



## Woman in Battle Dress

*Antonio Benítez-Rojo*

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## **Woman in Battle Dress** Antonio Benítez-Rojo

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 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*

"As detailed as any work of history and as action filled as any swashbuckler, *Woman in Battle Dress* is not only Antonio Benítez Rojo's last and most ambitious book, but also his masterpiece. In this graceful English translation of Henriette Faber's autobiography—more than fiction, less than fact—American readers will have access to one of the most engaging novels to come out of Latin America in recent years."—**Gustavo Pérez-Firmat**, Columbia University

**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, María 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*.

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#### **Vickie Gilbert:**

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