

**John Dryden's *The Rival Ladies* and Cervantes's *Las dos doncellas*:  
A Comparative Study**

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**Abstract**

John Dryden's *The Rival Ladies* (1664) is a stage adaptation of *Las dos doncellas* (*The Novel of the Two Maidens*) (1613), an exemplary novel written by the celebrated author Miguel de Cervantes. Produced in a context where the identity categories upholding Spain's social orthodoxy were facing increasing resistance, *Las dos doncellas* offers a bounteous source to explore the fixity of gender, as it features two cross-dressed ladies who travel across a disrupted nation unhesitant to wield their 'manly' swords. This article analyses Dryden's re-positioning of the source text into a new cultural-ideological context, also marked by the unsettling of hegemonic gender narratives and the resulting power structures. The playwright capitalises on the subversive potential of the source text, which is rendered wider and more multifaceted by the genre shift, to engage with the ideological milieu of Restoration England. The study also examines some scenes of Dryden's own invention which address issues of pervasive concern to the target culture, mainly gender identities, roles and relations. Significantly, his additions to Cervantes's plot denounce social constraints on female freedom, such as forced marriages and the double sexual standard.

**Keywords:** Cervantes, Dryden, Restoration, Gender, Theatre.

**Introduction**

Printed in 1613, Cervantes's *Las dos doncellas* relates the dares and ventures of two cross-dressed ladies, Teodosia and Leocadia, both travelling the length and breadth of Spain in search of the same runaway lover, Marco Antonio. Intent upon making the rogue fulfil a neglected marriage promise, the heroines range over a nation rife with chaos and turmoil. The gender disorder inherent to the wandering transvestites of romance is matched by episodes of acute social disruption that are narrated with pungent realism, mainly a bandit robbery and a colossal battle. Fuchs has analysed this all-pervasive disarray as "exposing the internal anarchy – gendered and otherwise – of a masculinist imperial Spain" (2010, 47).

The subversive potential of *Las dos doncellas* is broad and multifaceted. Cervantes's exploitation of the motif of cross-dressing signals the constructedness and performativity of gender and conjures the menace of unruly sexual desires. This poses a perceivable threat to the ideological foundations of a society predicated upon an emphatically masculine Spanish essence. During the golden age of imperial expansion, the nation prided itself on the heroic deeds of 'manly' conquerors, whose strength and

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rectitude were revered assets that demarcated the feminine as inherently weak and immoral. This 'feminine' inferiority was strategically projected on national outsiders: "all heterogeneous groups with origins perceived to be outside of the peninsula, especially Muslims and Jews, were necessarily represented as both nonmale and non-Spanish" (Mariscal 1991, 58). Alongside this national self-fashioning, however, inevitably loomed cultural anxiety over potential effeminacy, which gained momentum as Spain's imperial power started to decline: "when the enemy began to penetrate Spain's defenses at the end of the sixteenth century and the dream of Castilian world domination symbolically began to sink along with its Armada, the nation's exalting image as conquering hero also visibly began to founder" (Donnell 2003, 42).

The perceived jeopardy to the gendered pillars underlying Spain's social orthodoxy is reflected in and fuelled by the sustained conflicts pervading Cervantes' narrative. The portrayal of a disrupted society where two cross-dressed damsels do not waver to heft their 'manly' swords unsettles the gender identities at the core of the crumbling self-image projected by nation and empire at a time of heightened anxiety over gender, "which, at times, manifested itself as a crisis of masculinity in the way each nation perceived itself" (Donnell 2003, 42).

In 1664 John Dryden authored a stage adaptation of *Las dos doncellas* entitled *The Rival Ladies*. Cervantes's work was transposed to a different literary genre and historical period where gender identities and relations were also the object of intense ideological scrutiny. The late seventeenth century has often been signalled as straddling the shift in the understanding of gender from hierarchical to complementary difference. Men and women began to be defined as *essentially* distinct, not only biologically, but also mentally and emotionally, each naturally suited to play certain roles: "this doctrine defined a male sphere that was public—one concerned with the regulated world of government, trade business, and law [...] — and a women's sphere that was private—encompassing the unregulated realm of home, family and child rearing" (Kuersten 2003, 16). Restoration drama articulates acute cultural anxieties over gender, partly triggered by the thriving presence of women in the 'male' public arena, as actresses, playwrights, patrons and audience members. Thus, "at a time of transition when the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality coexisted and fought for permanence" (Martínez-García 2020, 122), the nature of femininity and masculinity became fluid hubs of endorsement and challenge, affirmation and reformulation, containment and subversion.

Given its questioning of fixed gender categories, *Las dos doncellas* offers a yielding source to engage with ongoing anxieties over the differences between male and female. Besides, the genre shift opens new possibilities to explore the mutability and performativity of gender, as breeched actresses impersonate sword wielding ladies trying to pass as men.<sup>1</sup> This article provides a study of Dryden's reimagining of Cervantes's work. An analysis is conducted of the playwright's re-positioning of the source text into a new geographical, cultural, and ideological context, also troubled by the unsettling of hegemonic gender narratives. For this purpose, several episodes have been selected from *Las dos doncellas* where the rigid identity categories upholding the social hegemony of seventeenth-century Spain are undermined. Further discussions are subsequently offered on Dryden's transposition of Cervantes's

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novel to a new social context and literary genre, with a view to analysing how the play capitalises on the subversive potential of the source text to engage with the target culture's ideological milieu. The study also examines some scenes of Dryden's own invention which address issues of pervasive concern in Restoration drama, mainly gender identities, roles and relations. Significantly, Dryden's additions contribute an eloquent denunciation of social constraints placed on female freedom, such as forced marriages and the double sexual standard that perpetuated patriarchal power by regulating and coercing women's bodies.

**The wood robbery reimagined: Cervantes and Dryden on the (in)stability of identity**

At the opening of Dryden's play, Gonsalvo, recently arrived from the Indies, sets foot in Alicante after spending some weeks in Barcelona. Right after disembarking, he witnesses a robbery in a wood and intervenes to free some captives that had been bound to trees. This scene is a reimagining of an episode written by Cervantes. In *Las dos doncellas*, the cross-dressed Teodosia is discovered by her brother Rafael, who resolves to join her quest and make Marco Antonio fulfil his marriage promise. In pursuit of the runaway rogue, they come across an eclectic bunch of people who had been robbed by Catalan bandits and tied to trees, divested of most of their apparel. There is one captive who stirs the siblings' compassion more profoundly: "a boy [...] with a face so beautiful it moved deeply anyone who looked at him" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 301). The charming youth soon earns the favour of both travellers, who are joyful to let him join in their adventure. The following morning Teodosia realises on a closer look that the lad has pierced ears and a timid gaze and reckons 'he' must be a woman.

In Cervantes's work, the wood is figured as a marginal space powerfully encoding social transgressions of diverse kinds. "In stealing the travelers' clothes, the bandits have removed signs that locate them precisely within a social structure" (Fuchs 2010, 51), suspending the established power hierarchy and undermining the essentialist subjectivities at its base. Free of all sartorial indexes of gender and class, the siblings' new acquaintance capitalises on the fluidity of identity to produce different self-fashionings. First, she tries to pass as the son of two different gentlemen, both of whom Rafael happens to know. Caught in a net of lies, the cross-dressed damsel professes to be not only the opposite gender, but also a lower social class. She even declares having an aspiration to rise above 'his' assigned place in society by fighting in a war "by means of which [...] even those of obscure birth can become famous" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 302). Fuchs has analysed the subversive matrix within this asseveration as broader and more complex than may seem at first glance: "The phrase *de oscuro linaje* [...] may refer not only to the lower classes but also to New Christians ostracized for their 'unclean' blood" (2010, 53; original emphasis). The character's declaration of intent poses a multi-layered challenge to the status quo; gender, rank and ostensibly even blood status are depicted as fluid, unstable identities that can be renounced and escape categorisation by conventional markers.

In *The Rival Ladies*, the intricate politics of subversion at work in *Las dos doncellas* are altered to cater for the idiosyncrasies of the target culture, as the focus is placed on the power dynamics of gender and eroticism that dominated the Restoration stage. The scene features Honoria, cross-dressed and

renamed Hippolito, bound to a tree and facing two robbers with drawn swords. A conceivably titillating visual spectacle is made of the character's vulnerable position. Dressed in male attire, suggestively revealing of the actress' female anatomy, the helpless Honoria/Hippolito is confronted with the bandits' phallic swords. The raiders discuss how to inflict violence on her assailable body: whilst one wishes to rob the captive and spare the youth's life, the other spurs his partner to kill 'him.' The impending violence against the disempowered damsel is discernibly eroticised. First, the most merciful bandit discloses his desire to "strip" (Dryden, 1.2.1) the captive, capitalising on the double meaning of the term as 'rob' and 'undress.' The murderous raider also expresses the urge to tear off 'his' doublet, as the audience is tantalised with the prospect of an unclothed feminine body.

This episode encodes the economy of power upheld by the emerging ideology of gender as polarised difference. It articulates the gendered dichotomies which Marsden has identified as typically inscribed in scenes of attempted rape: "active/passive, dominant/submissive, sadist/masochist, subject/object and ultimately desire/object" (1996, 187). The blurring of gender boundaries inherent to the motif of cross-dressing is thus rendered quite ineffective, as Honoria is portrayed as the passive, subdued object of male domination, violence and sexual desire. Significantly, the righteous man, Gonsalvo, acts to save the helpless maiden and confronts the bandits with his phallic sword.

The display of male authority and dominance through violence, however, also exposes the incoherence of an ideological system that defines men as naturally suited to wield power effortlessly, and thus poses a threat to the foundations of patriarchy. This threat is partly contained by the stunning moral reformation undertaken by the captain of the robbers, who begs Gonsalvo for mercy and proclaims he never intended to commit a crime as obnoxious as murder. Not only does the compassionate hero spare the bandit's life, but he offers him some money and advice. The robber feels indebted to Gonsalvo for his magnanimity and endeavours to live up to his high moral standards:

That Life you have preserv'd shall still be yours;  
And that you may perceive, how much my Nature  
Is wrought upon by this your generous Act;  
That goodness you have shown to me, Ile use  
To others for your Sake[.] (Dryden, 1.2.19–23)

Virtue is thus portrayed as a defining asset of honourable manhood, exhibited even by the captain of the robbers, a presumably disruptive character operating on the margins of society. As will later be further discussed, Gonsalvo becomes the constant epitome of this all-important trait in the play. His self-restraint and moral stature are nonetheless coupled with displays of brave action and (hetero)sexual prowess, which assert the hero's masculine status.

### **Dryden's original plot: An exploration of female freedom and agency**

After the robbery, Gonsalvo acquiesces to take Hippolito as his page. Dryden complicates Cervantes's plot by introducing two more characters, Julia and Manuel, siblings to Honoria and likewise raided by the bandits. Gonsalvo instantly becomes infatuated with Julia, who takes him for the leading robber and develops an irrational aversion towards her rescuer. A whole new storyline is introduced in the

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development of these characters. To achieve reconciliation after a long-standing feud, Manuel plans to give his sister in marriage to Don Rodorick in exchange for Angellina, his foe's sister and the playwright's adaptation of Leocadia.

Dryden's additions to Cervantes's original allow an exploration of the freedom and agency ladies should be accorded when choosing their husbands. The source culture offers a convenient setting to approach this subject, as the preservation of social orthodoxy in Golden Age Spain hinged on a marked "societal impulse to limit women's roles and mobility through conduct manuals, sermons, and other normative writings" (Cruz and Quintero 2017, 2). Even though the drive to curtail female freedom may have been a reaction to emergent ideologies advocating change, and the reality of women was most likely varied (McKendrick 1974, 44), this normative impetus perpetuated an image of Spain as governed by a rigid code of honour which enforced female subordination and "upheld an ideal of feminine seclusion"<sup>2</sup> (Lehfeldt 2018, 148). The audience learns from a conversation between two servants that Angellina is treated as a passive object of exchange for men to bond over:

I do not think she Fancies much the Man;  
Only, to make the Reconcilement perfect  
Betwixt the Families, she's Passive in it;  
The choice being but her Brother's, not her Own. (Dryden, 1.3.12–15)

Forced into an undesired marriage, Angellina wields agency to rebel against patriarchal authority; she resolves to feign an illness and run away that very evening. Her woman manages to slip a note to Manuel right before the ceremony, informing him of both her lady's intent and Rodorick's plot to marry Julia and later deny him Angellina's hand. The widespread image of Spanish men as oppressive of women is evoked and reinforced by the self-serving Rodorick. Quite cynically, he dissociates himself from this image, only to agree to his sister's exhortation not to defer his own craved marriage for her sake: "That privilege of Pow'r which Brothers have / In Spain, I never us'd: Therefore submit / My Will to hers" (Dryden, 1.3.93–94).

The drastic curtailment of women's freedom is challenged in *The Rival Ladies*. Several scholars have argued that Restoration comedy objects to forced marriages, even though the emergent discourse advocating the centrality of free will and love to matrimony coexisted with an older ideology favouring economic motivations and social alliances (Wheatley 1990, 2). When Rodorick's plot is unveiled, Julia chooses love over obedience in a blatant defiance of her brother's orders:

Jul. What shall I do?  
Man. Leave him, and come away;  
Thy Virtue bids thee.  
Jul. But Love bids me stay. (Dryden, 1.3.184–187)

In Cervantes' Spain, a woman's worth was largely dependent on public consensus, more precisely "on her reputation for modesty, seclusion, and being above suspicion of fornication in neighbors' opinions" (Behrend-Martínez 2005, 1084). Thus, the social world acted as a powerful tool to regulate

behaviour and enforce normative conduct. Julia subverts this agency constraining ideology, as she composedly abides by her own moral standards and risks being socially ostracised:

Jul. You know I have adventur'd for your sake  
 A Brothers anger, and the Worlds opinion:  
 I Value neither; for a settled Virtue  
 Makes it self Judge, and satisfy'd within,  
 Smiles at that common Enemy, the World. (Dryden, 1.3.150–154)

Facing Julia's resounding rejection, Gonsalvo, the epitome of male moral virtue in the play, also defends the lady's free will, and so prioritises female liberty over his own happiness: "I know not why you think your selves my Pris'ners; / This Ladies freedome is a thing too precious / To be dispos'd by any but her Self" (Dryden, 1.2.72–74). Julia resolves to defer her marriage and seek protection in a monastery until Rodorick has made amends with her brother.

Unforewarned that Angellina would flee in male attire, Manuel fails to recognise her on the appointed night. He does come across Rodorick and Julia, and both rivals engage in a fight that is soon halted by Gonsalvo. Advised by Hippolito, Julia hides to save the combatants' lives and all three men take separate ways to search for her. Both sisters are then left in each other's company and are soon joined by Angellina.

The encounter of all three main female characters – two of them disguised as boys – plays out as a comical exploration of the fixity of sexual and gender identities. Angellina blatantly undermines the sartorial signification of sex, as she explicitly denies that apparel is an effective marker of sexual difference: "Where had I courage for this bold disguise, / Which more my Nature than my Sex believs?" (Dryden, 1.4.69–70). In early modern Europe, clothing was regarded as not merely signalling, but also shaping human subjectivities: it was not "something external to the body, that could be simply put on and taken off, or that could function as an abstract sign: rather, it was seen to mould a person and materialize identity" (Rublack 2010, 183). Angellina's words subvert the Renaissance understanding of the gendered body as configured by both "cultural artifacts and 'natural' parts" (Fisher 2006, 93), to substantiate the emerging ideology that advocated biological essentialism as the basis for sexual difference.

The masculine disguise also fails to hide the wearer's inherently 'feminine' nature, as all three ladies admit to lacking 'manly' bravery. As soon as they find themselves alone in the dark and bereft of male protection, Julia and Hippolito acknowledge their faltering courage. Right afterwards, the agitated Angellina – disguised as Amideo – makes her entrance in the scene giving voice to her anxious dread. Hippolito underscores the parallelism in their disposition – "Alas he fears as much as we" (Dryden, 1.4.87) – even though Julia is the only woman performing her assigned gender. To the early modern mindset, other malleable, socially concocted signifiers besides sartorial codes that defined sex alongside biological parts were personality traits and behaviour (Caballero 2016, 131). Once again, the play aligns with the emerging ideology that grounds sexual difference in essentialist distinctions. The understanding of sex as an unstable category shaped by both natural and cultural signifiers is comically – and quite powerfully – undermined in the ensuing conversation:

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Jul. What say you

Sir, Will you joyn with us?

Ang. Yes Madam, but

If you would take my Sword, you'l use it better.

Hip. I, But you are a Man.

Ang. Why, so are you.

Hip. Truly my fear had made me quite forget it. (Dryden, 1.4.87–91)

The cross-dressed women fail both to take the sword, a powerful sartorial signifier of manliness endowed with phallic symbolism, and to display 'masculine' courage. Hence gender is portrayed as a stable, natural category that cannot be materialised in performance. The ladies' portrayal as unnatural bearers of the 'manly' sword is once again comically articulated in the next scene, when Hippolito fails to help Gonsalvo put his on:

Amid. Look you, my Lord, he puts it on so awkwardly;

The Sword does not sit right. [Crying.

Hip. Why, where's the fault?

Amid. I know not that; but I am sure 'tis wrong.

Gons. The fault is plain, 'tis put on the wrong Shoulder.

Hip. That cannot be, I look'd on *Amideo*'s,

And hung it on that Shoulder his is on. (Dryden, II.i.33–38; original emphasis.)

### **The events at the inn recreated: Cervantes and Dryden on gender and sexual desire**

After the brief encounter described above, the fearful women are 'rescued' by Gonsalvo, who takes them all to an inn. The scene draws from the opening of Cervantes's novel, which unfolds in the same setting. It features a secretive horse rider, later revealed to be the cross-dressed Teodosia, arrive at the lodging perceptibly agitated. After coming round from a swift faint, the character fastens the undone buttons at her chest and endeavours to keep the only room available all for herself. The stunned inn keepers cannot but laud "the great comeliness and gallant disposition of the new guest, concluding that they had never seen such handsomeness" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 291). Only her "imperfectly disguised body" (Fuchs 2010, 46), which she hastens to conceal as soon as she reawakens, can offer a subtle anticipation of Teodosia's gender. Otherwise, the maiden's performance is a congruous, consistent articulation of the Golden Age paradigm of noble male youth (Grünnagel 2013), and as such it is read by the enthralled hosts. Cervantes's novel thus features a cross-dressed woman successfully displaying 'masculine' traits, and hence poses a challenge to the fixity of gender categories upholding Spain's self-fashioning.

Shortly after Teodosia, a second traveller arrives at the inn. The hostess' fervent acclaim of the guest's beauty excites the curiosity of the newcomer, who gets filled with zeal to "see a man so warmly praised" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 292; my emphasis). Prompted by a desire tinged with voyeuristic and homoerotic overtones, the traveller manages to share Teodosia's room. In the middle of the night, she

bursts into a fit of heartbreak and bitterness and relates, in self-addressed murmurs, the story of her amorous misfortunes. The discovery that the enigmatic boy is a wretched lady exacerbates her roommate's passion: "[it] further piqued his desire to meet her, and he decided several times to go to the bed of the person he believed to be a woman" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 294). In fact, he becomes frantically agitated, as evidenced by his "toss[ing] and turn[ing] in the bed and sigh[ing]" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 297). The character's escalating restlessness in the presence of a damsel in the intimacy of a shared room tantalises the reader with the suggestion of sexual titillation. This is indeed Teodosia's own reading, which, quite significantly, is endorsed by the omniscient narrator: "she suspected that some amorous passion was troubling him, and she still thought she was the reason, and it was a sensible to suspect and think so" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 298). The transgressive potentiality of the episode is nonetheless tempered by the discovery that the second traveller is Teodosia's brother, Rafael, who resolves to aid his sister in the search for Marco Antonio.

Dryden offers a brief and humorous rewriting of the event pertaining to the target culture's ideological milieu. A discussion is staged about which two of all four guests should share the intimacy of a room. The servant's reply is quite illustrative of the emerging ideology that sex is immutable and biologically determined: "Jul. How shall we be dispos'd? / Serv. As *Nature* would; / The Gentleman and you" (Dryden, 1.4.108–109; my emphasis).

To Gonsalvo's categorical imperative that the lady must be accommodated apart, the servant makes the following suggestion: "Then the two Boys that are good for nothing / But one another, they shall go together" (Dryden, 1.4.114–115). His words encode the Renaissance ideology that defined gender "along a scale of hierarchical gradations in which an adolescent boy might occupy a homologous relation to a woman" (Mackie 2009, 8). Will Fisher has pinpointed the discourse on marriage as one key locus where the distance between men and boys was persistently emphasised, often on the grounds of the latter's alleged "non-generativity" (2001, 177). The servant's derisive portrayal of the 'boys' as being good only for each other can easily be interpreted in light of this belief.

As argued by Stephen Orgel, "the economic analogy between boys and women overlaid a more essential one: boys were, like women – but unlike men – acknowledged objects of sexual attraction for men" (1996, 70). Such view is a constituent of a broader "economy of corporeal subjection" (King 2004, 41) where patriarchal authority was asserted and materialised through men's subordination – sexual and otherwise – of women, children and other dependents. As a reaction against this increasingly contested ideology, a competing discourse won currency where "gendered and sexual subjectivities emerged [...] as vehicles of resistance" (King 2004, 41). This discourse is soon endorsed by Gonsalvo, who does not hesitate to attribute Hippolito's refusal to share a room with anyone but Julia to 'his' (hetero)sexual drive: "I did not think you Harbour'd wanton thoughts: / So young, so Bad!" (Dryden, 1.4.182–183). Both cross-dressed ladies acted that naively because they forgot they were performing the 'wrong' gender, which stresses the dissociation between their self-perception and the masculine identity they have taken on. While Angellina murmurs to herself "Alas I had forgot I am a Boy" (Dryden, 1.4.129), Honoria feels



she cannot redress her ingenuous mistake: "I can make no defence / But must be sham'd by my own Innocence" (Dryden, 1.4.133–134).

### **Dryden's original plot expanded: A critique of social constraints on women's free will**

After the cross-dressed damsels have been rescued and hired by Gonsalvo as his pages, Dryden's original storyline is resumed, and a further critique is offered of the social, legal and economic constraints faced by marriageable women. Julia is taken by 'his' 'rescuer' to see Manuel, who condescendingly deprives her of any will or agency and intends to compel her into an undesired marriage 'for her own good.' Facing her refusal, he tries to coerce his sister into submitting to his – male – authority, 'rightfully' bestowed on him through the patriarchal line: "My Fathers will, who with his Dying breath / Commanded, you should pay as strict Obedience / To me, as formerly to him" (Dryden, 2.2.98–100). Julia makes an outright denunciation of the gendered double standard at play in the choice of a spouse: "What right have Parents over Children, more / Than Birds have o'r their Young? yet they impose / No rich Plum'd Mistriss on their Feather'd Sons" (Dryden, 2.2.105–107).

Once again, Gonsalvo commits to the noble cause of love and submits his will to Julia's in an intriguing soliloquy where he "excuses rape as something that women secretly desire" (Greenfield 2016, 66):

Against her will fair Julia to possess,  
Is not t' enjoy but Ravish happiness:  
Yet Women pardon force, because they find  
The Violence of Love is still most kind [.]. (Dryden, 2.2.147–149)

This speech encodes the discourse of morality and sexual politics that defined rape as the 'natural' manifestation of 'manly' passion and potency, where women are constructed as complicit with the naturalised gendered dynamics of domination and submissiveness. Gonsalvo's words articulate "the commonly held view that violence was an acceptable means of seduction" (Boebel 1996, 63) which ladies would compliantly abide by. However, such view is later undermined by Julia, who states that the use of force is futile as a wooing mechanism: "Your Worth and Virtue my esteem may win, / But Womens passions from themselves begin; / Merit may be, but Force still is in vain" (Dryden, 4.1.66–70).

Disempowered and fully aware of her state of "low submission" (Dryden, 4.1.149), Julia still declares that "My Brother gives my Person, not my Heart" (Dryden, 4.1.59), and, as seen in the above quotation, claims full agency over her feelings and – sexual – desire. She manages to wield agency from her powerless position as male property by warning Gonsalvo that she will kill herself if she is not bequeathed to Roderick. The epitome of noble male behaviour, Gonsalvo acquiesces to her demand, as he prefers to see Julia in another's arms than dead.

### **Gendering childhood: Signifying boys in the emerging paradigm of sex as difference**

Julia's inability to reciprocate Gonsalvo's love sparks a debate between the titular ladies, both passing as young men, on whether he should persist in his amorous intent or subdue his 'manly' passion

and find another love interest. The sexual and emotional development of boys – as opposed to men – is articulated in the passage:

Hip. Poor child, who would'st be Wise above thy Years,  
 Why dost thou talk, like a Philosopher,  
 Of conquering Love, who art not yet Grown up  
 To try the force of any Manly passion?  
 The sweetness of thy Mothers milk is yet  
 Within thy Veins, not sown'd and turn'd by Love.  
 Gons. Thou hast not Field enough in thy Young breast,  
 To entertain such Storms to struggle in. (Dryden, 3.1.192–199)

“The physiological characteristics of children, the malleability of their brains and bodies” (Vicente 2017, 76) posed a threat to the emerging ideology that defined sex as fundamental difference, which opposed the Renaissance ideology where women and boys bore an analogous relation. The idiosyncrasies of – male – childhood were accommodated into the ideology of sex as difference by acknowledging “the power that education had to mold *natural* tendencies” (Vicente 2017, 72; my emphasis). As sex began to be regarded as an immutable category, “wrongful sexual behavior could only be the result of the incorrect social influences and improper education in childhood” (Vicente 2017, 73). More specifically, children’s sexuality was seen as mediated by their social environment, which played a key role in “disciplining the child’s natural tendencies toward sensual pleasures and sexual experimentation” (Vicente 2017, 72). Within this environment, maternal rearing had a prominent place. A high and prolonged attachment to their mothers was seen as weakening and potentially effeminising (Vicente 2017); thus, a proper education and ‘manly’ activities were required to reinforce the ‘natural’ division of the sexes. Conspicuously infantilised, Amideo is depicted as being of too tender an age to have naturally developed manly (hetero)sexual and passion and amorous feelings.

The gendering of childhood is in fact addressed recurrently in the play. As mentioned before, the “economy of corporeal subjection” (King 2004, 41) upheld by the servant’s mocking emasculation of the ‘boys’ is undermined by Gonsalvo’s remark on their wantonness and by the marked dissociation between the ladies’ self-perception and the masculine identity they perform. However, the emerging discourse advocating distinct gendered and sexual identities coexists in the play with the patriarchal view of boys and women as playing an analogous role. For instance, Manuel admits to feeling an unusual fondness for Amideo, whom he later marries as Angellina: “A sweet fac’d Boy, / I like him strangely” (Dryden, 2.2.135–136). Even though the unnaturalness of such feeling is to some extent acknowledged, Manuel’s implied attraction is not irrevocably problematic. What Mackie has called “the easy ‘bisexuality’ of the Restoration rake” (2009, 8) would in turn be rendered quite unsustainable by the rising prevalence of “a model that defines sexual relations within a paradigm of complementary difference rather than along a scale of hierarchical gradations in which an adolescent boy might occupy a homologous relation to a woman” (Mackie 2009, 8).

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Such homology is once again articulated in the closing act of the play. Fleeing from Roderick and his minions, Gonsalvo and Manuel take Julia and the cross-dressed damsels to a ship for refuge, only to later find out they share their hiding place with their foe, whom they take for the vessel's commander. When Gonsalvo suggests fighting the unsuspecting crew, Manuel gauges their chances quite negatively: "four Men, and two poor Boys / (Which added to our Number make us Weaker)" (Dryden, 5.2.37–38). Boys are sharply differentiated from and opposed to men, on account of an alleged categorical – 'feminine' – weakness. Thus, Manuel suggests waiting until all crew members have retired to sleep; it is only unconscious, defenceless men that he sees a chance to beat: "By this means too, the Boys are usefull for us; / For they can cut the Throats of Sleeping men" (Dryden, 5.2.45–46).

**The Barcelona battle rewritten: Performing gender in combat**

Competing, opposing discourses of gender intersect in the play. In fact, it can be argued that *The Rival Ladies* articulates the "discursive instability" (Quinsey 1996, 2) that marks the Restoration period, "a volatile mixture of question and (sometimes violent) reassertion, action and reaction, searching skepticism and conservative affirmation" (Quinsey 1996, 2). This intersection is encoded in a scene of great relevance: a duel between the cross-dressed maidens that is loosely adapted from a battle fought in the Spanish source. Both works engage in pressing ideological concerns on gender identities and relations.

In *Las dos doncellas*, Rafael, Teodosia and Leocadia arrive in Barcelona searching for Marco Antonio, whom they find embroiled in a tumultuous battle between citizens and galley crews. The character's outfit is evoked in a vivid portrayal of the scene: "among those from the galleys who most distinguished themselves was a youth of twenty-two or so, dressed in green, with a hat of the same color adorned with a rich band, apparently made of diamonds" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 310). Although he is described as a skilful combatant (Cervantes 1613/2016, 309), Marco Antonio's 'manly' heroism is subtly undermined in the very account of his deft performance. The showy garb depicted in the quote, utterly unbecoming the occasion, conveys the character's immature injudiciousness, and it renders the stone blow that wounds the imprudently flamboyant contender quite less than incidental (Clamurro 2001).

Marco Antonio's demeanour in battle stands in sharp contrast to the damsels' heroic poise: "with great agility they jumped down from their mules, and putting their hands on their daggers and swords, with no fear whatsoever, went right to the middle of the crowd" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 310). The female combatants are endowed with various culturally specific signifiers of normative masculinity. Perhaps the most straightforward is the dagger and the sword, since by the period's standards "cultural artifacts" played as much a role as "'natural' parts" in the configuration of the gendered body (Fisher 2006, 93). Significantly, Teodosia and Leocadia are described as showing not even the slightest glimmer of fear, courage being construed as a fundamentally masculine trait. The "great agility" they display in jumping down from the mules also encodes, as defined by Clamurro (2001, 42), the masculine ideal of strength and prowess, signified in the rider's control over their body and horse. In a subversion of hegemonic gender, the martial heroines rescue their – ostensibly emasculated – love interest, whom Leocadia takes in

her arms to a nearby skiff. Thus, Marco Antonio fails to enact the heroic masculinity expected of a gentleman, and so the prescriptive ideal of aristocratic maleness is thwarted.

In Dryden's rewriting, the fight explodes between the cross-dressed maidens as an expression of accrued sexual rivalry. Upon getting sight of the other, each lady secretly admits to being weakened by – unmanly – fear:

Hip. This were so fit a time  
 For my Revenge; had I the Courage, now:  
 My Heart swells at him, and my Breath grows short,  
 But whether Fear or Anger choaks it up,  
 I cannot tell.  
 Amid. He looks so Ghastfully,  
 Would I were past him; yet I fear to try it,  
 Because my mind mis-gives me he will stop me. (Dryden, 4.3.6–12)

Ultimately, the duel is prompted by the recollection of a childish dispute over who, Honoria or Angellina, was fairer and more deserving of Gonsalvo's affection, where each damsel offered an insulting portrayal of the other's allegedly hideous looks. In her analysis of early seventeenth-century theatrical representations of duelling, Low contends that, in contrast, "men's duels are almost invariably prompted by the desire for revenge or for glory, both of which motives derive from the values of heroic self-assertion" (2003, 8). In Dryden's play, the heroism of the female combatants is initially undermined by both the farcical motive leading to the armed confrontation and by the text's trenchant emphasis on the maidens' fear.

Persuaded that her opponent is scared, Honoria challenges Angellina to a duel; originally driven by more frivolous motives, the maidens will end up fighting for a nobler cause, though: to assert their claim to Gonsalvo. To Honoria's challenge, Angellina first responds with a preposterous offer: "Lay by our Swords / And I'll scratch with you for him" (Dryden, 4.3.45–46). The comical softening of a blood-drawing practice underscores Amideo's 'feminine' pusillanimity, as shown in 'his' rival's reply: "That's not manly" (Dryden, 4.3.46).

At this point, Hippolito begins to sluggishly unbutton 'his' doublet; the calculating opponent follows suit, watchful to remain one button behind. Slowly, both cross-dressed actresses start to take off layers of clothing, presumably titillating the eager audience with voyeuristic anticipation. As the erotic expectation is heightened, Hippolito undresses more quickly. The suggestive feminine contour of Honoria's body, discernible beneath the actress's shirt and breeches, is, to Angellina's amazement, revealed, and seductively exposed to the gaze of the audience: Two swelling Breasts! a Woman, and my Rival! / The Stings of Jealousie have giv'n me Courage / Which Nature never gave me" (Dryden, 4.3.52–54).

Significantly, Angellina underscores an emblematically feminine part of her opponent's anatomy, capitalising on and heightening the erotic energy of the scene. Her reaction also reinforces the understanding of gender identities as essentially distinct. However, the sexual jealousy brought by the British spelling realisation that her rival is a lady makes the more hesitant Angellina overcome her

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'feminine' fear. Now, it is Honoria's courage that falters, as she understands that her rival's valour "is not counterfeit" (Dryden, 4.3.59). The unflinching Amideo tears open 'his' doublet to reveal Angellina's feminine figure. The actress/character is also sexualised in Honoria's amazed reaction, which highlights Angellina's sensual appeal: "Death to my Hopes! a Woman! and so rare / A Beauty that my Lord must needs Doat on her" (Dryden, 4.3.64–65).

The ladies' sexualisation onstage downplays their enactment of the masculine traits signified in the practice of duelling. Significantly, their 'unmanly' lack of skill – all absent from the Spanish source – is also made quite apparent in the stage directions, as at first "They draw, and Fight awkwardly, not coming near one another" (Dryden, 4.3.83). However, as the combat progresses, "They Fight Nearer" (Dryden, 4.3.89) and finally, as a prelude of who would win Gonsalvo's heart, "Hippolito gets Amideo down in Closing" (Dryden, 4.3.91).

As demonstrated in the above discussion, the ladies' 'male' martial heroism is overpoweringly downplayed in various ways. They get enraged over a frivolous childish issue, feel utterly terrified at the prospect of an armed combat, and later prove the clumsiest of duellers; both stand out for their sexual attributes – and thus become the object of the audience's gaze and desire – rather than their 'male' bravery, prowess and skill. However, the affirmation of polarised gender identities vigorously encoded in the text does not go completely unchallenged. Farcical though their animosity may be at first, the maidens end up duelling because they cannot renounce their genuine love for Gonsalvo. Both overcome their 'feminine' fear and fight with growing determination. However, Manuel arrives and "takes away the swords" (Dryden, 4.3.91), and so restores the gendered order subverted – though not entirely – in the duel scene. The empowerment temporarily conferred to the damsels by their 'manly' swords is taken over by the active male hero, whose deed moves Angellina, now turned into the archetypal rescued lady-in-distress: "The Noble *Manuel* has sav'd my Life: / Heav'ns, how unjustly have I hated him!" (Dryden, 4.3.93–94: original emphasis).

The maidens' performance of masculinity is conveniently downplayed through both their hypersexualisation and their infantilisation, plainly articulated in Manuel's reaction to the fight: "You seem the little Cupids in the Song, / Contending for the Honey-bagg" (Dryden, 4.3.109–110). Apparently, the gendering of the ladies undertaken in the scene reinforces the long-established association between duelling and manhood: "As a social phenomenon, the duel in early modern England became an overdetermined sign of masculine identity that helped to stabilize significantly volatile notions of both rank and gender" (Low 2003, 3). However, the notion of aristocratic masculinity articulated in and shaped by the practice of duelling, opposed to both femininity and male youthfulness, is undermined by Honoria right afterwards: "If I have Injur'd you, I mean to give you / The satisfaction of a *Gentlewoman*" (Dryden, 4.3.109–110; my emphasis). The character's gendered words encode a ritualised challenge to another duel to be enacted between combatants of the 'right' rank, but not gender. Besides, the disempowered ladies wield their 'masculinising' swords quite soon again, when Julia cries for help upon seeing Gonsalvo and Rodorick fight.

Both maidens enact an active ‘manly’ archetype at this point, the aggressor and the rescuer. Whilst Angellina tries to kill Julia, Honoria steps in to save her, sword in hand. Significantly, even the only female character performing her assigned gender brandishes one. After Gonsalvo has wounded Roderick, the miserable Julia begs him to end her life and torment. The enamoured offender answers by yielding his sword and making the same request. At this point, the gender roles are momentarily reversed. Julia, the passive, afflicted lady begging a man to exert action on her inert body is willing to become the perpetrator of a fatal deed on his. It is the convenient arrival of Roderick’s servants that makes Julia transfer the responsibility for the action to the ‘proper’ gender, taming and defusing the transgressive potential of the scene: “Now these shall do it” (Dryden, 4.3.263). Both cross-dressed ladies then give their own swords to Gonsalvo, restoring the gender order of the play.

### **Manhood scrutinised: Cervantes and Dryden on hegemonic and transgressive masculinities**

Unfolding in the microcosm of a ship, the last act explores and questions culturally contingent discourses of manhood. Similarly, the dénouement of Cervantes’s storyline challenges and ultimately undermines his culture’s hegemonic narrative of masculinity. After the battle in Barcelona, the ladies are finally reunited with Marco Antonio, who is soon urged by Leocadia to fulfil his marriage vow. The rascal acknowledges Teodosia as his true and only wife and proclaims his repentance for his sins of youth: “I did so without thinking very much about it and with the judgment of a young man, which I am, believing that all those things were of small importance and that I could do them with no scruples of any kind” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 314). The conventional ending seemingly encodes and upholds the reinstatement of orthodoxy, both social and sexual. Marco Antonio’s words sustain a view of marriage as an institution that co-opts unorthodox male behaviour, which is played down as a flaw of youth amended in adulthood.<sup>3</sup> However, the subversive imprint of the text is not completely erased, as the narrator remarks on the lure that the transgressive spectacle of a sexually ambiguous couple has for the voyeur eyes of the beholders, “who were looking attentively at what the patient was doing with the page he held in his arms” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 315).

The coupling of Leocadia and Rafael is not an unproblematic endorsement of the normative ideal of adult masculinity either. Upon learning the identity of the cross-dressed maiden, Rafael sets out to take her as his wife, arguably to quench his sexual urge, as he expects the outcome to be “a happy conclusion to his desire” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 308). Even more troubling is his resolution to accomplish his goal “either by means of force or by means of gifts and good works” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 308). Actually, though not physically, he does coerce Leocadia into accepting his marriage proposal, which he phrases as a choice between being “alone and in clothes unworthy of your honor, [...] with no one to provide what you may need” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 317) or returning home “in your own honoured and true clothing, accompanied by a husband as good as the one you could choose for yourself, rich, happy, esteemed, served and even praised” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 317). Deprived of any subversive agency, the vacillating lady succumbs to a fate forced upon her, the only respectable outcome to an otherwise ostracised existence: “if heaven has ordained this, and it is not in my hands or those of any living being to oppose what He has determined, let what He wishes and you desire, Señor, be done” (Cervantes 1613/2016, 317).

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Don Rafael's coercion of Leocadia and, more importantly, his acknowledged resolve to gain her by whichever means are tell-tale signs that he also falls quite short of the ideal of aristocratic manhood.

The self-indulgent pursuits incurred by both male protagonists, which undermine the honourable masculinity they are presumed to enact, are rendered plainer by the contrast they pose to their progenitors. At the end of the story, both wedded couples arrive in Barcelona to witness the opening of a ceremonious duel among their fathers, which is stopped, thanks to the gentlemen's fortunate interference. As contended by Clamurro (2001), though quixotically archaic, the combat extols the bygone tenets of dignity and chivalry, scarce in a disrupted society marked by imperial decline whose male elite has become rather unheroic.

In Dryden's play, the encounter between Gonsalvo and Roderick in the male microcosm of a vessel crew also yields a convenient setting to explore ideal and transgressive modes of manhood. Right before their confrontation on the ship, both characters get in a fight over Julia, kindled by Roderick's unchecked jealousy. Pressed and unwilling to show Gonsalvo his gratitude, the rogue becomes bitterly resentful that he must receive Julia from his rival's hands. As the tension builds up, the blinded Roderick accuses his foe of intending to make him "the Tenant of thy Lust" (Dryden, 4.3.222), and utters the insulting words that ultimately trigger the combat: "She's an Infamous, leud Prostitute; / I loath her at my Soul" (Dryden, 4.3.225–226).

In the leadup to the fight, Julia herself acknowledges that Roderick is unworthy of a love which she still cannot renounce, as she urges him to "spare my Shame for the ill Choice I made / In loving thee" (Dryden, 4.3.184–185) and, offering to take his hand, declares her unconditional, though underserved, love: "Tis an harsh word, / I am too Pure for thee; but yet I Love thee" (Dryden, 4.3.190–191). To justify Roderick's unorthodox behaviour, Julia resorts to the discourse that defines inordinate passion as a trait of youth to be tamed and tempered in marriage, the co-opting institution where normative adult masculinity is fully realised: "This Jealousie is but excess of Passion, / Which grows up, Wild, in every Lovers breast; / But changes Kind when Planted in an Husband" (Dryden, 4.3.199–201). Roderick, however, depicts his identity as inborn, unalterable essence and asserts his unbounded authority: "Well, what I am, I am; and what I will be, / When you are mine, my Pleasure shall determine. / I will receive no Law from any Man" (Dryden, 4.3.202–204).

It is only later, on the ship, that the injured Roderick acknowledges and regrets his error: "Too late I find / I wrong'd her in my Thoughts; I'm every way / A wretched Man" (Dryden, 5.2.54–56). However, the rogue does not undergo a complete reformation to embody – and thereby substantiate – the ideal of masculinity epitomised by Gonsalvo:

Rod. *Julia*, you know my peevisish Jealousies;  
I cannot promise you a better Husband  
Than you have had a Servant.  
Jul. I receive you  
With all your Faults. (Dryden, 5.3.258–261)

As mentioned before, Gonsalvo exhibits impeccable virtue, high moral standards and, contrary to Rodorick, admirable self-discipline. Many of the traits representative of the gentleman, the hegemonic mode of masculinity that would prevail in the early eighteenth century, converge in him. As described by Mackie (2009), this male figure should assert his own and his household's value through education and the edification of virtue. Thus, "personal worth gravitates from the contingencies of wealth and status inward to an ethical-aesthetic realm variously manifest as taste, sensibility, and virtue" (Mackie 2009, 7). Rodorick, however, fails to legitimise the shifting form of patriarchal authority that would become the claim of the eighteenth-century gentleman, who should "shape his emotions, attachments, and conduct within the parameters of polite civility" (Mackie 2009, 6-7).

Significantly, this emerging mode of manhood where personal worth does not hinge exclusively on inherited status is also embodied by the captain of the robbers, who undergoes the promised moral reformation. On learning that Rodorick intends to take revenge on Gonsalvo and capture Julia, he seizes the vessel, purports to be her captain and thwarts the rogue's plot. Gonsalvo himself commends the former robber's personal value, grounded in his virtue: "You'r truly Noble; and I owe much more / Than my own Life and Fortunes to your worth" (Dryden, 5.3.189–190).

The reforming power of Gonsalvo's noble heroism also becomes apparent in Manuel, who follows suit when his friend yields his sword to a crew member to prevent Julia's murder:

Jul. O strange effect of a most Generous passion!

Rod. His Enemies themselves must needs admire it.

Man. Nay, if *Gonsalvo* makes a Fashion of it,

'Twill be Valour to Dye tamely. (Dryden, 5.3.54–57; original emphasis.)

Despite its emphasis on male nobility, the play is no unproblematic endorsement of an essentialist, gendered view of men. The ship is portrayed as a marginal locus of sexual deviance and material transgression at odds with the ideology of heteronormative civility. The reformed captain masquerades his noble designs in front of the pirate crew by feigning interest in Rodorick's riches, and, when informed of Julia's presence, purports the cruel intention to sell her to the – sexually – 'aberrant' Turks: "Wee'l Sell 'um altogether to the Turk, / (At least I'll tell him so)" (Dryden, 5.1.25–26). The pirate's reply encodes the sexual deviance typically ascribed by hegemonic voices to the cultural outsider: "Pray, Sir, let us reserve the Lady to our own uses; it were / a shame to good Catholiques to give her up to Infidells" (Dryden, 5.1.27–28). Gonsalvo reinforces this view of the pirates by asking Manuel to forewarn Julia of "the danger / Her Honour's in among such Barb'rous people" (Dryden, 5.2.95–96).

The projection of deviant masculinity onto a marginal space of illicit behaviour can potentially legitimise dominant culture by defining and demarcating the threat to be destroyed. However, masculine identities and behaviour escape the polarised categorisation of normative vs. deviant, as Rodorick does not completely uphold nor disown the masculine type epitomised by Gonsalvo and emulated by Manuel and the captain of the robbers. Thus, the construction of normative men as sharing traits common to their distinct – masculine – gender is challenged, as a range of masculinities, from ideal to aberrant, find expression in the text.



### **Femininity prescribed: Cervantes and Dryden on ideal female traits and behaviour**

The play's denouement also articulates the prescription of ideal feminine behaviour, epitomised by Honoria. Like Cervantes's Teodosia, she is the damsel presented in a more favourable light, and thus worthier of the readers' sympathy and the longed-for marriage to Marco Antonio. Linda Britt (1988) has analysed the differences between both heroines in the source text. Whereas Teodosia is seduced and enamoured by the aristocrat, blunter Leocadia casts off feminine restraint and modesty to undertake herself the pursuit of her desire, glazing at the gentleman "more than was licit for a modest young maiden" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 304). Teodosia is moved by the rogue's "sweet words" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 294), but Leocadia is driven by more earthly pursuits, as she is enthralled by Marco's wealth and status: "having considered the quality of lineage and his father's large fortune, it seemed to me that acquiring him as a husband was all the happiness my desire could hold" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 304).

An all-important difference between Cervantes's maidens is that Marco Antonio takes Teodosia's, but not Leocadia's, virginity. Deprived of all personal worth, the debased damsel seeks the only socially sanctioned solution to her disgrace: the restoration of her honour. As observed by Britt (1988), Leocadia's motives are far less noble. Under the wrong assumption that Teodosia has eloped with Marco Antonio, she seems intent on taking the utmost revenge on her rival: "That enemy of my rest should not think she can enjoy at so little cost what is mine! I shall look for her, find her, and take her life if I can" (Cervantes 1613/2016, 306). Teodosia's kinder nature and her legitimate urgency to wed Marco Antonio render her more likeable than her opponent. The damsel's assertiveness and martial heroism are effectively coupled with her nobility of character in what reads as a very positive portrait of Cervantes's preferred lady (Britt 1988, 46).

In the same vein, Dryden fashions Honoria as the most virtuous heroine, more compassionate and selfless in love. Angellina goes as far as to picture herself murdering Julia – "I think, Sir, I could kill her for yourself" (Dryden, 3.1.180) – a declaration which is reminiscent of Leocadia's willingness to take her rival's life. By contrast, Honoria is willing to help Gonsalvo gain Julia's heart, even at the expense of her own hope and joy.

Constancy is another trait emphatically defined as desirable in women, reflecting and generating social anxiety over female sexuality, intensified by the rising presence of women in the public theatrical world. Once she has come to appreciate Gonsalvo's personal worth, Julia cites constancy as the sole reason why she remains loyal to her flawed love:

Were I not Rod'ricks first, I should be Yours;  
My violent Love for him, I know is faulty,  
Yet Passion never can be plac'd so ill,  
But that to change it is the greater Crime:  
Inconstancy is such a Guilt, as makes  
That very Love suspected which it brings[.] (Dryden, 5.3.69–74.)

Similarly, Angellina displays virtuous constancy when she has to renounce Gonsalvo's love and accept Manuel as her future husband: "it will take some time / To change my Heart. (Dryden, 5.3.244–

245). The alluded change of heart is grounded on even more solid motives in Dryden's version, as Gonsalvo is found to be Rodorick's – and hence also Angellina's – long-gone brother. Thus, any perseverance on her part to pursue the match would be utterly illicit.

The play's final couplings emulate Cervantes's. Like Leocadia, Angellina is the first to disclose her true identity and profess her love for Gonsalvo. She pronounces an impassioned speech which articulates the essentialist association between fear and femininity pervading the play: "For him I have expos'd my Self to Dangers, / Which, (great themselves, yet) greater would appear, / If you could see them through a Womans fear" (Dryden, 5.3.98–100).

Then it is Honoria's turn to reveal herself. She embodies an ideal of virtue that makes her worthier of Gonsalvo's affection, self-sacrifice in love:

If *Angellina* knew, like me, the Pride  
Of Noble minds, which is to give, not take;  
Like me she would be Satisfy'd her Heart  
Was well bestow'd, and ask for no return. (Dryden, 5.3.215–218; original emphasis).

Honoria's virtuous heroism is rewarded, like Teodosia's, with Gonsalvo's love. Before the curtain falls, the hero tries to justify his change of heart by rating Honoria's personal worth higher than Julia's looks: "Your merit shall her Beauties pow'r remove; / Beauty but gains, Obligement keeps our Love" (Dryden, 5.3.279–280).

## Conclusion

Featuring two cross-dressed ladies that travel across a disrupted nation unhesitant to wield their 'manly' swords and two heroes whose gender and sexual behaviour retain subtle hints of unmanliness, *Las dos doncellas* offers a bounteous source to deal with the fixity of gender. In *The Rival Ladies*, Dryden capitalises on the source text's subversive potentiality, which is rendered wider and more multifaceted due to the genre shift undergone by his rewriting. Cervantes's novel and Dryden's play explore the culturally specific notions of gender that uphold each period's hegemonic power structures, both under increasing jeopardy due to ongoing political changes.

*Las dos doncellas* offers a veiled critique of Spain's unheroic social elites through the characters of Don Rafael and Marco Antonio, whose performances do not endorse the period's ideal of aristocratic manhood. The maidens, however, display 'masculine' heroism in a nation marked by a social disorder that both echoes and reinforces the transgressive identities embodied by the power elites. Thus, the fixity of gender upholding Spain's social orthodoxy is undermined at a time of anxiety over the nation's declining imperial might.

Produced at a transitional time marked by the overlapping of opposing gender ideologies, *The Rival Ladies* engages with issues which, partly due to the escalating presence of women in the public sphere, were of pivotal interest: "Restoration drama is overwhelmingly concerned with questions of gender identity, sexuality, and women's oppression, to a degree and a depth not seen in a comparably popular

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form of entertainment before or since" (Quinsey 1996, 1). Significantly, Dryden's additions to Cervantes's plot denounce social constraints on female freedom, such as forced marriages and the double sexual standard allowing to perpetuate the patrilineal lines of inheritance by regulating and coercing women's bodies.

The playwright's adaptation of Cervantes seems to be marked by an all-pervading effort to legitimise the polarised ideology of gender as complementary difference, since in a stark contrast to the source text, the maidens' performance of gender places an overpowering emphasis on their 'feminine' attributes and traits. Nonetheless, the play itself subverts, to some extent, the dichotomous gender identities that it articulates so emphatically, as is clearly seen in the scene staging the duel and its aftermath. Besides, the opposing discourse that defines sex as hierarchical and thus undermines essentialist gender binaries is also encoded in the text, particularly in scenes portraying male homoerotic desire for boys.

The emerging gender ideology implied a reformulation of patriarchal authority, as men were no longer granted an unbounded and repressive power grounded in their indisputable superiority. Gonsalvo exhibits many of the traits that would confer the modern gentleman authority and prestige. The masculine heroism epitomised by the character is conveniently reinforced by the gender performances undertaken by both Manuel and the reformed captain of the robbers. However, the depiction of transgressive and non-conforming masculinities thwarts the construction of men as naturally virtuous and thus legitimate wielders of power.

**(السيدات المتنافسات) لجون درايدن ورواية (الفتاتين البكر) لسيرفانتيس: دراسة مقارنة**

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**الملخص**

(السيدات المتنافسات) للكاتب جون درايدن (1664) هي اقتباس مسرحي لرواية لاس دوس دونسيلاس (رواية الفتاتين البكر) (1613)، وهي رواية نموذجية كتبها المؤلف الشهير ميغيل دي سيرفانتس. أنتجت رواية (الفتاتين البكر) في سياق تواجه فيه فئات الهوية التي تدعم الأرثوذكسية الاجتماعية في إسبانيا مقاومة متزايدة، كما توفر مصدراً فضلاً لاستكشاف ثبات الجنس، إذ تضم سيدتين ترتديان ملابس الجنس الآخر وتتنقلان عبر أمة ممزقة لا تتردد في استخدام سلاح "الرجولة". يحلل هذا المقال إعادة تكييف درايدن للنص الأصلي في سياق ثقافي أيديولوجي جديد، كما يتسم بعدم استقرار الروايات الجنسانية المهيمنة وهياكل السلطة الناتجة. ويستفيد الكاتب المسرحي من القدرة التخريبية للنص الأصلي، التي أصبحت أوسع وأكثر تنوعاً من خلال تحول النوع، للتفاعل مع البيئة الأيديولوجية لاستعادة إنجلترا. كما تتناول هذه الدراسة بعض المشاهد التي ابتكرها درايدن التي تتناول قضايا الاهتمام المنتشر بالثقافة المستهدفة، ولا سيما الهويات والأدوار والعلاقات بين الجنسين. إن إضافاته إلى حبكة سيرفانتيس تدين القيود الاجتماعية المفروضة على حرية المرأة، مثل الزواج القسري والمعايير الجنسية المزدوجة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** سيرفانتيس، درايدن، إصلاح، جنس، مسرح.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>. Significantly, there are two surviving seventeenth-century English stage adaptations of Cervantes's novel: Beaumont and Fletcher's *Love's Pilgrimage* (c. 1615–1616) and Dryden's *The Rival Ladies* (1663). For a comparative study of *Las dos doncellas* and *Love's Pilgrimage* see Hardman (2016) and Serrano González (2022).
- <sup>2</sup>. The cloistering of women, perceived as a tradition endemic to misogynistic Spain, is later mocked by Gonsalvo when he learns of Julia's intention to seclude herself in a monastery: "If you will needs to a Religious house, / Leave that fair Face behind; a worse will serve / To spoil with Watching, and with Fasting there" (Dryden, 2.2.91–93).
- <sup>3</sup>. This co-option was frequently undertaken by conduct manuals, which prescribed and naturalised gender roles at different stages: "For males, the manhood-acquiring process entailed a period of youthful excess (drinking, whoring, fighting), followed by marriage and control of a household, which was seen as the ultimate trial and demonstration of manhood" (Martínez-García 2021, 358).

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