
James Anderson Winn’s heroes are those poets who “have grasped and made real the rich, contradictory emotions that war calls forth in all of us,” not those poets who have “misused their gifts to sustain false versions of honor and chivalry, or to celebrate the creation of empires” (p. 219). The Poetry of War, which discusses both sorts of poets, is organized around six broad themes: honor, shame, empire, chivalry, camaraderie, and liberty. Each of these themes is explored through wide-ranging examples from both classical poets (such as Homer and Virgil) and more modern poets (such as Walt Whitman and Wilfred Owen). Winn’s explications of these poets are models of the literary critic’s craft: sensitive, intelligent, and historically informed.

Winn values most highly not poetic brilliance but poetic truth—which, for him, may be the same thing. The Poetry of War does not discuss art for the sake of discussing art. Rather, Winn wants to show what poetry has to teach us about war, the motivations behind war, and the experiences of men in battle. As well, Winn brings a clear political point of view to The Poetry of War. He is openly critical of the Second Gulf War, openly skeptical of the idea of a “good war,” and openly embarrassed that “The Star-Spangled Banner” is his nation’s anthem. At its core, then, The Poetry of War is a fiercely moral book. Winn is not a literary critic cloistered in his library but a humanist deeply engaged in the real world around him, a writer who argues passionately that poetry has made a difference in the history of the world—both for good and for ill.

While The Poetry of War offers compelling evidence that poetry has played an important role in shaping how both soldiers and civilians have viewed war for thousands of years, another issue remains less clear: Will the poetry of Vietnam or any later war ever play this role again? Poetry, Winn argues, highlights and preserves truths about war that journalists and politicians may ignore or forget. But who in the twenty-first century spends free time reading poetry—contem-
porary or otherwise? With this problem apparently in mind, Winn takes pains to make his discussions of poetry accessible to as many readers as possible. He will not use a term such as *personification* without giving a brief definition (which is the literary equivalent of pausing to remind readers that Gettysburg was a battle in the Civil War). This is as it should be, for Winn is writing not only for his fellow literary scholars but also for anyone who cares about war and truth.

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In his introduction, James Chapman claims that *War and Film* “does not aim to be either a comprehensive survey of the field or a definitive history of the representation of war in film”; nevertheless, his book could “best be described as a ‘minor epic’” (p. 8). Chapman also argues that his book fills a gap in film and cultural studies since the war film remain a “relatively unexplored” field.

While it is true that there are no wide-ranging, transnational studies of war on film, historical studies of individual war films, cinematic violence, genre studies of Hollywood and other national cinemas’ attitudes toward war make an impressive bibliography. While many are doubtless familiar with the classic studies by Michael Isenberg and Lawrence Suid, more recent monographs and edited collections by Robert Brent Toplin (1996), Andrew Kelly (1997), Marilyn Metelski and Nancy Lynch Street (2003), J. David Slocum (2006), and John E. O’Connor and Peter Rollins (2008) have helped to rethink the war film in relation to changing historical contexts of genre, masculinity, and nationalism; have explored television and other media’s impact upon the war film; and have addressed the conflict between the documentation of “history” and the ritualization and stylization of violence on screen. Sadly, Chapman’s book pays little attention to these and other recent interventions in the field. As the book seems to be aimed at an undergraduate market, a bibliography and discussion of the theoretical and historical questions influencing the field may have been useful.

Rather than following the prescriptive, Jeanine Basinger genre format, Chapman presents a loose “conceptual framework” for exploring the representation of war in films. Chapman believes that filmmakers have always seen war as spectacle, tragedy or adventure. He creates his own generic codes, but rather surprisingly, does not anchor them to any historical framework or context. There is no explanation of why filmmakers present a particular battle or war experience a certain way (ie: archival production history), no discussion of other media’s impact on the visual representation of war (popular literature such as James