

Lord Byron's Maid of Saragossa: Reconstructing Heroism

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Abstract

In regards to gender, Byron has not only highlighted the role of males, but also of females as warriors who can triumph as future political leaders. Though he is not outspoken about the subversion of gender roles, his works clearly reveal that. A close examination of Byron's poetic corpus reveals that he does not always comply with gender roles but tends to challenge unyielding patriarchy by destabilizing the traditional conventions of femininity. Using the theories of Jack Halberstam's female masculinity and Judith Butler's gender performance, this paper argues that, for Byron, heroism is an androgynous act. In effect, he re-examines gender stereotyping by reshaping conventions of nationalism through his depiction of an androgynous/intersexual character of the "unsexed", self-empowered Maid of Saragossa, who physically and vehemently breaks free from oppressive patriarchal gender codes while asserting her femininity. In this manner, Byron undermines the conventional ideals of masculine militancy by portraying an uncompromising feminine combativeness through an ideal heroine, a feminized icon of unique, inherent civic virtues of retaliation, sacrifice, dedication and courage. He thus reinforces an unconventional social outlook – the empowerment of womanhood.

Keywords: Byron, female masculinity, gender performance, Maid of Saragossa, shero
"Noble examples excite us to noble deeds." (Lucius Seneca)

Introduction

As early as 1800, Lord Byron's narrative poems, had found a place for women in politics and encouraged them to claim their voice in governing nations. Aligning women to nations and the battlefield is an innovative way to refashion Romantic poetry. As such, the resonance of a feminized

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patriotism and nationalism in the poetry of a 19th century aristocratic poet is worth mentioning, especially his poem, “The Maid of Saragossa” whose heroine is the first transgressing character to transcend gender codes. It offers strong and direct evidence that Byron is avidly interested in leading female personages whether fictional or nonfictional and that he is aware that poetry should also speak to a female audience.

Heroism, as treated by Byron, assumes an original direction in the sense that it denies the separation of genders. Therefore, confusing the boundaries of femininity and masculinity becomes the ultimate expression of Byronic heroism. Such a complicated representation of the image of heroism is unparalleled in Romantic male-authored texts. Patently, androgynous heroism is a revolutionary Byronic creation which intimates that heroism is regenerative.

Literature Review

The nature of heroism is undeniably controversial. According to Robert Gerwarth (2009), from a European perspective, heroes have always been associated with “male virility and strength while the unheroic ‘other’... was often feminized” (p. 385); thus, heroism has been accredited to manliness. In the same fashion, Margery Hourihan (1997) ruminates that “heroism is gendered” since heroic traits ascribed to males include: “courage, single-minded devotion and goal, stoicism, self-confidence, certitude, extroversion and aggression” (p. 68).

What if a woman, such as the Maid of Saragossa, who reinforces prototypical hero behavior of control, power, aggression and action, shares these exact attributes? How can heroic conduct be gendered then? That is, why do other critics, such as Lee Edwards (1979) in “The Labors of Psyche: Toward a Theory of Female Heroism,” acknowledge heroism’s genderless nature: “heroism itself is an asexual or omniseual archetype” (p. 44)? Gendered heroism has no grounds in the poetry of Byron since he displays interest in the duality of heroism by eliminating the idea that men are superior and women are inferior as witnessed throughout his portrayal of the Maid of Saragossa who reveals masculinity as well as femininity.

Considering Byron’s female heroines, some critics deny their textual existence: “Byron, with all his intensity and experience, has drawn no heroine of any merit [...] He has no power of delineating human nature” (Anon, 1896, p. 391). Such a short-sighted observation could be refuted throughout the analysis of Byron’s literary treatment of the compelling character of the Maid of Saragossa. Moreover, Rowan Bridgwood (2010-2011) argues that Byron “reduc[es] his empowered female characters to stereotypical passivity” (p. 502) because these female heroines encroach gender codes. Such a claim is somehow unpersuasive since the majority of Byron’s empowered and rebellious females who subvert gender stereotypes are renowned for their active performance. Additionally, in *The Spirit of the Age*, William Hazlitt (1932) retrains Byron’s heroines to

yielding slaves: Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave... and with these two characters, burning or melting in their own fires, he makes out everlasting centos of himself (p. 71).

Having said that, it could be deduced that Hazlitt dooms Byronic females as passive. This condescending assumption cannot be true.

Methodology

In the beginning of 1999, there was noticeable change in the discernment of gender. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* written by Judith Butler (2002) played a crucial role in altering the traditional gender perception which evolved from “being” or “having” into “doing” as defined by Butler. Thus, gender became performative and gender identity became constructive: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 2002, pp. 43-44). Accordingly, *doing* gender is constructed via repeated acts through various contexts and paradigms. In this respect, Byron illustrates through the performance of the Maid of Saragossa that gender codes are socially constructed and no longer innate.

Judith Halberstam, who used the pseudonym, Jack Halberstam, is a gender scholar, who tackled in *Female Masculinity* the idea that gender roles are flexible and can be reversed by describing various representations and situations of masculine females. Halberstam (1998) coined the term “female masculinity” and defined it as “a way of representing oneself in a manner that challenges the dominant discourse on gender and sexuality” (pp. 1-2) suggesting that the long-held ideals of conventional gender are being revolutionized in the hands of a woman whose public performance will alter her literal, historical, cultural and political positions. Furthermore, she disputed the public enactment of masculine females as a representative practice of societal uprising (p. 9). In this respect, Butler (2002) indicated that sex and gender are not always interrelated. In fact, gender is at times misleading since not only males but females also are capable of male performance:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (p. 10).

Furthermore, in the preface of her book *Noble Deeds of Woman*, Elizabeth Starling (1851) explicated that women’s domain of action could never be limited since, if placed in extremely dangerous settings and faced with unusual situations of life trials, their reliability, resilience, intelligence and noble thoughts permit them to act intrepidly and efficiently:

[...] woman's sphere of action is not [...] to be so circumscribed: her integrity, fortitude, courage, and presence of mind, may frequently be called forth by adventitious circumstances.

In extraordinary times [...] she may be placed in situations of difficulty, if not danger: let her then prepare herself to encounter them [...] (p. xvi).

In the same sense, Halberstam (1998) added that the inefficient male requires the female to embrace an active part publicly and take charge. Halberstam elucidated that when females are suddenly faced with tough situations, they tend to transform and gain power to establish their competence. Out of necessity and in the midst of extreme, hazardous circumstances and difficult conditions, females are motivated to act and be soundly prepared to encounter challenges and difficulties (Halberstam, 1998, p. 5). The Maid of Saragossa's gender performance reflects Starling's and Halberstam's perspective of an empowered and transformable female who is endowed with the ability to develop and change, an undeniable evidence of her fortitude.

Thus, based on gender performance and female masculinity, Byron tailored his female hero prototype. Categorized as androgynous, Byron's heroism is carried in a manner that the female heroic figure performs and exemplifies the finest qualities of feminine and masculine identities. As such, Butler's argument that gender is not biological but constructive and performative and Halberstam's claim that ordinary maidens become empowered in the midst of a turbulent environment are reflected in the Maid's performance. The fact that she assumes the role of a hero out of necessity and performs it as efficiently as a male serves to establish both theorists' claims. This, in turn, closely mirrors the construction of the androgynous identity of Byronic heroism. In order to analyze Byron's concept of generic heroism, I will demonstrate the extent to which Byron's female heroic figure, the Maid of Saragossa, performs the concept of female masculinity devised by Halberstam who clarified how female masculinity is born from hostile and tyrannical circumstances. Such a notion of female performing masculinity suits the Maid's performance perfectly. It is the violent and oppressive military milieu of the Peninsular War that generates the need for the enactment of female masculinity, and such a context, despite its hardness, seems promising and empowering since it leads to the birth of an active doer: an androgynous heroic figure.

“The Maid of Saragossa,” a Historical Myth

During the Peninsular War or the Spanish War of Independence (1807-1814), in the first siege of Zaragoza in 1808, Augustina de Aragon, a low-class Spanish female born in Barcelona in 1786, was working in the background on the supply lines providing provisions to the Spanish soldiers who were protecting the city's Portillo Gate. Strangely enough, there occurred a sudden reversal of roles from acting inside the domestic sphere to acting outside domestic boundaries and a complete transformation from being a marginal domestic figure into being a central heroic character. Realizing that the injured Spanish soldiers are impotent and have almost lost the war against the triumphant French troops, Augustina, out of necessity, finds herself in the midst of action. Motivated by her

strong-willed resistance, she takes command of the crucial situation (uncertain about her capacity) leading the historical battle that ends the Spanish crisis.

With such physical courage, she invades the masculine war arena, performing feminine masculinity, by acting fearlessly and selflessly in order to serve her country and reconstruct its history. Stepping on the slain and injured soldiers, Augustina appoints herself as a soldier, behaving counter to the female stereotype and performing in an unfeminine manner. Grasping a match from a dead Spanish soldier and enthusiastically firing off a cannon singlehandedly, she unpredictably succeeds in such crucial intervention, with the cooperation of the inhabitants of Saragossa and defeated Spanish soldiers, in surprising and attacking the approaching French invaders who were obliged to withdraw. Consequently, she uses her femininity to express military awareness and nationalism commonly associated with males.

Participating in warfare is a gendered action that accentuates the socio-political roles taken by Augustina. Taking action by firing a cannon, a solemn performance of masculinity, is considered as a genderless decision; this is a male act physically performed by a female. Accordingly, she performs heroic masculinity. Operating a cannon without being trained to do so was an unusual and miraculous moment in her life that expresses her individual genius. Henceforward, she was able to transform a desperate moment into a momentous and miraculous one. Her nationalism is stimulated by a selfless femininity in which she endangers her life to perform an ultimate sacrifice to save her country; even although she was within the reach of fire, it is surprising that the indomitable Augustina never got wounded. As an aftermath of this exceptional military event and such unprecedented feminine/masculine accomplishment, she becomes a well-known woman warrior whose patriotic feelings, national exploits, martial prowess, daring acts and epic reputation permeated Europe and were lauded by poets, historians, authors, painters and artists as an inspirational model and touchstone of transgressive and heroic feminism embodied in a substantial tradition of widespread feminist discourse. The meticulous description and truthful account of her heroic performance by Charles Vaughan (1809) is worth mentioning:

The attack of the enemy seemed to be directed principally against the gate called Portillo.... It was here, that an act of heroism was performed by a female, to which history scarcely affords a parallel; Augustina Zaragoza, about 22 years of age, a handsome woman, of the lower class of the people, whilst performing her duty of carrying refreshments to the gates, arrived at the battery of the Portillo, at the very moment when the French fire had absolutely destroyed every person that was stationed in it. The citizens, and soldiers, for the moment hesitated to remain at the guns; Augustina rushed forward over the wounded, and slain, snatched a match from the hand of a dead artilleryman, and fired off a 26-pounder, then jumping upon the gun,

made a solemn vow never to quit it alive during the siege, and having stimulated her fellow-citizens by this daring intrepidity to fresh exertions, they instantly rushed to the battery, and again opened a tremendous fire upon the enemy. (pp. 14-16)

Performing during a time of crisis, Augustina guarantees her name in history as she immediately becomes a heroic female icon. In other words, her metamorphosis into the status of Greek Amazonians (a title conferred on mythical mighty females possessing aggressive combatant skills) warriors and patriotic women of action leading a war against a foreign army exhibits how an autonomous woman can steal the action scene in battle and perform on a battleground more desirably than men. In reality, she kept serving in the military for several years. At the end of the 56th stanza in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron notes that he saw the Spanish Maid in Seville, wearing her medals on a daily basis. It is true that both of them met at the Spanish court, and it appears that the poet has registered the passion of Augustina parading her heroism, enjoying her androgynous power by exhibiting the set of medals on her cloak.

Byron's "Maid of Saragossa," a Literary Representation

Known as the Spanish Joan of Arc, the celebratory historical character of Augustina de Aragon is mentioned by Byron in the opening stanza of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* that honors her in the name of the Maid of Saragossa representative of the Spanish "black-eyed maids of Heaven" (st. 59). This is the first time Byron poeticizes a non-fiction heroic military personality. Although a historical heroine, yet in Byron's literary and Romantic consciousness, she becomes a modern icon of notable female action and significantly transcends into a mythical status, symbolizing freedom and inspiring rebellion against tyranny and patriarchy. It is worth analyzing her transgressive nature and exceptional performance to truly comprehend the nature of Byronic heroism.

A harsh military zone demands masculine performance. That is why a young working-class maiden, the Maid of Saragossa, had to fill up a daring void, so heroic performance is being forced upon her. Considering Halberstam's theory that a female hero emerges when society is in crisis and when men are stuck, Byron's empowered Maid outstandingly "retrieve[s] when man's flush'd hope is lost" (st. 56). The poet implies that, in reference to her historical glorious act of charging the cannon, her masculine performance appears more heroic and active than that of insubstantial males in the manner she retrieves leadership/power by brazenly possessing and efficaciously managing the phallic cannon. Thus, Byron's Maid establishes Butler's (2002) theory that gender is performative and "culturally constructed" (pp. 33, 9)

Despite the fact that she acts spontaneously and out of necessity, the Maid's heroism is humiliating for males who are overwhelmed by such an unusual display of strength, as Marina Warner (1999) contends: "The particular insult of defeat at the hands of a woman turns into special respect

for that woman ...reflect[ing] the assumption that only manliness is equivalent to strength and a woman's victory is a travesty of the natural order, worthy of either horror or respect" (pp. 207-208). In this respect, unconventionally transgressing powerful masculinity through female triumph and female masculinity is both horrifying and respectful. However, Byron's delineation of the Maid of Saragossa highlights her power veneration while reducing any concerns of dismay: "Yet are Spain's maids no race of Amazons, / But form'd for all the witching arts of love" (st. 57). In other words, although the Spanish heroines are "no race of Amazons," they can effortlessly transform into Amazonian warriors during critical time.

In general, a woman is acknowledged as being a pacifist whose only purpose is nurturing and caring, performing domestic duties within established patriarchal expectations. Since "[m]ilitarism is seen as one form of patriarchal, social and structural violence" (Gasztold, 2017, p. 183), then it is not the appropriate space for females to be actively admitted in. Nevertheless, a female's exclusion from the public sphere does not preclude her from asserting her personage with striking confidence. Interestingly, in the time of political turmoil and social crisis, empowered females who appoint themselves as warriors discover their own power, despite overwhelming obstacles, and become an emblem of intimidating female transgression and aggression. Performing as an Amazon female warrior, the Maid of Saragossa "Stalks with Minerva's step where Mars might quake to tread" (st. 54) and follows the steps of the heroic/immortal female Goddess Minerva. Such a Minerva-esque figure is endowed with masculine authority allowing the Spanish Maid to efficaciously adopt man's role in war when her severely injured lover, along with other wounded soldiers, lays passive, helpless and castrated. At this stage, her authority stands in stark contrast with male impassiveness and ineffectiveness. Despite the gloomy atmosphere that hovers around the battlefield where her lover is dying, this Spanish freedom-warrior never weeps, displaying, as Anna Camilleri (2011) expounds, an outstanding "positive leadership" (p. 218). Hence, when masculine heroism fails, the Maid's feminine masculinity rises to the point that she becomes a fearless warrior distinguished for her military actions:

Her lover sinks-she sheds no ill-timed tear;
 Her chief is slain-she fills his fatal post;
 Her fellows flee-she checks their base career;
 The foe retires-she heads the sallying host. (st. 56)

Remaining resilient throughout her journey, she is in complete control of herself and her world. The above lines portray how she becomes a male warrior, and the poet imagines her bearing a phallic-like dagger. Driven by ideological and humanitarian motives, she confronts, challenges and stands up for what she has faith in, risking her life by advocating war for a better life and future. Leading the action forward amongst incompetent and emasculated soldiers, the female hero "heads

the sallying host.” The use of the adjective “sallying” is meaningful since it is indicative of the warrior maiden’s transgression. “Sallying” is defined as “an action of rushing or bursting forth” or “a venture excursion” (Merriam-Webster online). This type of masculine action employed in war to attack in order to defend is the Maid’s emergent concern and so is her new role: venturing outside the accustomed domestic boundaries. Battling two enemies simultaneously is a double combatant role played by the Spanish female character that Byron denotes.

As the troops progress forward, the action of the female warrior or the “sallying host” is even more progressive. Fortunately, the maid conceives of a suitable masculine space of violence precisely fit for her (especially that male heroes are ineffective) in which she demonstrates her incredible feminine aptitude of successful and flawless performance. Willingly and successfully endorsing masculine mannerism of violence and aggressiveness, she is sufficiently potent and free to appoint herself as the mistress of her fate, thus, subverting once again the conventional codes of masculine nationalism. This could be read as a spiritual/allegorical emancipation, liberating women from the oppression and domination of patriarchy.

As male heroism proves vulnerable, the Maid shines again but this time to further weaken man’s authority. At this point, the poet’s elegiac tone about failing mannish heroism elicits the reader’s pity and concern about a disintegrating masculine heroism:

Awake, ye sons of Spain! awake! advance!
 Lo! Chivalry, your ancient goddess, cries,
 But wields not, as of old, her thirsty lance,
 Nor shakes her crimson plumage in the skies:
 Now on the smoke of blazing bolts she flies,
 And speaks in thunder through yon engine’s roar:
 In every peal she calls—“Awake! arise!”
 Say, is her voice more feeble than of yore,
 When her war-song was heard on Andalusia’s shore? (st. 37)

Chivalry, conventionally accepted as a male trait, has now become a female virtue; the female warrior’s chivalrous performance and words contribute to her enactment of female masculinity in the absence of male authority. In vain does Byron attempt to persuade the male Spanish soldiers to incite, arise and advance in order to battle the enemy. Oddly, Byron’s emergency call is answered by a strong-minded, vigorous, female’s swift willingness to confront an advancing triumphant enemy in order to save her country. Such performance reveals a lot about female political power and authority.

Interestingly, the Maid’s choice of wording is another way in which she undermines patriarchy since her inspirational words and voice complement her heroic action. Militaristic fury is evident in the above lines as she exclaims, “Awake! Arise!” Not only her actions but also her words

reveal she is a leading female character. In reality, Augustina used to say, “Courage men. If you cannot go on, we women will” (qtd. in Tone, 2007, p. 551) and her call: “Death or Victory!” and “War to the knife” (qtd. in Clayton, 1879, p. 85) articulates heroism and reinforces her masculine performance. Actually, these phrases are uttered not only to motivate men to fight but also to criticize and challenge their ineffectual masculine military activity.

The reader is fascinated by the realization that the Maid of Saragossa holds exclusive attributes through performing actions with enormous courage not normally associated with her gender; her heroic stature and performativity make her a legend:

Ye who shall marvel when you hear her tale,
 Oh! had you known her in her softer hour,
 Mark'd her black eye that mocks her coal-black veil,
 Heard her light, lively tones in Lady's bower,
 Seen her long locks that foil the painter's power,
 Her fairy form, with more than female grace,
 Scarce would you deem that Saragoza's tower
 Beheld her smile in Danger's Gorgon face,
 Thin the closed ranks, and lead in Glory's fearful chase. (st. 55)

Oddly, several critics construed Byron's Augustina as representative of an atrocious version of femininity. Phillip Shaw (2007), for instance, associates her “Gorgon's face” with that of the repulsive and destructive character of Medusa (pp. 237, 239). Considering the word ‘foil’ that is repeated more than once in the Spanish stanza (st: 55 & 56), it can bear with it several meanings. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines foil as “a light fencing sword” and “a thin piece of material...put ... to add color or brilliance.” In this sense, Jerome Christensen (1993) considers that the foreign attackers are “foiled” by the Maid's “hand” not her “gaze” (p. 74). I concur with Christensen's analysis since this image is more suitable for such an active and appealing female whose long, black locks metaphorically resemble phallic swords to fight the enemy and are not, as viewed by Shaw, live snakes to scare the invaders.

Christensen (1993) views the Gorgon image described by Byron as an empowering tool capable of freeing an autonomous woman from gender oppression and paternal battles: “the image of the Gorgon, that infinitely various, phallicized head, that threatens paralysis; that image screens a more disturbing, preconscious awareness that the woman has arms of her own that she can wield in peace and in war, thus challenging the prevailing conventions by which things are ordered” (p. 74). The multiple connotations of Gorgon's image and of the word foil with their correlation to action, independence, aggression, strength, rebelliousness and reflection are indicative of the birth of an empowered, active character with an exchangeable identity and powerful poetic presence. As a

distinguished, malleable heroine, Byron's Maid evolves and multiplies her dimensions to fit adequately in the dynamic sphere of masculine action.

Admiring females who fought bravely and took an active part in warfare, Byron praises the Maid's soldiery valor via her battlefield heroics. All through her unique performance which endorses Butler's (2002) performative theory that "gender is an 'act'" (p. 187) and "gender is always a doing" (p. 33), the Maid of Saragossa displays a remarkable, active individuality, performing military deeds associated with the public sphere and masculinity. By infringing masculine space of violence, she contravenes warfare codes. The following lines elucidate an unequaled, recurring pattern of female actions in combat, revealing the Butlerian truth behind the concept of gender that depends on repeated performances:

Is it for this the Spanish maid, aroused,
Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar,
And, all unsex'd, the anlace hath espoused,
Sung the loud song, and dared the deed of war?
And she, whom once the semblance of a scar
Appall'd, an owl's larum chill'd with dread,
Now views the column-scattering bay'net jar,
The falchion flash, and o'er the yet warm dead. (st. 54)

Heroism involves activism and is defined by performing repeated actions. The Spanish Maid's performance is described by doing masculine feats: "... and dared the deed of war" (st. 54). Here Byron empowers this warlike young woman by labeling her military performance as daring and her accomplishments as mannish. All in all, the Maid's military performance is hailed by Byron as unmatched.

After associating the Maid of Saragossa with violence and toughness, Byron, as a male poet, re-feminizes her by describing her unpatrolled beauty. Hereafter, the other characteristic that balances the Maid's female masculinity is her exceptional femaleness even in the battlefield. The repeated reference to her beauty: "Her fairy form, with more than female grace" (st. 55) hints at the fact that this good-looking figure conceals much more than feminine grace; it reveals how her extraordinary charm is preserved and undistracted by manly performance since active masculinity does not affect her beauty. The following line of verse confirms the Maid's masculinity and sexuality and typifies the androgynous qualities of her heroism: "In softness as in firmness far above/ Remoter females" (st. 57); such gentle toughness and determination is the oxymoron behind her exceptional leadership and control.

Coupled with sensuality, tenderness, and fierceness, the Maid gives the impression of a contradictory character through an analogous image suggesting the yoking of female grace with female military heroism: "'T is but the tender fierceness of the dove,/ Pecking the hand that hovers

o'er her mate" (st. 57). Soft firmness expressed in "tender fierceness" is indeed heroic firmness since this description articulates the Maid's female gallantry in encountering danger with firmness. In this respect, Camilleri (2011) observes that the Maid's "capacity for violence stems from an explicitly feminine source" (p. 218). This clarifies Byron's notion that heroism, like the Maid, is genderless, in the sense that her identity is unaffected by gender constructs.

Indeed, the expression of "tender fierceness" reveals the creative blending of the Maid's feminine charm and her masculine embodiment simultaneously. It is atypical how femaleness can perform in such an aggressive, forceful way. Such integration is a resounding indication of Byron's representation of gender creativity, and this context provides the poet sufficient space to lay the ground for gender experimentation. Essentially, the genuine synthesis of the oxymoronic concept of violence and femininity is the essence of Byronic heroism and the aftermath of Byron's poetic methodology.

Byron's diction is loaded with connotations of feminine sexuality and sensuality. The ideals of femininity are reinforced here through the gendered imagery of the adjective "aroused": "Is it for this the Spanish maid, aroused,/ Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar,/ And, all unsexed" (st. 54). This "aroused" female seems to spur Byron's Romantic imagination portraying her as unsexed and sexualized concurrently, and gender fusion is also associated with the way Byron envisages heroism. Surprisingly, "unsexed" but "aroused," the Maid displays a mysterious exhibition of dual aptitudes. Such active individuality is no doubt remarkable. As she actively performs in warfare illustrating her feminine masculinity, Byron unsexes her. This "unsexed" warrior is deprived of gender since she embodies a dual stereotype in the same manner heroism or the fighting act is also unsexed because it could be attained by female masculinity. In transcending traditional gender politics while retaining the conventions of maternity, such a fascinating character might appear contradictory, but her natural feminine appearance makes her humane and reveals a unique performative female masculinity.

Some researchers are convinced that women fighters performing "active roles are de-sexed and no longer regarded as feminine women..." (Byrne, 1996, p. 14). Actively participating in military activity within a male domain strips women of their femininity (Gasztold, 2017, p. 184). What is intriguing about the Spanish Maid is that she disrupts the conventional plot of action and adventure by retaining her womanliness without letting her femininity consume her. Nothing distracts her from her quest, not even sexuality, since it does not expose her vulnerability. Moreover, in her appearance, she never unsettles the codes of her femininity. Extraordinarily, she is physically and sexually powerful; this is where her power/empowerment lies. Active female masculinity does not affect her beauty; Byron does not stigmatize her for losing her womanhood since, as Camilleri (2011) explains "[t]he crucial distinguishing feature of female military heroism therefore lies in the heroine's

capacity to separate her action in the public, masculine arena of violence, and her suitably feminine demeanor in the private, domestic sphere” (p. 255).

Throughout his literary treatment of such a mysterious personage, Byron reveals his outlook about the genderless nature of heroism. What is striking about the exceptional nature of such an ambivalent character is its duality: this sensual Spanish belle is subjected to the male gaze since she is attractive and young; however, her martial masculine performance makes her an embodiment of war, violence, control and power. These androgynous and poetic qualities seemingly appeal to Byron’s Romantic imagination, especially the reliable fact that her manly performance does not distract from her femininity. She maintains her stance as an eye-catching sexual symbol.

Highlighting and challenging the conventional expectations of a fair lady, Byron bewilders the reader as he creates a dramatic conflict between appearance and performance, demonstrating that such a sensual figure is capable of violence and rebellion/revolution. The combination of androgynous features adds enticing magic to a character that allures the female readership, tempting them to accept or adopt the Maid’s posture. Byron has to constantly alter both of the Maiden’s masks or identities depending on the situation; it could be deduced that the demanding critical context she is placed in actually shapes her into its own requirements. Thus, the battlefield is a powerful triggering stimulus behind her performance of female masculinity through which she is provided the opportunity to display her potential. While the Maid has a contradictory character echoing female and male attributes, one wonders whether tender feminine traits are intentionally juxtaposed with masculine qualities so that the former domesticates the latter to the extent that feminine and masculine qualities become a norm for both genders.

Reconstructing Heroism: ‘A Shero’ Without a Hero

Feminist poets and authors insinuate throughout their literary treatment of heroism at redefining a female hero. Generally speaking, the word “heroine” is synonymous to a female protagonist, regardless of whether such a character is smart, remarkably active or audacious. A heroine is known to be passive, as Hazlitt describes nearly all Byron’s female characters, while a hero is active: “the hero must act-as the heroine cannot” (Edwards, 1979, p. 36), so if a heroine can act, then she requires an alternative name.

The feminine counterpart of a hero is not a heroine; it is called a ‘shero,’ and the grammatical gendering of such a noun is feminine. Initially, a representative model of a shero is “wonder woman” that was first designed in 1941 by William Moulton Marston, a psychologist, as an evidence of female supremacy (Reid, 2009, p. 183). Whoever behaves like a typically male hero is called a hero, but a shero, a feminine version of a typical male hero, does not have to behave like a male hero or just imitate him; she could be more performative and characterized by her active individuality. Besides, it should be recognized/grasped that in a narrative account a shero could exist without a hero, but a

heroine cannot exist without a hero. In other words, a shero could stand on her own and initiate an act by driving the narrative forward without help or reference to her male counterpart. Therefore, a shero, a hero and a heroine are not exactly similar; subsequently, these three nouns should not be interchanged.

A shero is an inspiring/independent young woman leader and superhero who challenges both the female's traditional social role and the outdated/rigid patriarchal ideologies of gender. Such central "characters challenge traditional and acceptable roles of women.... They are physically strong and independent, their stories focus on their actions and adventures and they save innocent people," so "it is unacceptable to label them heroes or heroines" (Onciul-Omelus, 2005, p. 48). That is why this unconventional, confident, empowered and courageous figure deserves a novel suitable title, and as Varla Ventura (1998) disputes: "women of courage ... must have a name of their own" (p. xv).

The best adequate feminine name that fits an adventurous, rebellious, dynamic, mentally and physically strong and heroic woman is shero; such a label stands as a "symbol of female empowerment" who "explores her sexuality" and "embraces her community" (Onciul-Omelous, 2005, pp. 50, 59). In brief, the qualities of a shero are summarized as such: "agency, competitiveness, physical toughness, forcefulness, aggressiveness, violence, independence, and rugged individualism" (Reid, 2009, p. 184). Since the name shero implies/epitomizes female power, audacity, ingenuity, empathy, resourcefulness and resistance, then Byron's Maid of Saragossa who challenges male warriors/leaders deserves this title.

Experimenting with female heroic performance, Byron's poetic imagination refashions poetic reality through his recreation of a dramatized action shero. Together with her compassion, empathy and military aptitudes, the compassionate heroic Maid of Saragossa becomes the mother of her nation, sacrificing her physical presence for spiritual goals. Encountering self-denial by risking her life but trusting her instinct, she is honor bound to defend a country falling apart. By doing so, she defies male authority not only by being a warrior, a role traditionally reserved for males, but also by appropriating the responsibility of defending a nation and sharing heroic glories. Such a strongminded female warrior is an active, accomplished leader in warfare, a liberal decision-maker, a self-sacrificing heroic figure, a symbol of historical, literary, social and political revolution and protective, compassionate mother of freedom possessing the power of awakening empathy. Her capability for noble actions, her heroic potential and her courageousness are not only outstanding but characterize an effective individuality, a telltale of female heroism. At the same time, such a shero stands as an emblem of strength and beauty. Penetrating male-dominated political borders by carrying political charge and participating in nationalist movements demonstrates that Byron's shero has unlimited potentials.

Reconstructing Heroism: Female Masculinity

Customarily, an active hero is used to be masculine par excellence since heroic performance is a natural telltale of one specific gender/sex, which is maleness. Recently, scholars, critics, writers and poets have started calling for gender diversity. The term “masculinity” is no longer synonymous to maleness; both males and females help in the construction of such a notion, so fluid masculinity acquires multiple meanings/implications. Nevertheless, Byron was a forerunner in revealing that heroism is not merely an extension of conventional masculinity but an intrinsic scope of femininity through the figure of the Maid of Saragossa, whose female role is layered on top of her masculine performance. Subsequently, Byron plausibly/credibly attempts to craft an alternative femininity or female masculinity. Thus, conventional masculinity is violated and challenged. What occurs to the notion of heroism when a character is androgynous? The Maid’s female masculinity undermines the masculinity of heroism and provides a distinguished representation of modern heroism which excludes the emphasis of normative gender identity. The performance of such an androgynous character is a remarkable representation of female masculinity and a direct confirmation that heroism, to Byron, recognizes no gender hierarchy.

Being a female and fighting like a male proves there exists a thin line that divides the flexible/penetrable boundaries between being and performing. Occupying a stable androgynous persona, Byron’s Maid becomes a plausible performer, powerfully performing a complete range of multiple gender fluctuations and display. Performing shifting roles provides her more space and freedom to constantly operate and exercise gender shifts endlessly depending on the circumstances. By bending gender roles and not being bound to any, she commits herself to gender mutability and fluidity, becoming a convincing performer and changer. Remarkably, the masculinity she performs is part of her femininity. Despite the fact that the Maid of Saragossa performs what was considered a masculine role, she retains her femininity by refusing to appear like a man and preserving her female traits. Clayton (1879) clarifies that Agustina de Aragon refused to resemble a male figure, parading daily in Seville wearing “the Spanish military uniform—retaining, however, the petticoat and skirt, of her sex” (p. 87).

Gender roles, I contend, undergo a rapid change and transformation as a result of the impact of struggle, suffering, political and military conflict, crisis, tragedy and calamity which provide an insight to men or women to act on the spot to ensure security and survival. The Maid of Saragossa marks a change in women’s traditional roles by performing in the public sphere where she displays phenomenal bravery and undaunted courage. As a civilian and a challenging female, she promptly adapts to a masculine domain, the milieu of war, and demonstrates how competent females could be during armed conflicts.

The Peninsular War arms the Maid with an active heroic agency, empowering her stature to the point that it grants her social, cultural and political sovereignty. Through the overtly masculine nature of her heroic action, she conquers the masculine domain. Randomly, she stumbles upon her chance to prove herself in action to become a role model of martial femininity. A plausible impression of female masculinity is what the Maid of Saragossa articulates throughout her actions. Indeed, she relishes or lives up to such a stable label.

Reconstructing Nationalism

Usually known to be paternalistic, nationalism entails dedication, commitment and unconditional love for one's own country and nation. Undeniably, a female's sacrifice and military conquests are a potent testimony of nationalism. Not trained to take part in military campaigns and fire cannons, the Maid of Saragossa prepares herself to defend her country out of her fierce, stubborn patriotism and nationalism. Her extraordinary capacity for action enables such a virile heroic figure to concretize/enact her nationalistic ideology through performing repeated heroic acts that seem attention-grabbing for a reading public. Such performance makes a difference in nation-making as she helps resurrect her powerless/oppressed Iberian nation in reshaping its history and restoring its ancient splendors.

Unquestionably, Byron subverts the paternalistic tradition of nationalism and continues in this nationalistic vein, spicing up *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* with a flavor of patriotic poetry. As such, he highly commemorates the zealous nationalist spirit of feminine self-reliance and sacrifice. Due to the lack of tolerance for impotent male soldiers, Byron's Spanish shero feels responsible for her nation. Forced with an armed conflict, she adopts a prompt plan of action, performing a combatant role and striking her target. In this way, she changes the gender dimension of peace-building. Indeed, Byron's Maid is able to exhibit a more genuine nationalist spirit, promoted by love and compassion, than masculinity could offer.

According to Anthony Smith (1991), nation and family are metaphorically interconnected; he elucidates: "the metaphor of family is indispensable to nationalism. The nation is depicted as one great family, the members as brothers and sisters of the motherland or fatherland.... In this way the family of the nation overrides and replaces the individual's family but evokes similarly strong loyalties and vivid attachment" (p. 79). In a similar vein, the national Spanish shero, compelled by two motivating forces, the feminine impulse of love and masculine incentive of patriotism, demonstrates her loyalty to her nation by considering it as her extended family, hence becoming the mother figure to her nation. Through such figurative attachment, she develops empathy towards her oppressed nation. Consequently, the performative role of Byron's Maid as a female warrior

contributes to the national making of her homeland. As such, her female masculinity becomes a performative motif affecting her nation's history and destiny.

Reconstructing Gender

A nationalistic and patriotic icon, Byron's Maid regains the pride of nationalism and patriotism through penetrating male-dominated political borders. Consequently, she rebels against the oppressive gender codes and conventions and unconventionally dissolves the rigid system of patriarchy. Byron's Maid is both doing gender and doing heroism within the context of patriotism and nationalism. Hence, the Spanish shero undergoes transformation from being subordinated into being dominating, from being a passive character into becoming an active sexualized doer who performs deeds considered as gender accomplishments for males. In consequence, her political agenda does not comply with women's pre-defined conventional roles set by the dominance of oppressive patriarchy. In this way, her political doings and practices construct her genderless heroic identity, thus impacting and improving the state of women's rights and motivating women to become men's equivalent. Through her unique enactment, she is elevated to the status of martial heroics of epic sheroes. By doing so, Byron upraises the social and military status of femininity.

War is the venue for the female warrior to attain empowerment. This venue gives her enough space to challenge pervasive patriarchy and intently restrained gender roles, giving her the opportunity and liberty to exercise power/leadership, display her potential in decision making and problem solving and develop/expand her resourcefulness in attaining change and making a difference. Acquiring new military and leadership skills, the Maid no doubt expands her gendered role, becoming an effective participant in reversing gender roles and emerging as man's equal in winning two battles, one against oppressive patriarchy and the second against an aggressive, resilient enemy. Thus, the Byronic Maid successfully performs multiple roles to achieve multiple goals.

In his description of the Spanish shero, Byron evokes supernatural femininity. As a feminist and revolutionary Romantic poet, he overthrows the common archetype of a phallogentric patriarch and supports instead a feminized political freedom-warrior. What is astounding about Byron's Maid is her political success, her autonomy and her inheritance of male power. Nonetheless, she transcends traditional gender politics and retains the conventions of maternity simultaneously. In brief, she possesses a masculine partisan mind in a female body. Due to his assertion of maternal authority and sovereignty, Byron advocates a promising gynocratic world, a world lead by females.

Conclusion

Through her struggle and suffering to accentuate gender politics, the Maid of Saragossa delivers Byron's promising message that the truest ideology of patriotism, nationalism and heroism

is androgynous since genuine heroism is an amalgam of masculine (military strength and aggression) and feminine (sacrifice and affection) attributes. As matriarchal authority rebels against patriarchal leadership, Byron finds this reversal of roles extremely natural, plausible and down-to-earth. Consequently, the image of a shero exhibiting feminine militarism and feminine nationalism and gaining control over men's world seems highly plausible in Byron's poetry. Ultimately, by projecting a sense of pride in women's potential, Byron restores the detrimental imbalance that gendered politics, specifically patriarchy, may generate. Consequently, Byron's outlook concerning heroism is modern and promising as he believes in genderless heroism through his depiction of the Maid of Saragossa. By giving the authority to females or sheroes to take the lead, Byron designs/foregrounds a national poetic tradition that exalts feminine feats by nurturing, using a Butlerian expression, "the political visibility of women" (Butler, 2002, p. 4).

By and large, contributing to an evolving theory of heroism, Byron intends to reconstruct the literary dimension of heroism for poetical purposes to make it revolutionized and contemporary. Henceforth, by improving and modernizing heroism, it is no longer an external biological entity associated with physical fortitude; it converts into a social construction tailored to include feminine features. By reconstructing gender through heroism and restructuring heroism through gender, the Maid performs Halberstam's motif of feminine masculinity, in which a masculine performance is layered over a feminine appearance, to foster the flexibility of gender and the evolvement of heroism. Eventually, the passion of an ideal feminized nationalism and generic or sexless heroism could also be transparently traced in other Byronic works such as *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos*.

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