature shrewd female survivors engaged in work traditionally assigned to men.

This paper argues that Wein's quartet serves to innovate the genre of the war novel by expanding the representation of military history to include the contributions and experiences of women. In the context of the war novel, critics including Angela K. Smith and Miriam Cooke have challenged observations like that of Paul Fussell that define war literature as by and about men. Little attention has been paid to how YA literature has countered this masculine tradition.

In addition to expanding the representation of women in wartime contexts, two important consequences flow from Wein's work. First, Wein continues a tradition of complicating the ideologies used to justify war. While a love of country inspires many of her protagonists, she simultaneously peoples her novels with a complex array of oppressed populations—prisoners of war, concentration camp victims, people of color, and Scottish travelers (gypsies). Consequently, Wein critiques some of the prejudices and injustices common among the Allies of WWII even as she celebrates their heroic accomplishments. Secondly, by focusing on the skillful achievements of her protagonists as pilots, spies, and investigators as well as focusing on the relationships each young woman forges with her family members and female colleagues, Wein's work forces romance, the typical focus for female characters in war novels, to a tertiary or even lesser level of significance for most the women in these books.