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**Harden, Faith S. Arms and Letters: Military Life Writing in Early Modern Spain**

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**Harden, Faith S.**

***Arms and Letters: Military Life Writing in Early Modern Spain.***

Toronto Iberic. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. Pp. 188. ISBN 978-1-4875-0704-6 (hardcover) CA\$60.

Faith S. Harden has written a significant book with an echo (with a difference) in its title of the first line of Virgil's *Aeneid*, but rather than study epic, she focuses on the life writing of soldiers in early modern Spain. Harden argues that some of the soldiers create a life writing that "situates individual actions of dubious morality in a broader context of economic hardship, social precarity, and existential danger," whereas other soldiers produce autobiographies that "roundly reject any association with dissipation and depravity, opting instead for a sober self-presentation grounded in religious and historiographical discourse" (6). These texts are not introspective but transform even mundane events into important or entertaining deeds, so that noble and non-elite soldiers use their narrative skill and experience for recognition and for an honour that was the domain of aristocratic warriors (6).

For Harden, from the mid-1500s to the late 1700s, "Spanish soldiers produced, circulated, and in some cases published an unprecedented number of autobiographical texts," which she defines "as first-person, retrospective prose narratives that emphasize the author's military service in the course of accounting for a broad life trajectory" (6). These works representing a soldier's life can involve pleas for remuneration, depictions of love and war, eyewitness accounts, and explorations of varying themes and various genres, "including military treatises, martyrs' tales, travel narratives, juridical testimony, the *comedia*, chivalric fiction, and the picaresque novel," creating a "discursive heterogeneity" that "reflects the early modern soldier's diverse social origins and varying degrees of education" (7). Harden examines the autobiographies of men and a woman who come from "the urban artisan classes, impoverished rural hidalgos, and second sons of the titled nobility," each telling unique tales, sharing military culture, stressing "honour and the value of military labour," tracing how they animate the life writing of soldiers in all its diversity (7). Moreover, Harden examines honour, which telescopes a multitude of social relations and embodies, quite visibly, controversy while being revised and transformed from the apparently fixed and hereditary to the mobile and monetary. Harden draws well on the scholarship, including that of J. R. Hale,

while showing that honour was found across society in Spain, having expanded from the connection between honour and arms in the *Siete partidas*, a juridical text compiled in the tenth century by Alfonso X, that defined honour as one of the three pillars of the Iberian nobility (15, 17). For Harden, the technology of war made warfare more democratic, but the language of honour remained. She takes up Stephen Greenblatt's self-fashioning and sees military autobiography in that light, exploring the mutuality of honour and life-writing (see 7, 13). Moreover, Harden discusses the early modern military revolution and the nature of life-writing in early modern Spain. For instance, in examining contexts, she builds on the work of other key scholars, such as Michael Murrin, who explores martial themes from the medieval romance to the early modern epic partly in terms of gunpowder, which had come to Europe from China in the fourteenth century (11). Among many other intriguing points, Harden notes that military autobiography straddles fiction and documentary writing and has a structure of the author's career while also crossing the bounds of the professional (14). While looking at matters of genre and historical changes, that is "the textualization of honour," Harden argues for the uniqueness of each text of military life that she examines (19). She sees two principal kinds—the implicit petitions and texts of fame (20).

In the first chapter, Harden argues that García de Paredes's *Breve suma* combines features of military life writing such as exemplarity and edification, professional pride, aristocratic prerogative, and the practice of arms as ennobling and worthy of self-representation (24–47). The second chapter discusses military life writing that is petitionary and akin to military treatises and historiography—Diego Suárez Corvín's autobiographical sketches and Domingo de Toral y Valdés' *Relación de la vida* (48–79). In the third chapter, Harden continues her discussion of the petition and examines Jerónimo de Pasamonte's *Vida y trabajos* that represents his life, including his capture and enslavement by the Turks, and of the *miles cristianus* (80–108). The fourth chapter returns to "self-novelization," discussed in the first chapter, and entertainment, looking at Miguel de Castro's *Vida* as well as the autobiography attributed to Catalina de Erauso in terms of the culture of lawlessness in the military in Spain (109–40). Harden concentrates on six texts, mainly in chronological order, and makes an important contribution in her analysis of honour, subjectivity, military identity, masculinity, and self through representation.

Harden also gives a good sense of the texture of the works: “In the *Breve suma*, a text that is conspicuously laconic and plagued by chronological inaccuracies, Paredes carefully records the names of his first companions in Italy, Spaniards from all corners of the peninsula who, like him, had relocated to Rome in search of financial opportunities and adventure” (33). For Harden, this soldier’s self-novelization includes “banal details that serve to transmute the historical person into a larger-than-life persona,” providing a model for Paredes’s adolescent son and a “set of ideas” for successors, such as arms are ennobling and chivalric despite new technologies of war and kinds of military labour and the life and honour of a soldier are worth being in autobiographical narratives along with the literary and historical (47). Harden notes “the failure that unites the autobiographical projects of Diego Suárez Corvín and Domingo Toral y Valdés,” both creating, despite no “immediate material benefits,” a “distinctive strategy of self-fashioning” that “allowed the authors to express a sense of their own significance and leave a record of labour that they feared was otherwise ephemeral” (79). In *Vida*, for Harden, Jerónimo de Pasamonte represents “the author’s wounded body” and testifies to his experience and insight “as a literal and figurative Christian soldier whose honour—despite entreaties to debauchery and apostasy—remains intact” (108). According to Harden, “Miguel de Castro and Catalina de Erauso incorporate certain aspects of the picaresque—itsself an inversion of chivalric romance—into their self-presentation” (140). Harden’s volume throws “light on some of the ways in which the idea of honour operates in the life writing of Spanish soldiers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (141). In the study, Harden explores with effect the relation between self and other in the soldiers’ representations of themselves in the world, how honour makes them self-made (149). This is a book readers should make time for and from which they will benefit in making sense of past and present in the drama of meaning between author and audience over time and space.

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