Gerry Milligan. *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. x+332. ISBN 9781487503147.

Milligan's *Moral Combat* is a key contribution to the studies on the correlation between gender and war in Italian Renaissance culture. The wide spectrum of texts and the depth of the analysis place this study at the centre of the academic debate on representations of warfare and of women, engaging the scholarly tradition from a new perspective: that of the gendered morality of war.

The book is organized in six chapters, provided with an Introduction, a Conclusion, a rich apparatus of Notes (233–289), an Index (321–332), a List of Illustrations (vii), and a Bibliography (291–289) divided into Primary and Secondary texts. The “Introduction” (3–11) grounds *Moral Combat* within the history of women militancy. Milligan explores the concept of moral responsibility in war, an aspect that seems to polarize genders favoring masculinity (through images of courage, victory, and strength) over femininity (victimized, non-combatant, and ultimately weak). Yet, the historical data alluding to a substantial absence of women from the battlefield are contradicted by literature. In fact, during the Renaissance the incongruity between fictional viragos and historical women warriors was not as clearly defined. Therefore, Milligan addresses the connection between gender and war in literature not only through the representation of women as warriors, but also in their portrayal as “non-combatants, commanders, pacifists, victims and active observers of war” (5).

In addressing the literary gendering of war, Milligan pays particular attention to the dynamic between representation of armed women and shaming of men unable to perform their military duties. The first two chapters focus on the debate regarding women's ability to fight. The first, “The Philosophical History of the Armed Woman” (12–42), reports on treatises discussing women in the military, starting with Plato and Aristotle. Through the medieval elaborations of the classics, we arrive at the Renaissance *querelle* on female militancy, which produced works that dealt with the intellectualization of war and the defence of women. Their analysis focused on the lack of education and training affecting women's participation in wars (Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella), and women's utility and duties in civil and political matters (Torquato Tasso and Francesco Serdonati).

The second chapter, “The Poetic and the Real: The Chivalric-Epic Commentary of the Armed Woman” (43–78), looks at the epic-chivalric genre

and its viragos. These works (particularly Ariosto's *Furioso* and Tasso's *Liberata*), studied from the standpoint of the revelation's trope and the metaphorical significance of armour, portray the disparity between fictional armed maidens and historical women warriors, while suggesting the inspiring role of these figures for their readers. These epic poems open questions of verisimilitude and historicity, revealing the potential of real women combatants.

Chapter three, "Women Writers Demanding Warrior Masculinity: Catherine of Siena, Laura Terracina, Chiara Matraini, and Isabella Cervoni" (79–119), explores the rhetoric of war and women's perspectives on it. The texts considered, written by women, clarify the bond between the vulnerability of women and (male) gender shaming. These women analyze binaries of war, like shame and praise, timidity and temerity, and ultimately femininity and masculinity, in a dynamic that invited men to perform their moral duty in war as protectors of women.

Chapters four through six explore the representation of historical women in war through the tradition of biographies of illustrious women, whose *architext* can be found in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* (c. 1361), a version of which is analyzed in each chapter. Chapter four, "Classical and Christian Models of Warring Women: From Plutarch to Boccaccio" (120–151), correlates biographies of women in war (groups of historical and mythical women portrayed by Plutarch) to Boccaccio's text. Chapter five, "The Noble Warrior Woman (1440–1550)" (152–196), and chapter six, "The Fame of Women and the Infamy of Men in the Age of Warring Queens (1550–1600)" (197–228), are anchored by two sixteenth-century editions and expansions of Boccaccio's work: Giuseppe Betussi's *Donne Illustri* (1547) and Francesco Serdonati's compendium (1596). The three works by Boccaccio, Betussi, and Serdonati strengthen the position of women and accentuate the vituperation of men. In these chapters the interrelation between historical women (like Matilde of Canossa, Caterina Sforza, Orsina Visconti, Maria and Catherine de' Medici, and Elizabeth I Tudor) and their literary portrayals reveals a "gender metamorphosis" (150) in the representation of armed women. In particular, the variety of roles in which women are portrayed by Betussi and Serdonati provides a female readership with models for feminine virtue and militant women, and opens a discourse on both class and gender in war.

In his "Conclusion" (229–231), Milligan reiterates the central point of this study: in all the texts taken into consideration, combat remains a choice for women but a moral obligation for men. Therefore, the Renaissance fascination with literature on women warriors cannot be explained simply by the consideration of

the pleasure and marvel that these tales brought to the reader. Two other reasons could explain this interest and the proliferation of these literary figures. The first is the concept that the victory of the *weaker* sex could symbolize the possibility of victory for Italy, the oppressed, against the European powers, who oppressed *her*. The second reason can be explained as a matter of irony: the presence of the *innocent* on the battlefield reminds the readers of the atrocity of war; thus, women warriors potentially inspire the end of violence, a desire for peace.

From the first page to the last, the intersection of references and the novelty of Milligan's study go hand in hand, making this book a must-read reference not only for Renaissance Studies or for Women and Gender Studies, but for Italian and warfare literature and culture in general. In engaging the complexity that surrounds the rhetorical gendering of war, we understand better the literary representation of women in war and explore how fiction and reality interacted, inspiring both men and women in a period heavily affected by war. Perhaps the historical data on women warriors will not be affected by this book, but Moral Combat undeniably demonstrates the "profound cultural rupture" (11) that the few Renaissance (historical) warrior women brought to literature and the overall discourse on warfare.

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Guido Pugliese. *Saggi di letteratura italiana. Da Dante a Manzoni*. Johnny Bertolio (ed.). Firenze: Franco Cesati, 2017. Pp. 375. ISBN 9788876676727.

Il volume di saggi raccoglie materiali di diversi momenti del lavoro di Guido Pugliese, raggruppando gli scritti dello studioso per nuclei di interesse letterario. Il materiale originario è di eterogenea provenienza: interventi a convegni, articoli per riviste, voci di enciclopedia, sezioni della sua *Doctoral Dissertation*, capitoli di libri e interventi su giornali.

Pertanto, la presentazione di Pasquale Sabbatino, lungi dall'essere solo un dovuto riconoscimento della figura dell'uomo e del professore, è un indispensabile percorso di lettura. Focalizzando i temi affrontati nel volume, queste pagine permettono di apprezzare diacronicamente gli interventi che ritornano, nel corso degli anni, su autori e argomenti inesauribili, e sincronicamente i saggi che, al