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Milligan, Gerry. *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. 332. ISBN 978-1-4875-0314-7. \$75.00 (hardcover).

In the second chapter of *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in the Italian Renaissance*, Gerry Milligan discusses Lucrezia Marinella's epic poem *L'Enrico* (75). Making reference to the poem, Milligan clarifies that "The world in which Marinella wrote"—the Italian Renaissance, broadly speaking "perceived the division of the sexes as reflected in a corresponding *natural* division of the professions: war and weaving. Homer had long ago established this dichotomy when in the *Illiad*...Hector tells his wife that weaving is for women, war for men" (76). In his latest effort, Milligan skillfully upends this very construct: he weaves here so that the women of the Italian Renaissance may fight. His book is a rich tapestry that draws together innumerable threads to present a vivid and dynamic image of Italian Renaissance women, war, and the role of gender in literary discourse and debate.

The monograph departs from the premise that 16th-century Italian literature offers perhaps the first sustained discussion about the role of women in war. Milligan's overarching argument is that during the course of the Italian Renaissance, the issue of women's militancy is presented as a largely moral one. Women engage in war—whether as armed viragos, reluctant defendants of cities, pacifists, or writers opining about war—because of the moral failings of men to protect women. The first half of the book thus establishes the thematic premises of study, framing and introducing questions of philosophy, gender, genre, and socio-political custom. The second half narrows its gaze to consider biographical narratives of (pseudo)historical women in war through accounts of "illustrious women." Milligan therefore maintains a constant and dynamic dialogue between literary productions and the varied cultural, socio-political, and wartime happenings that inform their discourse. In so doing, he grants readers the first English-language study to engage issues of gender and war in Italian Renaissance literature with such breadth of vision and inter-disciplinary commitment.

Chapter 1 centers on the foundations upon which Renaissance debates about women's militancy were built: the divergent statements of Plato and Aristotle in the *Republic*, Book V and the *Politics*, respectively, in which the former favors women's militancy as part of the republic's equal division of social responsibility, and the latter implicitly refutes it by asserting women's weaker nature compared to men's. Milligan considers how Renaissance authors grapple with this legacy and the intermediary commentaries of Medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas to confront two entangled themes: first, the issue of women's innate ability to participate in warfare, and second, the question of the armed virago's strength. In so doing, Milligan introduces the genres and disputes to be confronted in the subsequent chapters of the book, alternating between examples drawn from treatises, dialogues, and chivalric epic. He also—importantly—considers not only the male gaze on the armed woman but also how women writers like Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella engage with tradition to advocate for her person.

Chapter 2 provides a compelling exploration of the cultural debates surrounding women in warfare by considering the chivalric-epic warrior woman as not only a symbol (as has been widely proposed until now) but as a dichotomous figure, a woman *and* a warrior. This approach permits an interrogation of the poetic virago's credibility. Milligan identifies two tropes essential to the dynamic of "the poetic and the real"; one is the chivalric-epic virago's virginity and "wildling childhood," a trait Milligan traces back to Virgil's Queen Camilla, and the other is the "revelation moment," a phrase coined to refer to the virago's shedding of armor that reveals her body and hair. Milligan's analysis draws a progression from Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* to later epic-chivalric authors like Torquato Tasso, whose *Gerusalemme liberata* highlights post-Reformation preoccupations with the

virago's Christianity, historicity, and fictionality, and to women writers like Fonte and Marinella, who expanded and commented the tradition of militant women to challenge that viragos remained fictional because of social custom, not anatomy or aptitude. Here, the author forges new ground in bringing armed women of the Italian Renaissance beyond the confines of fantasy, uniting poetic questions with ones of literary memory, socio-politics, and readership.

In Chapter 3, Milligan shifts his focus to women's writings about men's warfare and the rhetorical strategies used to persuade men to fight. A fascinating analysis demonstrates how mechanisms of shame and praise are employed regularly to underscore men's moral obligations in warfare. These writers claim the right to judge the martial accomplishments (or failures) of men by stressing, rather than discounting, their own gender; as Milligan explains, "[f]ailing to perform manhood before women is to be doubly shamed" (113). Such discourses often conflate the religious with the political, and likewise link wartime masculinity performed well with the promise of fame and immortality: women capitalize on the symbiosis between fame and writing to threaten the withholding of laudatory compositions if men fail to perform their gender in war.

Having established his thematic and theoretical landscape, Milligan's final three chapters narrow their gaze to study accounts of women in war through the lens of Boccaccio's *Famous Women*, on which the Renaissance genre of "illustrious women"—a particularly fertile medium for biographies of militant women—is modeled. Tracing the evolving representation and reception of militant women across iterations of an archetype, Milligan brilliantly investigates both the influence of literary memory over time and the impact of real-world socio-politics on such accounts. Chapter 4 establishes the classical and medieval sources for Boccaccio's militant women. Through a case study of Boccaccio's Amazons, Milligan reveals how the morality attributed to militant women is based primarily on circumstance and deference to masculine hierarchies. A similar ambiguity extends to Boccaccio's moralizing commentary; though he encourages women to emulate the virtues rather than the deeds of Amazons, Milligan deftly illuminates how Boccaccio grapples with the feasibility of real-world viragos, the paradox of woman-inflicted violence, and the increasingly prominent paradigm of gender switching between viragos and their male counterparts, whereby "women overcome femininity, and men become women" (150).

The remaining chapters carry forward these themes to reveal how later versions of *Famous Women* reflect altered discourses surrounding women and war in 15th and 16th century Italy. Milligan anchors Chapter 5 with Giuseppe Betussi's 1547 translation and expansion of Boccaccio's text to show the emergent importance of class. Illustrious militant noblewomen, modeled on courtly heroines, engage in war as vigilant surveillants who shame men to action through speeches and letters; lowborn combatant women instead participate physically, engaging in battle armed and killing their enemies. Case studies demonstrate the evolving archetypes of illustrious noblewomen's militancy: Anna of Monferrato embodies the ideal peaceful ruler, Queen Maria of Hungary exemplifies the ideal virago, and Caterina Sforza and Orsina Visconti challenge the feminine-masculine dichotomy. Chapter 6 follows a similar structure, shifting forward to Francesco Serdonati's 1596 revision and amplification of Betussi to offer an essential consideration of the influence of Queen Elizabeth I of England and regent Catherine de' Medici of France on late Italian Renaissance discourses about women and war. This is a fascinating and vital question thus far neglected by scholars. Milligan unearths that, in a climate of real-world "warring queens," heroism in warfare becomes the most common means by which women enter the pantheon of illustrious exempla; case studies of Serdonati's biography of Christine of Lorraine, and of literary pseudo-histories of Catherine de' Medici, support this reading.

Comprehensively, Milligan's rich and dynamic investigation forges new intellectual approaches and offers important new insights to the study of women, gender, and war in the Italian Renaissance. Above all, he exposes the persistent undercurrent of morality that informs and shapes discourses of militant women throughout the Italian Renaissance. But the breadth and ambition of his approach also grants a far-reaching view of how poetic representations of women and war navigate, shape, and challenge real-world gender norms, socio-politics, and the cultural imagination of the Italian Renaissance, not just in regard to women but also to men. Milligan's contribution, therefore, represents an essential departure point for future scholarship on gender and war in the Italian Renaissance as well as a generous source of inspiration for new interdisciplinary avenues of study.

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