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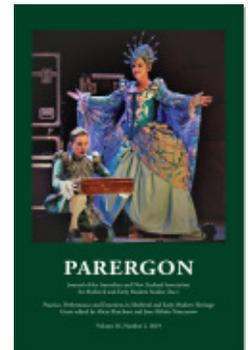
*Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance
Literature* by Gerry Milligan (review)

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decline of revenge tragedy in the seventeenth century (p. 87); discussion of the relationship between early modern drama and literature and witchcraft pamphlets might have been further expanded. This chapter also explores how the display of anger is not only gender-based but also ‘class-based’ (p. 90), and identifies that witches tend to be ‘emotionally vulnerable’ (p. 90). Chapter 4’s discussion of the erotic nature of witch–devil relationships makes an important argument for the reinterpretation of the 1640s’ pamphlets as offering evidence not of an ‘aberration’ but an ‘intensification of ideas that were already circulating’ (p. 137). This chapter offers a discussion not only of witchcraft and sex but of broader attitudes to sex and sexual practices in the period (p. 124). The final chapter situates the pamphlets within the major socioreligious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, broadly aligning social anxieties about witchcraft with Catholicism and Quakerism.

This monograph will be of value to those interested in early modern English witchcraft and the history of the emotions, specifically in terms of gender and emotion. It offers an invaluable appendix of pamphlets, analysis of images from the pamphlets, and a clear re-evaluation of the role of the devil in early modern English understandings of witchcraft.

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Milligan, Gerry, *Moral Combat: Women, Gender, and War in Italian Renaissance Literature* (Toronto Italian Studies), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2018; hardback; pp. 344; 3 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. CA\$75.00; ISBN 9781487503147.

Moral Combat reveals that Renaissance literary discourse concerning gendered militancy framed active combat as the natural obligation of men, while casting women in several roles, ultimately aimed to praise or shame men into action. Gerry Milligan suggests that the rhetoric used in present-day debate about women in combat roles has ancient foundations, but that the first sustained cross-cultural discourse on the topic occurred in the sixteenth century. Using a comparative literary approach Milligan traces intersections and developments of classical and Christian rhetoric, tropes, and didactic narratives, to reconstruct the literary backdrop from which Renaissance authors wrote of militant women in their own time of political instability in the Italian peninsula. Milligan makes an important contribution to scholarship on Italian literature, not least due to *Moral Combat*’s grounding in an extensive primary source bibliography including several works by female writers.

The first chapter introduces ideas that resonate throughout the book, including the dual influence of classical and Christian authorities, arguments based in women’s physicality or socialization, the view of women as victims or aggressors, the distinctions between poetic conceit and historic reality, and the relative hierarchical values of gender and class. It compares Plato’s pro- and Aristotle’s anti-female combatant stances, the likewise conflicting biblical

and hagiographic exemplars, and theological treatises, and it identifies popular Renaissance interpretations and incorporation of these competing perspectives. The second chapter turns to the virago in chivalric epic poetry, again beginning with a classical model, presenting Virgil's Camilla as a precursor to warrior women in Renaissance literature. Milligan analyses recurring tropes including the public revelation of a knight's female identity. The chapter discusses works by Laura Terracina, Moderata Fonte, and Margherita Sarrocchi. Chapter 3 examines the militaristic language and objectives of a selection of influential women, whose stances are couched in their political setting. It opens with Catherine of Siena's fourteenth-century letters (published in 1500) and closes with Isabella Cervoni's sixteenth-century poems.

Collectively, chapters 4 to 6 present a fascinating examination of the changing didactic assessment of female combatants, commanders, and victims in women's biographies published over two and half centuries. Chapter 4 focuses on Plutarch's *Bravery of Women* (regaining popularity due to a 1485 translation), in which militant women acted collectively against social ills, and Boccaccio's anthology *Famous Women* (c. 1362), in which individual militant women as well as female victims of war are interpreted as examples to inspire men to battle and women to domestic virtue. Chapter 5 examines biographies written 1440–1550, including Giuseppe Betussi's 1545 translation and additions to *Famous Women*, to consider the influence of class in representations of recent, historical, and predominantly noble women's role in policing masculinity and contributing to the war effort. The final chapter considers literature written for and about 'warring queens' in the years 1550–1600; it draws attention to the inclusion or exclusion of Elizabeth Tudor in Italian biographies and discusses Francesco Serdonati's 1596 edition of *Famous Women*, expanded and dedicated to Caterina Sforza's granddaughter Christine of Lorraine.

The study conducts insightful literary analyses of works ranging from key classical thinkers to medieval chivalric epics, to fourteenth-century women's letters, all of which contributed to the rhetoric used in the cumulative moralizing compendiums of illustrious women from the late fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. Milligan makes a convincing case for fifteenth- and sixteenth-century authors' recourse to classical and Christian literary models, while flagging the current relevance of his study through reference to gendered rhetoric used in militaristic discussions of the last century. At times figures and works spanning centuries are treated as assumed knowledge or juxtaposed in a way that requires the reader to be familiar with the context to recognize the relative weight they should place on the evidence as either part of an active contemporaneous discourse or as a broad-scale cultural one. From a historian's perspective, the argument would have been strengthened by more regular and direct grounding of source material in its historical context and a clearer rationale for the opening and closing dates of the last two chapters (particularly in light of a brief identification of the Italian Wars as a catalyst for sixteenth-century interest in women's militancy).

Milligan acknowledges the value that would come from further research into the readership and reception of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century works, but this is not the prime focus of the present study. Rather, Milligan offers readers new insights into the cultural literary development of gendered discourse concerning combat, while proposing potential avenues for further research using different methodologies. *Moral Combat* provides an informed, engaging, convincing, and useful foundation for a long-overdue scholarly discussion of women's role in the war narrative. I would recommend this book for students and scholars interested in the gendering of warfare and didactic humanist literature.

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Powell, Susan, *The Birgittines of Syon Abbey: Preaching and Print* (Texts and Translations, 11), Turnhout, Brepols, 2017; hardback; pp. xxii, 348; 5 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. €90; ISBN 9782503532356.

This volume brings together some of Susan Powell's many contributions over the past two decades to the study of the late-medieval Birgittine community of Syon Abbey. The community—comprised of both a sisterhood of nuns and a brotherhood of priests, deacons, and lay brothers—was well known for its intellectual culture, and it is this theme that provides a common thread throughout the collection of essays.

Five of the seven chapters (2 to 6) reproduce material published elsewhere between 1998 and 2010. Although Powell herself acknowledges that the field of Syon studies has advanced considerably in even the past decade, these essays have not been revised beyond the occasional addition to the text and (more commonly) updated footnote. To each is appended a headword outlining the original publication details of the essay and any changes made, and an afterword discussing the scholarship that has appeared since the essay's initial publication. While these afterwords go some way towards bringing the essays up to date, it seems a missed opportunity that this recent literature and any resulting developments in Powell's thoughts on the topic were not integrated into the body of the text.

Chapters 2 to 4 focus on preaching and sermons. The Birgittine brothers were 'specifically enjoined to preach to the laity' (p. 50), and Syon's status as a pilgrim destination gave it a large and frequent audience for preaching. Chapter 2 provides an overview of preaching practices at Syon and the extant evidence for sermons preached there. The primary focus here is the *registrum* of the brothers' library, but Powell also cites the importance of exploring 'collections without clear Syon associations' (p. 71). The latter line of research is developed in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3, Powell undertakes a close analysis of Cox MS 39, in an effort to determine whether the sermons it records might have been composed and preached at Syon; the evidence, while suggestive, is ultimately deemed inconclusive in the absence of further research. Powell finds more decisive evidence of Syon connections in the sermons included in Caxton's editions of John Mirk's *Festial*, which are the subject of Chapter 4.