



Woman in Battle Dress

Antonio Benítez-Rojo , Jessica Powell (Translation)

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In 1809, at the age of eighteen, Henriette Faber enrolled herself in medical school in Paris—and since medicine was a profession prohibited to women, she changed her name to Henri in order to matriculate. She would spend the next fifteen years practicing medicine and living as a man.

Drafted to serve as a surgeon in Napoleon's army, Faber endured the horrors of the 1812 retreat across Russia. She later embarked to the Caribbean and set up a medical practice in a remote Cuban village, where she married Juana de León, an impoverished local. Three years into their marriage, de León turned Faber in to the authorities, demanding that the marriage be annulled. A sensational legal trial ensued, and Faber was stripped of her medical license, forced to dress as a woman, sentenced to prison, and ultimately sent into exile. She was last seen on a boat headed to New Orleans in 1827.

In this, his last published work, Antonio Benítez Rojo takes the outline provided by historical events and weaves a richly detailed backdrop for Faber, who becomes a vivid and complex figure grappling with the strictures of her time. *Woman in Battle Dress* is a sweeping, ambitious epic, in which Henriette Faber tells the story of her life, a compelling, entertaining, and ultimately triumphant tale.

Praise for *Woman in Battle Dress*

"*Woman in Battle Dress* by Antonio Benítez-Rojo, which has been beautifully translated from the Spanish by Jessica Ernst Powell, is the extraordinary account of an extraordinary person. Benítez-Rojo blows great gusts of fascinating fictional wind onto the all but forgotten embers of the actual Henriette Faber, and this blazing tale of her adventures as a military surgeon and a husband and about a hundred other fascinating things is both something we want and need to hear."—**Laird Hunt**, author of *Neverhome*

"A fascinating novel, in a brilliant translation, about the unique fate of Henrietta Faber who played a gender-bending role in the history of Cuba."—**Suzanne Jill Levine**, noted translator and author of *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions*

"A picaresque novel starring an adventurous heroine, who caroms from country to country around the expanding Napoleonic empire, hooking up with a dazzling array of men (and women) as she goes. A wild ride!"—**Carmen Boullosa**, author of *Texas: The Great Theft*

"Very few novels dare to explore the historical representation of women to the extent that *Woman in Battle Dress* does, with impeccable veracity and bravado."—**Julio Ortega**, Professor at Brown University, author of *Transatlantic Translations*

Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1931–2005) was a Cuban novelist, essayist and short-story writer. He was widely regarded as the most significant Cuban author of his generation. His work has been translated into nine languages and collected in more than 50 anthologies. One of his most influential publications, *La Isla que se Repite*, was published in 1989 by Ediciones del Norte, and published in English as *The Repeating Island* by Duke University Press in 1997.

Jessica Powell has translated numerous Latin American authors, including works by César Vallejo, Jorge

Luis Borges, Ernesto Cardenal, Maria Moreno, Ana Lidia Vega Serova and Edmundo Paz Soldán. Her translation (with Suzanne Jill Levine) of Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo's novel *Where There's Love, There's Hate*, was published by Melville House in 2013. She is the recipient of a 2011 National Endowment for the Arts Translation Fellowship in support of her translation of Antonio Benítez Rojo's novel *Woman in Battle Dress*.

Woman in Battle Dress Details

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Author : Antonio Benítez-Rojo , Jessica Powell (Translation)

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From Reader Review Woman in Battle Dress for online ebook

Maria A. says

It is a good book for those who like detailed history novels. I found it confusing and boring. Not my type of book.

World Literature Today says

This book was featured in the Nota Benes section of the November/December 2015 issue of World Literature Today Magazine.

<http://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2...>

Jenna says

Very much enjoyed the novel's ability to immerse the reader in women's struggles during this time period. Henriette's story, especially because it is based partially in fact, truly resonates with me as a powerful narrative about a young woman trying to make her way in a world that doesn't see her fit enough to make a difference. I only wish the ending had been more satisfying. In the context of the fact that we don't know what happens to the real Henriette in the end, the story's conclusion makes sense. However, I would have appreciated the author creating a satisfying ending for her of his own.

City Lights Booksellers & Publishers says

"Very few novels dare to explore the historical representation of women to the extent that *Woman in Battle Dress* does, with impeccable veracity and bravado. The idea that a woman must pretend to be a man in order to become a physician, and is then punished by being forced back into a woman's identity, only to escape to New Orleans as a fictional character, works as a Stendhal novel in reverse. Napoleonic France and the colonial Caribbean are chartered by men; New Orleans is extraterritorial, ready for a new saga. A true Doña Quijota, Henriette Faber takes on these roles to gain her freedom in a novel, the only modern space larger than life."—Julio Ortega, Professor at Brown University, author of *Transatlantic Translations*

"Reviving the Renaissance and Baroque figure of the *virago*, in Spanish Golden Age theater the *mujer varonil*, Antonio Benítez Rojo creates a fascinating woman protagonist who dresses and acts like a man, mostly as a qualified medical doctor, while participating in major historical events in Europe and the Caribbean. The reader's attention is captivated by the suspense generated by the fear that her true sex will be discovered, and entertained by her wiles in trying to prevent it. *Woman in Battle Dress* is a rich and engaging historical novel."—Roberto González Echevarría, Sterling Professor of Hispanic and Comparative Literature, Yale University, author of *Modern Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction*

Maxine says

Woman in Battle Dress by Cuban author Antonio Benitez Rojo is based on the true story of Henriette Faber. Henriette was born in Switzerland in 1791. In 1809, at the age of 18 and at a time when women were prohibited from studying medicine, she enrolled in medical school disguised as a man. She was drafted into the Napoleonic army and took part in the 1812 retreat in Russia. She eventually emigrated to Cuba where she continued to practice medicine. She eventually married a woman. Three years later, the woman turned her into the authorities and she became the subject of one of Cuba's most sensational trials.

Henriette was a woman who refused to accept the limitations of her time and was willing to suffer the same hardships that would have been considered heroic in a man. Instead, she was humiliated, stripped of her license, imprisoned, forced to dress in women's clothes, and eventually exiled. Yet little has ever been heard of her outside of Cuba. In Woman in Battle Dress, Rojo has taken the bare outlines of her life and written a truly sweeping and engrossing historical novel.

The story is admittedly slow but slow doesn't always mean bad or boring and certainly not in this case. I found myself rereading passages and pages not because I missed something but because I wanted to experience it again. Rojo does an impeccable job of recreating not only Henriette's life but her voice. This was especially true when writing about her experience as she takes part in the army's retreat in the dead of a cold Russian winter – Henriette speaks with the clarity and objectivity of a scientist but despite or perhaps because of this, this section of the novel is truly as chilling as the landscape and experiences she is describing.

Woman in Battle Dress is written in the style of a memoir supposedly as she is on her way to exile in Louisiana and in the dense prose of the era, a style that may be off-putting to some readers. However, for any who are fans of historical novels or the classics, I cannot recommend it highly enough.

4.5

Melanie says

What a story!

Woman in Battle Dress is certainly a story not to be missed. It is compelling, intriguing, and you will be captured from the start. I highly recommend Woman in Battle Dress.

This review is my own and I give it freely.

Waheed Rabbani says

In 1827, Henriette (Enriqueta), a convict, and Madeline, a prostitute, are on a ship bound for New Orleans from Havana. Henriette is being deported and sent to a convent. Bribing the captain, Madeline exchanges her

passport and clothes with Henriette's, which lets Henriette escape. Later, while ensconced in a New York hotel, she pens her memoir.

Henriette Faber was born in 1791 in Switzerland. Orphaned at a young age, she is brought up by her uncle. After her husband, a dashing Hussar, is killed, she poses as a man called Henri and enrolls at the medical school at the Université de Paris at the age of 18. We learn of her service – forbidden to women at that time – as a surgeon in Napoleon's Army and her participation in various campaigns, including the disastrous retreat from Russia in 1812. Henri is captured by Wellington in Spain and then finds her way to Cuba, getting in trouble with another woman and the law there. This captivating account keeps us turning the pages.

This is the last novel by the late Antonio Benitez-Rojo, an acclaimed Cuban author. Using the sparse historical records, he has skillfully reconstructed Henriette/Enriqueta's not-widely-known life story. The exquisitely detailed chronicle, written in the first person and seamlessly translated by Jessica Powell, is a fascinating read. We are taken along with Henriette on her epic journey, hear her thoughts, and observe the joys and pains she experiences while growing up, attending grand balls, having adventures on the battlefield, dealing with slaves, and practicing medicine in the demanding disguise of a man. Although the "telling" format Benítez-Rojo uses for her story can be tiring to read at times, he keeps the novel to a manageable length. This is a valuable addition to existing stories about courageous gender-bending women, and as such it is highly recommended.

This review first appeared in the Historical Novels Review Magazine Issue 75 (February 2016)

Cristina Contilli says

Il libro è la biografia romanzata di Henriette Faber, donna medico nell'esercito francese durante la campagna militare in Russia (si era arruolata per amore di un ussaro), finita prigioniera degli inglesi... un libro avvincente ed avventuroso che mi è stato utile per costruire la figura di Therese Duplessis Hulin in "Amore e rivoluzione"

Mills College Library says

Fiction B467w 2015
