

Giorgio Mariani, *Waging War on War: Peacefighting in American Literature* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 296 pp.

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Giorgio Mariani's *Waging War on War: Peacefighting in American Literature* is a lucid, comprehensive, and persuasive study of a topic of urgent academic and social concern. It is a significant contribution to the enduring field of war studies in Americanist literary criticism, which reaches back to Daniel Aaron and Edmund Wilson. More important, *Waging War on War* also offers a way to change how we write about and study US wars by consolidating an increasing interest in intellectually rigorous, theoretically informed variants of peace studies. "If we wish to grasp the critical (anti-war/pro-peace) aspects of war literature," Mariani writes, "we cannot restrict our analysis to the ways in which war is represented. We must also investigate how peace is implicitly (as is often the case) or explicitly constructed" (25). Antiwar literature, and what it means to think of something as antiwar literature, remains relatively undertheorized. But Mariani's book, together with recent work by Kate McLoughlin and Cynthia Wachtell, will help to change that. Mariani argues that we must begin to theorize peace as something more than the absence of war; that we must understand the conceptual and political imbrication of war and peace; and that we must complicate the war-peace binary that dominates so much critical work without "sacrificing the moral implications of our interpretations" (8).

*Waging War on War* begins in relatively familiar terms and covers expected material: questions about the exceptional violence of America, for instance, and theories about the (un)representable quality of trauma and war. It then moves to one of its first major distinctions: the assertion that what we have thought of as antiwar literature is in fact not a stable category, and that opposition to romantic views of war should not be conflated with an antiwar stance. Advancing this argument, the author presents a thorough and up-to-date literature review that takes us through the first three chapters, developed with primary reference to Civil War texts but extending up to the Civil Rights era. One of the great risks of a work like this, which covers such a broad span of time, is that it might seem merely eclectic rather than comprehensive, undisciplined or idiosyncratic in its array of choices. The author is, clearly, concerned about this, specifically naming as a concern the possibility of temporal disconnection. But Mariani has succeeded in creating a conceptually coherent book that holds together well, primarily because of the strong theoretical starting point.

The close readings that follow are thoughtful and sometimes ingenious, embedded in rich critical and philosophical context. The author begins with Joel Barlow's *Columbiad*,

via Kant and Arendt—philosophical contextualizations that are well done rather than, as is sometimes the case in close readings, loosely referential. The author argues persuasively that Barlow's much understudied text is essential for understanding war writing in the US, since it exemplifies the tension that will define much of the US war literature to follow: namely, how a text that strives to imagine peace can succeed in forms traditionally devoted to celebrating martial virtues. The subsequent discussion of "the sacrifice" in Melville makes the interesting move of showing how sacrifice must not only be figured through the lethal scapegoating of the militarist but also through the peace-seeker's logic of victimage: in the latter case, by way of Father Mapple's invocation of the biblical Book of Jonah, which severs the connection between violence and the sacred by depicting a sacrifice whom God does *not* kill.

Just as questions of gender become pressing for the reader, the book takes up Ellen La Motte's *The Backwash of War*. The primary contributions of this chapter are twofold. First, it seeks to resuscitate a once again neglected text. A good part of Mariani's motivation as a whole, indeed, seems to be this kind of recovery—the chapter discussing sacrificial and nonsacrificial readings of Faulkner's *Fable* is another important critical intervention in this respect, assisting in the effort to bring attention to that often derided novel. Second, the La Motte chapter also develops the not-altogether surprising but nonetheless important points that what we consider war writing must not be restricted to combat; much women's war writing has emphasized the continuity between the violence of national tyrants terrorizing our political spaces and the violence of home-front tyrants terrorizing our domestic spaces.

The chapter on postmodernism and truth in Tim O'Brien deals with a series of more familiar arguments and texts, but it is, for chronological continuity and historical context, a necessary chapter. Moreover, it is notable for attempting to move beyond examination of O'Brien's self-deconstructive narrative theory to an emphasis upon the ineluctable and paradoxical love that fuels both the ambitions of peace and the horrors of war.

The book closes by considering the literature after the Gulf Wars: Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*, the poetry of Brian Turner, Helen Benedict's fiction and nonfiction. While not as comprehensive in its selections as specialized studies of the Gulf wars (such as Stacey Peebles' work), the author's development of the cosmopolitan in his selections—and their stark contrast to the binarism of their political moment—is striking. In this section, Mariani's personal stakes are increasingly evident, recalling the Introduction's account of his antiwar activism and his experience with police, state, and neofascist violence in Italy between 1968 and 1978. As Mariani reaches the end, he asks with sincerity: "How can we help the veterans as well as those distant people whose

lives are permanently damaged by a war that was waged, like it or not, in our name?" (223). While *Waging War on War* is rigorously academic, it is also infused with a clear-eyed moral urgency, along with a modest hope that scholarly work—despite its in-group messaging and often narrowing vocabulary—can be a deliberate contribution to the broad and varied cultural practices dedicated to decelerating violence and imagining nonreactive models of peace.