

QUEERING THE *DONÇELLA GUERRERA*

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Changing definitions of gender boundaries are the subject of much theoretical inquiry today, with gender seen as a performative construct, where sexual differences are never simply a function of material differences but are always both marked and formed by discursive practices. The gender ambiguity of the transgendered body can be seen as a contradictory site of postmodernity, both as a symbol for postmodern flexibility and as a legible form of embodied subjectivity (Halberstam 2005: 15-18). Mainstream scholarship of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern, however, has generally remained unaffected by such theoretical questions. This in spite of the groundbreaking "Gay and Lesbian Issue" of the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* as early as 1992 (Matter), followed by a number of other publications in the last decade, such as the collection of articles in *Gender Transgressions* (Taylor 1998), *Queer Iberia* (Blackmore and Hutcheson 1999), *Queering the Middle Ages* (Burger and Kruger 2001), and *Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages* (Sautman and Sheingorn 2001), as well as Goldberg 1994, Fradenburg and Freccero 1996, Fuchs 1997, Delgado and Saint Saëns 2000, Dangler 2001, Pugh 2004, the first section of articles in Cestaro 2004, and Freccero 2006.

My aim here in examining a five-hundred-year old Hispanic ballad, *La donçella guerrera*, is to illustrate how a medievalism theoretically engaged with the present and with an interdisciplinary perspective might lead to a very different understanding of the past. In my estimation, such a framework for the *donçella guerrera* can broaden considerably the horizon in which the ballad can be understood, while at the same time such a richer reading can contribute another chapter to a queering of the Middle Ages. E. Ann Matter (3) has spoken of the need to rewrite compulsory patriarchal discourses of desire and fill in the "blank spaces" where queer desires might have been, for which Gregory Hutcheson cogently offers a new way to read: "we need to approach indirectly perhaps, to cross our eyes, and to read just beyond the text in efforts to bring into focus that which appears to be absent," (265) which, as he adds, is not revisionism, but "a history beyond words."

The core story of the ballad recounts how the youngest of seven daughters of a man too old to serve in war goes off to serve in his stead, disguised as a man. The narrative begins with the father cursing his wife for having given him only daughters, upon which the youngest daughter volunteers to serve in his place. There follows a titillating dialogue where the father objects at each turn that his daughter's female body will betray her: "*They will recognize you by your breasts*" – "*I will flatten them.*" The second part of the story has the cross-dressing girl successfully 'trespass' as a soldier for seven years (only two in some versions). But the handsome king's son, who falls in love with her, on his mother's advice, puts her through a series of tests of sexual identification. The girl is so adept at cross-expressing, that is, performing the vocal and verbal garb and body language associated with the other sex, that she is able to continue her masquerade until she is called upon to go skinny dipping with the young man. To avoid discovery she flees home and rather ambiguously reclaims her femininity. The story ends with the couple presumably married and heterosexual order restored once the gender boundary violations have been righted, or does it?

The *donçella guerrera* ballad continues to be collected from oral tradition throughout the Hispanic world and is known in over a hundred versions, with variants throughout the languages of the Mediterranean, as well as in many other European languages (Vargyas 532-45; Armistead). The story is unusual in that Ragan (xii), who examined over 4,000 folktales, found only a hundred with female heroes who showed intelligence, perseverance, or bravery. Judging not only by the geographic extension of the ballad but by the many extant variants in legends, and in narrative and dramatic form, the underlying theme is of much older mythic origin (Delpech).

A variant of the story is found in Chinese folklore in the person of Mu Lan, the courageous warrior daughter who for twelve years fights as a man, only to return at the end to her home as a silenced wife, in one version kneeling before her parents-in-law and telling them that her public duties finished, she will now provide them with sons. On the other hand, the story has been recycled in some twentieth-century Chinese autobiographies of women as their fantasy of freedom, mostly famously by Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston recounts how, in her youth, rejecting traditional occupations of femininity and wanting to be, among other things, a lumberjack, she played the part of a "bad girl," asking "isn't a bad girl almost a boy?" Kingston also recounts that the Chinese executed girls who masqueraded as soldiers or students, no matter how successfully they had performed (Smith 1063-1078).

Here is a medieval version of the Spanish *romance* (Paloma Díaz Más):

La donçella guerrera

Estaba un día un buen viejo sentado en un campo al sol;
 Pregonadas son las guerras de Francia con Aragón.
 —¿Cómo las haré yo, triste, viejo, cano y pecador?—
 De allí fue para su casa echando una maldición:
 —¡Reventaras tú, María, por medio del corazón!
 que pariste siete hijas y entre ellas ningun varón.—
 La mas chiquita de ellas salió con buena razón:
 —No maldigáis, mi padre; no la maldigáis, non,
 que yo iré a servir al rey en hábitos de varón.
 Compraráisme vos, mi padre, calcetas y buen jubón;
 Daréisme las vuestras armas, vuestro caballo trotón.
 —Conoceránte en los ojos, hija, que muy bellos son.
 —Yo los bajaré a la tierra cuando pase algún varón.
 —conoceránte en los pechos que asoman por el jubón.
 —Esconderélos, mi padre, al par de mi corazón.
 —conoceránte en los pies, que muy menudinos son.
 —Pondréme las vuestras botas bien rellenas de algodón.
 ¿Cómo me he de llamar, padre? ¿Cómo me he de llamar yo?
 —Don Martinos, hija mía, que así me llamaba yo.—
 Y era en palacio del rey y nadie la conoció
 Si no es el hijo del rey que d'ella se enamoró.
 —Tal caballero, mi madre, doncella me pareció.
 —¿En que lo conocéis, hijo? ¿En que lo conocéis vos?
 —En poner él su sombrero y en abrochar el jubón
 y en poner de las calcetas, ¡mi diós, cómo ella las pon!
 —Brindaréisla vos, mi hijo, para en las tiendas mercar:
 si el caballero era hembra corales querrá llevar.—
 El caballero es discreto y un puñal tomó en la man.
 —Los ojos de don Martinos roban el alma al mirar.
 —Brindaréisla vos, mi hijo, al par de vos acostar:
 si el caballero era hembra tal convite no querrá.—
 El caballero es discreto y echóse sin desnudar.
 —Los ojos de don Martinos roban el alma al mirar.
 —Brindaréisla vos, mi hijo, a d'ir con vos a la mar:
 si el caballero era hembra el se habrá de acobardar.—
 El caballero es discreto, luego empezara a llorar.
 —¿Tú que tienes, don Martinos, que te pones a llorar?
 —Que se me ha muerto mi padre y mi madre en eso va;
 si me dieran la licencia fuérala yo a visitar.
 —Esa licencia, Martinos, de tuya la tienes ya;
 ensilla un caballo blanco y en él luego va a montar.—
 Por unas vegas arriba corre como un gavilán,

Por otras vegas abajo corre sin le divisar.
 —Adiós, adiós, el buen rey, y su palacito real,
 que siete años le serví doncella de Portugal
 y otros siete le sirviera si non fuese al desnudar.—
 Oyólo el hijo del rey de altas torres donde está,
 Reventó siete caballos para poderla alcanzar.
 Allegando ella a su casa todos la van abrazar;
 Pidió la rueca a su madre a ver si sabía filar.
 —Deja la rueca, Martinos, no te pongas a filar,
 que si de la guerra vienes, a la guerra has de tornar:
 ya están aquí tus amores, los que te quieren llevar.

Heteronormative sexuality, like other normative regimes, depends on the very terms it attempts to exclude. In this vein, *la donçella guerrera*, part of the broader “warrior maid” motif, plays with the transgressive and anxiety-inducing female to male transgenderism, in part precisely to promote gender appropriate roles. At the same time, a resistant reading is clearly possible because the story’s ludic transgenderism also serves to affirm the permeability of gendered boundaries and highlights the contrived, contingent, and contextualized nature of “male” and “female.” In the second part of this study I will return to a close analysis of this text in such a transgendered perspective. However, first I need to take a somewhat extended “queer” theoretical detour, to set the stage, as it were, for my analysis of the *donçella*’s transgendered performance. Specifically, since key concepts in my analysis are *transgenderism*, *performativity*, and *queer theory*, I need to define further my use of these three terms, particularly as applied to a medieval and renaissance context. If it seems that I am presenting the *donçella*’s story in a strange way, it is because changing the story can change the ‘reality’ and it is arguably at the edge of common sense that new stories can be made and comprehended in new ways.

The current broadest definition of *transgender* is as an all-inclusive term for those whose various forms and degrees of cross-gender practices and identifications are outside the current cultural expectations or norms. It can refer to those who cross-dress, those who are intersexed, and those who live in the opposite societal roles of their physical sex (with or without medical intervention), and those who play with gender expression for any purpose whatever. The term would encompass multiple forms of non-normative gender presentation, gays and lesbians, transvestites, butch women who are straight, femme men who are straight, etc., and transexuals, both those attempting to pass and those whose temporarily hyperbolic enactment is aimed at caricaturing gender binaries (Halberstam 2005: 40; Meyerowitz 9-10).

Transgender studies uses transsexualism as a key queer trope in challenging claims as to the immutability of the gender binary, laying bare the regulatory mechanisms through which sexual difference is enforced. Transsexuals who refuse to identify themselves as 'female' or 'male' radically deconstruct sex and gender, as, for example, in Leslie Feinberg's aptly named *Transgendered Warriors*, and also Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw*, who refuses to legally conform "hir" sex to "hir" expression of gender, instead questioning society's need to categorize by sex.

Another useful term in regard to transgenderism is the concept of female masculinity, as in the transgendered performance of the 'drag king,' often considered a temporary performed presentation of the self, which Judith Halberstam defines as "female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume (1998: 232)." Compare also Kath Browne's analysis of the female masculinities of women who consciously, overtly and hyperbolically perform maleness and the male readings of their bodies which they take to be men. Garber (1992: 16-17) defines transgenderism as a "category crisis," a failure of definitional distinctions, a borderline that becomes permeable and permits border crossings, a definition that is particularly appropriate in the case of the *donçella guerrera*, where a young girl's passing as a man allows her to trespass not only from private/female life to public/male life, but also to cross psychic and sexual borders, as well as, literally, geographic borders.

Judith Halberstam (1998) points out that in popular cultural representations, such as Hollywood films, the cross-dressed woman and the masculine woman, such as career women and Western heroines represent a certain sexual allure, what Adrienne Martín, in the context of homoerotic Golden Age burlesque poetry, refers to as fantastic or wishful voyeurism. Compare also other cross-dressing Hollywood fantasies, as of Katherine Hepburn in the 1935 *Sylvia Scarlett*, with slicked-back hair, pants, and a man's shirt collar framing her face (Villarejo). At the same time, they have very proscribed transgressive possibilities, as in the end, after providing spectators with momentary, vicarious trespassing of society's boundaries for sexual and gender behavior, order is always restored in terms of her full heterosexual womanhood. Compare in this context Tania Modleski on the cultural fascination with female-to-male cross-dressing in Westerns, from nineteenth-century, dime-store fiction through films, as in the *Ballad of Little Jo*, where it is only after assuming the identity of a man to avoid sexual victimization that Little Jo gains self knowledge, outdoing other men in manliness, and in the end choosing to remain a "man" and not return to the domestic sphere. Halberstam (2005: 55) refers to this as a

rationalizing narrative about gender passing, where a passing woman in postbellum America is assigned a supposed economic motive for her behavior. Modleski also contrasts Calamity Jane, one of the most famous female cross-dressers in the Western novel, who proved to be too masculine, so that in her 1953 reincarnation in the musical comedy *Calamity Jane*, with Doris Day, after many adventures she does marry and returns to her proper femininity. Modleski concludes that the character of Little Jo, a figure at once male and not male, in the *Ballad of Little Jo* suggests that having to choose between gendered alternatives may be the true source of people's simultaneous unease and attraction. It is for this reason that transvestite narratives for mainstream audiences seek to control and naturalize this potential instability.

While there exist a number of studies on the general theme of cross-dressing, with the exception of (sometimes bearded) female saints (Heise, Davis), these are more likely to deal with male to female cross-dressing (Kuhn, Counihan, Orgel, Bullough and Bullough, Bullough, Hotchkiss, Busby, Griggs; but contrast Thompson, Dekker and van de Pol, Bertin, Straub, Solomon, Holmes, Suthrell). In any case, these studies tend to focus on masquerade and not on deeper issues of gender or sexual identity. Some studies deal with the cross-dressed warrior maids in historical cases studies (Fraser, Salas, Juárez, Burshatin, Perry, Erauso, Velasco), with the English tradition (Wheelwright), a few with the focus on Hispanic literary tradition (Slater, Irizarry, Dugaw), usually not from a theoretical perspective. Theoretical studies on transsexualism (Ekins and King), on the other hand, tend not to deal with literature, and certainly not with premodernity, except perhaps with some attention to Shakespeare (Bennett). An engaging study in this latter vein is by Sennett and Bay-Cheng, who describe their own very complex drag king performance of the love scene in *Twelfth Night*, with some useful parallels to the *donçella guerrera*, between Viola, dressed as her master Orsino, with whom she is secretly in love, nevertheless wooing Olivia on his behalf, with Olivia, in turn, falling in love with Viola in her male persona of Cesario. Here, too, heterosexual order is tidily restored with the timely appearance of Viola's twin brother, which allows Olivia to transfer her homoerotic attachment to a more appropriate mate.

Mainstream medieval scholarship is characterized by opinions such as that of Busby, who states that we cannot speak properly of transvestism in medieval narratives because disguises are used only to develop narrative. Nevertheless, a few studies on medieval female to male transsexuals, as in the study by Perret and Greenhill, have shown how the theme of cross-dressing in literature is an opportunity to hint at homosexuality, a taboo so powerful that few texts can deal with it

directly, and it also allows reflecting on what is innate versus acquired in gender and sexual identity. Hess (2004) correlates female cross-dressers in the thirteenth-century romance with other hybrids, such as the fantastic marginalia of medieval illustrated manuscripts, all of which function as a frame, critiquing discourses that run through their texts, challenging the accepted order (see also Dangler [2005: 114] on *Celestina's* monstrous body). Gaunt (1990) and Burr (2004), like Perret, discuss the late thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence*, where because of prohibitions against inheritance through the female line from birth Silence is raised by her parents as a male, with her father covering her sex at the christening so that the priest will not realize that she is female. In adolescence, her beautiful body covered by boy's garb and her hair cut, Silence becomes a loyal vassal of the king, at the same time being the object of desire of males and females alike, and causing both political and social confusion. The lustful queen Eufeme (whose name bizarrely differs by only one letter from that of Silence's mother, Eufemie) repeatedly tries to seduce the cross-dressed Silence, and failing to do so accuses him/her of attempted rape. At the same time she also takes a lover, who dons nun's garb to be near her. The queen's sexual attraction to such transgendered men places her outside the acceptable limits of heterosexuality and she ends up being condemned to being torn apart by horses. Meanwhile, Silence, in spite of also having transgressed gender norms, but in whom masculine values, male persona, and male sense of honor coincide, gets to replace Eufeme as queen of England by marrying King Ebain, who is actually the uncle of Silence's father. Like Mulan in the Chinese story, Silence signals her total acquiescence to accepting a female role but declaring that she will forever silence herself.

Also of interest is Watt's (2003) study of gender transgression in cross-dressing narratives in Gower, where male cross-dressing is depicted as a sign of effeminacy and vice, while gender rebels who dress as men, such as Silence, are often viewed as emblems of masculine virtue. This in spite of the fact that all women who assume male positions of authority and male clothing are, in Cynthia Rowe's (1995: 131) term, "unruly," or grotesque. Interestingly, Italian Renaissance literature is replete with female characters, including several in the *Decameron* who dress as men, most being tales of amorous intrigues and *beffe*, and *novelle* derived from the ancient Greek romances, in which the female protagonists must disguise themselves to be able to move about in the world, either to right wrongs done to them or to reunite with their lovers (Nissen 2003).

In narratives of women passing temporarily as men it is not so much sex as gender roles that are being explored, with the ultimate

aim being the eventual taming of the woman into her acceptance of the culture's ideology of heterosexuality and her subordinate role in it. If most tales achieve closure with marriage, it is because the unruly female protagonist must be domesticated into the discourse of women's proper place. In this sense, warrior maid stories, as much as taming of the shrew tales, which I have studied elsewhere (Vasvari 1999a, 2002, 2004) reflect prenuptial rites, but where in the latter it is the husband's duty and privilege to do the taming through physically abusing and sexually terrorizing his bride, in tales of the warrior maid the heroine first gets a chance to live an alternate life for a proscribed period, what Simone de Beauvoir (356) called a "comedy of escape," before voluntarily reverting to her assigned role. More eloquently, Halberstam (2006: 2, 6-7) has spoken of "queer time" and "queer space," where a character can leave the temporal frame of bourgeois reproduction and family, where queer subculture provides alternative temporalities that lie outside the paradigmatic markers of straight life experience: birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.

As theorists of gender have shown, gender is not a stable identity but rather one tenuously accomplished in daily life within a very rigid regulatory frame in light of normative conceptions and activities appropriate to one's sex category, which congeal over time to produce the appearance of a natural sort of being. More specifically, *performativity*, as popularized by Judith Butler (1990; also West and Zimmerman, Marcus) in an attempt to "trouble" the meaning of gender, proposes that there exists no natural male or female gender but rather that the appearance of having a gender is produced by a set of extended, repeated and stylized acts performed within a specific historical, political, and cultural context. As there is no gender inherently belonging to bodies, such identity is constituted by the very expressions that are said to be the results of gender, so that the construction of gender ends up being both the product and the process of its representation. Butler (1990: 30) also underlines that since gender must be continually reproduced, its structure is always vulnerable to mutation and subversion, or as she reiterates in a later work, "the norm has a temporality that opens it to a subversion from within and to a future that cannot be fully anticipated" (2000: 21). Butler (1993: 64-65, 95) also argues that bodies take shape in response to norms, and that the process of materializing and reproducing norms can also change norms because norms depend precisely on what they exclude, so that heterosexuality at its most normative is organized around homosexuality. Butler uses examples of butch-femme lesbianism and drag to highlight how these and other non-status quo gender

performances bring into relief the constructed status of the fiction of the male/female binary.

From my perspective as a linguist, more concretely illustrative of transgressive gender performativity than Butler's philosophical work are sociolinguistic studies such as those of Barrett and Hall. Barrett studied the drag performance of an African American drag queen who simultaneously cross-expresses across gender, racial, and social boundaries when she performs hyper-femininity of a pregnant, middle class white woman, not as an imitation of women but as a potentially highly political deconstructive force working to undermine the rigidity of prescriptive gender roles. Hall illustrated the concept of cross-expressing, or the performance of the vocal and verbal garb associated with the other sex, through a linguistic study of twelve telephone sex call workers—the "call girls,"—eleven of whom were females of a variety of ages, ethnicities, and sexual orientations, and one was a Mexican-American bisexual male, all of whom custom tailored to caller specification a variety of stereotypes of female language, ranging from bimbo to nymphomaniac to transvestite, lesbian and dominatrix, with the only constant being that all were most successful in performing identities other than their own, and with the male being the most versatile and successful performer of female personae. This study, just as Fuch's (also Ramey) analysis of transvestism as border-crossing in the *Quijote*, shows that gender and religious/ethnic passing are often confused, and that the most interesting cases of transvestism occur at borders of all sorts, as they reflect the anxieties surrounding both kinds of differences simultaneously.

For a "real life" female to male impersonation, see the studies by McElhinny, where a policewoman describes how she has to act in a masculine occupational persona in order to survive in a male-gendered workplace. In addition to dressing in bulky, oversized clothing, she adopts a laconic style, at the same time replete with obscenities, an economy of affect being a requirement of male police work, which she succinctly summarizes by "I don't smile much anymore."

Still one more example of female transgenderism is tomboyism, where a girl behaves in ways considered socially appropriate for boys, and with which straight society copes by trying to dismiss it as a passing phase which girls will grow out of. In fact, it is a frequent theme in twentieth-century lesbian literature and coming-out stories (Yamaguchi and Barber, McEwen, Rottneck, Zimmerman 771-72).

Most work on temporary transgressive performativity, including Butler's, has been on more visible drag queens, the term drag king not yet having wide currency, no doubt because the watching of women's bodies as a cultural practice has made the drag queen body also more

visible. Female to male drag has only recently begun to receive critical attention, notably in Halberstam and a series of articles in a special issue of *GLQ* (Stryker), *The Journal of Gender Studies* (Whittle), and of the *Journal of Homosexuality*, "The Drag King Anthology" (Sennett and Bay-Cheng, Pauleney, Schacht, also published as Troka). Hubman consists of series of photographs, which can help us imagine the ludic performativity of what a modern-day *donçella guerrera* might look like, with fake facial hair and other obvious accoutrements of masculinity. However, some actual female to male cross-dressing is far from ludic and functions rather as a mode of survival, as was discussed recently in the *New York Times* (Sciolino & Fathi), where in Tehran many runaway girls disguise themselves as boys in order to protect themselves. One girl, in resisting the efforts of a male psychiatrist to question her, "her legs spread, her hands securely planted on her knees, she responded to most of his questions with a hard stare." She had also drawn a faint moustache on her face with an eyebrow pencil, covered her head with a baseball cap and obscured the shape of her body under a baggy shirt and pants. Only after she was undressed at a hospital did the doctors discover her gender. When asked why she dressed like a boy, she answered: "I was more comfortable like this. No one bothered me. I wouldn't have been able to survive."

Transgenderism and *performativity* are components of the broader inclusive rubric of *queer theory*, which seeks to destabilize the assumed naturalness of the social order by reading between and outside the lines of the dominant heteronormative discourses about cultural formation and authority; it also means to be a theoretical discourse that studies how mainstream reproductive heterosexuality comes to be [re]produced through popular cultural narratives as natural, self-evident, desirable, privileged, and obligatory (Sullivan 1-2, Vasvári 2006: 2).

Of particular relevance to this issue is Goldberg's and Menon's critique in their "Queering History," which maintains that while the Renaissance, and history in general, has been studied as historical alterity or difference, at the same time it has largely ignored queer difference, and privileged hetero-history. They propose that history as it has been studied is inadequate, due to what they term the "compulsory heterotemporality" of historicism. In its stead they propose "homohistory," which is not the history of homosexuality but is rather the investigation of the possibilities of the non-hetero and taking stock of different desires in all periods, what others have called queering the past.

Complementing Goldberg's and Menon's proposal for homohistory is Marcus's (201, 205) observation that while queer studies is an

important component of gender studies, it is neither equivalent nor analogous to the former. First, queer theory, rather than focusing narrowly on sexuality and/or sexual practices, aims to consider critiques of normalizing ways of knowing and of being that may not always initially be evident as sex-specific. Queer theory—by queering, making strange, delegitimizing, camping heteronormative knowledges and institutions—studies the extensive range of ways in which notions of sexuality and gender impact—at times implicitly—on everyday life. Second, in also providing more refined ways to think about all kinds of sex, queer studies has, like feminism, expanded the definition of what counts as sexuality. In queer studies today *sexuality* often does not refer primarily to gender or sex; instead it can mean affect, kinship, social reproduction, the transmission of property, the division between public and private, and the construction of race and nationality. Marcus (209) gives the example from Laura Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism*, which shows that Radclyffe Hall's 1929 trial brought lesbianism into the public sphere but also points out that earlier ignorance about lesbianism allowed relationships to flourish that would wilt under later policing. Doan offers convincing evidence that in the 1920's women in masculine clothing were not perceived as lesbians – or even masculine; instead, trousers and the right short haircut were the ultimate in modern, youthful, feminine chic. What now looks like gender inversion and has therefore been interpreted as lesbian style was in fact a new type of femininity that once signified trendiness rather than deviance. Halberstam (1998) offers a similar caveat against collapsing gender and sexuality when she argues against reading all instances of female masculinity as lesbianism.

Finally, after this rather extended theoretical introduction, we can turn back to the analysis of the text of the *donçella guerrera*, but, by way of transition let me end this section with an intriguing text which foregrounds all the same questions of transgenderism, sexual identity, gender role, and courtship politics, and the challenging of the cultural functions of gender boundaries that we have discussed so far. The song, "Woman or a Man?" by the English guitarist and singer-songwriter Richard Thompson, was recorded on his 1984 album *Small Town Romance*. Here are its lyrics, where the transgendered she-male is being (mis)read by a male observer, who in his confusion constantly repeats the refrain *I couldn't tell . . . if she is/was a woman or a man* (Epstein 99):

I stepped on the dance floor feeling very cool
I thought I saw an angel sitting on a stool
I just couldn't tell, you'll think I'm a fool
If she was a woman or a man.

She was the kind of woman that a man could crave
 From her high-heeled shoes to her permanent wave
 Except maybe she was needing a shave
 Was she a woman or a man?

Oh I asked her to dance and I took her by the hand
 She held me so tight it was hard for me to stand
 Built like a lumberjack I couldn't understand
 If she was a woman or a man.

Well, I walked her home it was quarter past four
 My heart was thumpin' as we ducked in the door
 And then when she kissed me I thought I was sure
 If she was a woman or a man.

Oh she stole my wallet and she knocked me off my feet
 She tied on her roller skates, made her retreat
 All I found was a blond wig a'lyin' in the street
 Was she a woman or a man?

Well, I don't care if she seemed unkind
 She stole my heart as she robbed me blind
 I love her so much that I still wouldn't mind
 If she was a woman or a man.

As Epstein says, the song's energy comes from its juxtaposition of culturally opposed sexual markers. A woman in high-heeled shoes but built like a lumberjack and needing a shave suggests a kind of seductiveness in "the very plasticity of gender designations" (100).

La doncella guerrera

In my initial synopsis of the ballad I described a medieval version documented in Díaz Más. Here I propose to create a composite text, or perhaps better, a deep-structure text, incorporating details from modern Peninsular and Sephardic variants, and even other languages, in particular to highlight elements relevant to the *donçella's* gender crossing (Menéndez Pidal, Leader, Zahon, Armistead and Silverman 1977, Armistead and Silverman 1981, Armistead 1981, Slater, Vargyas, Librowitz, Cruz-Sáenz).

The ballad may begin with narrative verses introducing an old man, "un buen viejo/ viejo y cano," in one Sephardic version, eighty-one years old, who is sometimes labeled "conde, capitán," even "rey." He begins to lament that he is too old to go to war, perhaps between "Francia y Aragón," but generally with the location left unspecified.

The ballad can also start *in medias res* with a male voice cursing his wife—"reventarás por medio del corazón"—for having given birth to seven daughters and no son who could take his place. Although seven is the most common number given, perhaps echoing the *Siete infantes de Lara*, the number of daughters can range from nine to only one. They are usually referred to as *hijas*, but occasionally with more biologically-marked emphasis, as *hembras*, in either case in opposition to the male *varón*. Ironically, although all are daughters, the masculine plural can be used—"siete hijos . . . ninguno fue varón"—to emphasize that although the old man had seven children or offspring, none was a boy.

Hearing the father's outburst against his wife, all the terrorized females in the family "callan a una vez." In one version it is then the father himself, who asks his first two daughters, in turn, if they are willing to serve in his stead, but it is only the third and youngest who volunteers. However, most commonly the females in the family remain invisible and it is only "la más chiquita" who dares to speak up to the father. In one version, perhaps in anticipation of her future role, she is introduced with the epic epithet "que en buena hora nació," a contaminated hemistich from the *Cid*. She tells her father that he should not have cursed her mother, sometimes also adding a religious note to shame him further: "que si madre no tiene hijos, es porque no se los dio Dios." Unbidden, she offers to go off to fight "en hábitos" or "vestidita de varón." Sometimes she asks first for her father's arms and a horse, but, more often, for male clothing, "calcetas" and "buen" or "apretado jubón," that is, male-covering for both the upper and lower body, with the implication that the vest needs to be tight so that it can strap down her breasts.

There follows a dialogue between the father and daughter in "adecant pairs," typical of ballad dialogue, that can include question-and-answer sequences, offers and acceptances or rejections, greeting followed by greeting. Here the exchange is a series of the father's objection followed by the daughter's rejoinder. Such formulaic exchanges have a ritual quality, where the protagonists seem shaped by their words rather than shaping their utterances themselves (Leith). At the core of ballads in general, whose verses are overwhelmingly in dialogue, is the emotional interaction of a limited number of characters. Here this initial dialogue between the father and daughter will be paralleled by a second dialogue of equal length between the king's son and his mother, culminating in some versions with a briefer exchange between the daughter and her father on her return home, or between the young couple after the king's son has pursued her home.

The father attempts to dissuade his daughter from going off to war with a series of three objections, each pointing out her unsuitability for passing as a man. First, he says that they will recognize her by her beautiful eyes, to which she replies that she will lower them (when a man passes by), or that she will affect a real *macho* “do not mess with me” look: “yo los revolveré, padre, como si fuera un traidor.” Next, he warns that her perhaps too ample breasts peeking out of her vest will give her away, but she counters that she will tie them down: “esconderélos al par de mi corazón.” Finally, he protests that her feet are much too small for a man, but she counters that she will wear *his* boots, stuffed with cotton!

As we can see, this sequence progresses from head to toe, with the assumption that the girl’s essential femaleness, which no sartorial disguise can camouflage, resides in her eyes, an essentialist view of gender that will be confirmed when the king’s son usually falls in love with the girl’s eyes, which will lead him to begin to suspect that she may not be who she seems. In later versions, as also in some foreign ones, the obvious detail missing in the medieval version of the inconvenience of the girl’s long hair, or braids, is mentioned by the father, or, occasionally, the mother, to which the daughter answers that she will cut it or hide it under a hat: “si llevo el pelo largo, ya me lo recortaré. / Una vez bien recortado, un varón pareceré.” In some modern versions it will be the girl’s hair that will give her away, when her cap falls off in battle. Also sometimes mentioned are her pale face, which she offers to burn in the sun so that she can become *morena*, and/or also her white hands, which she proposes either to expose to the sun by taking off her gloves, or, alternately, to hide them in gloves (on the sexual implications of becoming a *morena* see Vasvari 1999). This whole bodily catalogue of the *donçella* ultimately offers a kind of titillating reverse striptease, potentially enjoyable by straight and queer audiences alike.

In some versions the description of this artefactual reconstruction of self is limited to the most basic level of sartorial disguise, but others have a more sophisticated understanding that successful gender crossing also requires learning male body language and male discourse, as in one Hungarian version where the girl learns to walk in a manly way. For women to pass successfully as men in real life often a deliberate effort is made to eliminate any suggestion of “femininity” from movements, gestures, and the use of space, as well as in displaying the desired body language, from holding a cigarette to how to squint, a pride in toughness, often self-defined as “out-macho-ing” men (Crowder 52). On the other hand, maybe it is not unreasonable to posit a mere superficial masquerade, as after all, the girl will not be trying

to pass as a mature bearded man but as a more androgynous-looking youth. As Kulick discusses in his “Transgender and Language,” while being and speaking as a woman involves a wide range of skills and a complicated set of procedures that requires careful adherence to details about how to walk, talk, sit, eat, dress, move and display affect, widespread cultural attitudes hold that being a man is self-evident. This is consistent with the fact that whereas female to male transsexuals generally feel the need for few or no medical interventions, many male to female transsexuals—or for that matter, heterosexual women, also—spend a lifetime trying to stylize their bodies, behavior, and language. In this context the following quote from the drag king performer Pelvis Parsley is elucidating:

Men don’t move because they don’t have to. They take up twice the space that women do, and then some. When I’m a boy, I don’t have to wave my hands because with the simple addition of facial hair and pair of boots I have doubled in size! (Koenig 151)

When Parsley is asserting the wider circle of personal space that goes with being male, he is essentially saying that a little facial hair and boots symbolically give males this power. Now, the *donçella* does not seem in any variant to be concerned with prosthetic facial hair. Unlike the real-life Iranian teenage runaway quoted above, who drew on a faint mustache with eyebrow pencil, she never hides behind facial hair. However, she is certainly concerned about the male value of her father’s borrowed boots. It is very common for transsexuals to try to conceal telltale body parts, by tucking in the penis or binding the breast, as she does, but normally more important than concealment is to imply certain body parts of the other sex, such as falsies, displaying a bulk in the pants, or wearing a false beard (Ekins and King). This leads to the conjecture that a boot is sometimes not just a boot, but that the bulky cotton wad in those male boots, as an extension for the leg, plays the role of a prosthetic penis (Sp. *calzar a una mujer*, Eng. *the third leg* ‘penis,’ or Sp. *pie peludo* ‘leg’ (because the penis does not have hair).

The first part of the three-part ballad can end with the cross-dressing, or there may follow one or two more verbal exchanges, now initiated by the daughter, who asks her father the all-important question: what name should she adopt to make her gender change complete. By now acquiescing to her plan, he advises that she should name herself after him, ironically thus giving new birth to his last-born daughter, now transformed into his first-born son. In one medieval version, after asking her father to rename her, our heroine has one last request, that he teach her how to talk like a man when she gets to

court, and he instructs: “Besóos la mano, buen rey, / las cortes las guarde Dios.”

In all versions of the ballad the nameless *hija* is provided with a full named identity only *after* she has transitioned as a man; indeed, it is being called by this new name (or in one case, only *soldadito*) that indicates the change. Nevertheless, this important break is not always foregrounded, and the second section may simply begin with a new name, Martinos, or perhaps Marcos, or the more *frappant* Oliveros, the last obviously because of its epic connotations. Compare in this context the ludic version of gender renaming of drag king performers, who may take on stage names such as *Lizerace*, *Buster Hymen*, *Pelvis Parsley*, *Mo Be Dick*, or *Muff E. Oso*. A Portuguese version almost competes with these, as the *donçella* makes her appearance in the second part as *Dão Barão*, or Spanish *Don Baron*, etymologically and phonologically equivalent to “Don Varón,” not all that far from *Mo Be Dick*, after all.

Many body migrants speak of starting a new life, of being reborn, but the *donçella*'s disguise allows her an actual migration, and we learn in the first verse of the second section that that she's been passing for seven (occasionally only two) years—“Siete años sirvió al rey y ninguno la conoció”—no one, that is, except the king's son (or a captain) who fell in love with her. He confides in his mother (and in one Portuguese version, in both parents) that “tal caballero, mi madre, doncella me pareció.” Sometimes he laments “de amores me muero, madre, de amores me muero yo,” a contaminated line from lyric ballads, and normally a daughter's *querella de amor*.

There follows an extended dialogue between the mother and son, paralleling the earlier dialogue between the girl and her father. This may begin by her asking what has awakened his suspicion and he may reply that it is how the girl puts on her hat and clothes, or, with more detail: “en el poner del sombrero, que lo pone con dolor, / en el montar de a caballo, que lo monta con dolor.” But the main part of this section consists of a sequence of three, perhaps four, sexual tests that the mother suggests her son set for the young soldier. In foreign versions these may include tests of strength, throwing, jumping, running, rifle throwing, swimming across a river, but in Hispanic versions they are never tests of endurance but age-old folkloric tests to trick her into reverting to her female ways. First the mother advises that to test *si es caballero o hembra* a refrain which is repeated at each turn, that he should take her shopping and if she admires the jewels, or the fabrics, she is an *hembra*. But the *caballero es discreto* and instead shows interest in a dagger. Next the mother suggests that her son ask the *caballero* to spend the night, but he passes this test, too, by keeping his clothes on. Or she may suggest he take him to the orchard and if he is a woman she will

admire the flowers, but the astute *caballero* is smart enough to cut an ash rod instead with which to whip his horse. In another version of the test the mother suggests an apple orchard and says that a girl will pick the apples, but the son reports back that the other knights picked apples but “el caballero Oliveros con desprecio las miraba,” that is, he was more *macho* than any of the other men. Or the mother may suggest throwing rings into his/her lap and if s/he is a man he will bring his knees together, but if s/he separates them s/he is a woman. Or she may suggest that her son invite the knight to dinner and if he chooses the lower chair she is a woman, but the knight chooses the higher chair, and if he slices the bread against his chest he is a woman, but the knight, being wise, speared the bread and cheese with the tip of his knife. Finally, the mother suggests that her son invite the knight to go skinny dipping. At this the youth begins to cry, saying he has just received news that his father is dying, or has just died (or, for good measure, that the father has died and the mother is dying) and asks license to leave, which is readily granted.

The final section, in the version reproduced above, begins with the false knight mounting her white horse and fleeing, crying out behind her: “que siete años le serví, donçella de Portugal / y otros siete le sirviera si non fuese al desnudar.” The implication is that she would have continued in her male life—in Halberstam’s terms her seven years of escape into queer space and temporality—if she hadn’t been in danger of being found out. The king’s son, hearing her words, pursues her at full speed. On arriving home she shows similar doubts when asking for her distaff, symbol of her return to her female role, because she says “a ver si sabía filar,” to see if I can still live in this life. The final three verses in this version are also ambiguous because in this version an unidentified voice suggests: “Deja la rueca, Martinos, no te pongas a filar, / que si de la guerra vienes, a la guerra has de tornar.” A last verse does add that “aquí están tus amores, / los que te quieren llevar,” which could be read as the voice of the king’s son who has overtaken her, as the editorial footnote tries to suggest, but this verse sounds far more like an illogical contaminated verse tacked on to provide closure.

In some other versions the ending is much more clearly sexualized. The most extreme may be a South Slavic ballad where the girl, rather than fleeing on a horse, swims across to the other shore and from there she flashes her breast to the knights to make fun of their not having caught on to her identity. In another version when she arrives home there is no mention of a family welcome but only of her father’s cold interest in whether she returned with her *honra* intact, to which she can reply: “Yo con honra vengo, padre, porque la llevé de acá.”

In another version, which is the best known one since it has been edited by Menéndez Pidal (199-203), it is the girl herself who brags about having conserved her virginity and here she clearly signals her intention to return to her female role. At the same time she taunts her pursuer to try to catch her:

¡Corre, corre, hijo del rey,
 que no me habrá de alcanzar
 hasta en casa de mi padre,
 si quieres irme a buscar!
 Campanitas de mi iglesia,
 ya os oigo repicar,
 puentecito, puentecito
 del río de mi lugar,
 una vez te pasé virgen,
 virgen te vuelvo a pasar.
 Abra las puertas mi padre,
 ábralas de par en par.
 Madre, sáqueme la rueca,
 que traigo ganas de hilar,
 que las armas y el caballo
 bien los supe manejar.
 Tras ella el hijo del rey
 a la puerta fue a llamar.

Besides the same preoccupation with virginity as in the preceding version, the sexual tension is signaled both by her taunting her suitor and by the verse “ábralas de par en par,” a contamination from the ballad of the - *moraima*, where it symbolizes sexual intercourse, as I document elsewhere (Vasvári 1999: 74-91). In a Portuguese version the whole ending is truncated, with the king’s son insisting that he will accompany Dão Barão home. When they arrive her father asks: What is this, Don Baron, who is with you, and she replies, “It is your son-in-law, sir / who is going to marry me.”

Marriage is even more conventionally spelled out in a version where the king’s son formally asks for the girl’s hand and the father replies that she is too poor to marry him but he responds: *conde*, marry your other two daughters to *caballeros*, but this one is going to marry a prince (De Cossio and Maza Solano no. 3-6). Nevertheless, in the same collection there is another version (6-7: no. 267), where when the young “Oliveros” rides off, he doesn’t even wait for his pay, and one last line,[the king’s son] “reventó siete caballos y no la fue de alcanzar,” suggests no conventional happy ending.

As we have seen, there is considerable variety in the endings, ranging from the traditional heteronormative happy ending in marriage

to potentially resistant to hegemonic discourses of sexuality and “authentic” femininity. The question, already much discussed in regard to Kate’s final soliloquy in Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, is: which is the masquerade, the drag or the female passivity?

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