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Extra

From Spain to the Americas, from the Convent to the Front: Catalina de Erauso's Shifting Identities

Isabel Hernández

1. The Text

In the Spanish-speaking world of the seventeenth century, at a time when women were in general excluded from public life in any of its forms, a woman, named Catalina de Erauso (San Sebastián, Spain, 1592 – Cuitlaxtla, Mexico, 1650), known as "the lieutenant nun", became the object of enormous admiration. Her popularity increased when it was discovered that, after fleeing her convent, she had pretended to be a man for more than twenty years in different places around the Spanish colonies in America. Her secret would have remained unknown, had she not disclosed it herself in 1623 to the Bishop of Guamanga, who revealed the story of Catalina to the world. The news about her identity spread very quickly and the young female soldier became a celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic. She started to write the autobiographical[1] account of her life, "Vida i sucesos de la monja alférez", in 1624.[2] This also contributed considerably to the fame of the "lieutenant nun"

1 I mean "autobiographical" in the sense of the original publication, whereas the account of Catalina's life was edited like a real autobiography. See also footnote 18 in this essay.

2 According to Rima de Vallbona, the original manuscript of "Vida i sucesos de la monja alférez" was lost. The first printed version, prepared by Joaquín María Ferrer in 1829, is based on a hand-written copy from 1784; a second version appeared in Barcelona in 1838. Cf. Rima de Vallbona ed., Vida i sucesos de la Monja Alférez: Autobiografía atribuida a doña Catalina de Erauso, Tempe 1992. With regard to the different manuscripts, it is interesting to reflect on footnote 8 in Kathleen Ann Myers, Writing of the Frontier: Blurring Gender and Genre in the Monja Alférez's Account, in: Santa Arias and Mariselle Meléndez eds., Mapping Colonial Spanish America. Places and Commonplaces of Identity, Culture, and Experience, Lewisburg 2002, 181–201.Throughout this article, all references to the text are taken from the edition by Ángel Esteban, Historia de la Monja Alférez, Catalina de Erauso, escrita por ella misma, Madrid 2002.

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both in Spain and in America. Even after she had already retired from public life, the story of Catalina remained the source of many episodes of the history of the Spanish conquest of America, while also providing material for other literary works, the best known of which is probably the comedy attributed to Juan Pérez de Montalbán, "La Monja Alférez" (i.e. "the lieutenant nun"), published in Madrid around the year 1626.[3]

The authorship of this account is also surrounded by numerous questions, since there are critics who tend to favour the possible mediation of a third person.[4] According to different sources, during the eighteenth century a certain Domingo de Urbirú was responsible for a manuscript copy of the story of the lieutenant nun. His friend, the writer Cándido María Trigueros, poet and playwright, could have made a duplicate and also authorised a third copy. The author of this third copy, Juan Bautista Muñoz, was at the time writing the "History of the New World" and, as a result of his references to Catalina in this book, in 1784 the Royal Academy of History acquired the hand-written autobiography with the following title: "Vida i sucesos de la Monja Alférez, o Alférez Catarina, Dª Catarina de Araujo doncella, natural de San Sebastián, provincia de Guipúzcua. Escrita por ella misma en 18 de septiembre de 1646 volviendo de las Indias a España en el galeón San Josef, capitán Andrés Otón, en la flota de Nueva España, General D. Juan de Benavides, General de la Armada Tomás de la Raspuru, que llegó a Cádiz en 18 de noviembre de 1646." This text remained at the Academy until it was discovered by a congressman, Felipe Bauza. He then convinced his friend, Joaquín María Ferrer, to publish it for the very first time (1829). This first edition was produced in Paris by the printer Julio Didot with the title "La Historia de la Monja Alférez escrita por ella misma".[5]

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3 With regard to Montalban's work cf. the outstanding studies by Sara A. Taddeo, "Mentís, que no soy mujer mientras empuño este acero": Verdad, Engaño and Valor in *La monja alférez*, in: Barbara Mujica et al. eds., Looking at the Commedia in the Year of the Quincentennial. Proceedings of the 1992 Symposium on Golden Age Drama at the University of Texas, El Paso, March 18–21, Lanham 1993, 111–120, and Jules Whicker, La virtud militar y el diseño moral de *La monja alférez* de Pérez de Montalbán, in: Francisco Domínguez Matito and Maria Luisa Lobato eds., Memoria de la palabra. Actas del VI Congreso de la AISO, Madrid 2004, vol. 2, 1851–1860. The version by Thomas de Quincey, The Spanish Military Nun (1824), is also very well known. The first historical novel about Catalina was published several decades ago (Ricard Ibáñez, La monja alférez, Barcelona 1964); however, in recent years, the story of the lieutenant nun has surprisingly regained attention both in the Spanish-speaking (Juanita Gallardo, Confesiones de la Monja Alférez, Santiago de Chile 2005; Chufo Lloréns, Catalina, la fugitiva de San Benito, Barcelona 2007) and the German-speaking world, with two re-writings of her biography having recently been published: Markus Orths, Catalina, Frankfurt a. M. 2005, and Lea Korte, Die Nonne mit dem Schwert, München 2007.

4 Cf. Sonia Pérez Villanueva, Historia de la Monja Alférez: ¿escrita por ella misma?, in: Domínguez Matito/Lobato, Memoria, see note 3, 1442–1452.

5 Cf. Encarnación Juárez, La mujer militar en la época colonial: el caso de la monja alférez, in: Indiana Journal of Hispanic Literatures, 10/11 (1997), 147–164, 159 (footnote 2), and also Jesús Munárriz, Presentación y epílogo, in: Catalina de Erauso, Historia de la monja alférez escrita por ella misma, Madrid 1986, 5–10.

After being forgotten for a long time, Catalina de Erauso's autobiography has recently gained much attention within the field of autobiographical studies in spite of all the doubts surrounding its authorship and the biography of the main character. This is due to the fact that it represents a very clear example of gender transgression and intersection.[6] However, when interpreting the biography of this extraordinary woman, a more satisfactory explanation could be provided by inserting her life into the context of a series of constant geographical moves and gender crossings – an approach that has so far not been taken into consideration by literary criticism.

After a brief reference to her well-known descent and without addressing any potential readership – a literary strategy that could provide an indication of what to expect from the text –, the author launches into the account of her own peculiar and eventful biography: On 19th March 1600, at the age of fifteen and after a heated argument with an older nun, Catalina escapes from a convent administered by her aunt, the place where her father – Miguel de Araujo, a Basque officer and member of one of the traditionally most distinguished families in San Sebastián – left her shortly after she was born. From this moment onwards, and after spending some days hidden in a forest, where she makes all the necessary changes to her physiognomy in order not to be recognised,[7] she renounces her feminine identity and lives the rest of her life pretending to be a man and using male names. A couple of years after her flight, realising that not even her own mother, whom she on one occasion meets in a church, is able to recognise her, Catalina decides to leave San Sebastián and, after travelling to various Spanish cities and serving several masters, she embarks for the Americas. There, under the name of Alonso Díaz Ramírez de Guzmán, she enrols as a soldier for the Spanish army, taking part in numerous war-related activities in Chile, where she is awarded the rank of lieutenant.[8] After that, she travels extensively in Chile, Peru and Bolivia, where she works in different businesses on an irregular basis without ever losing her ties with the army. During this period, she leads a hectic and troublesome life, constantly taking part in hazardous adventures or brawls, and experiencing all manner of mishaps. Almost

6 According to M. Menéndez Pelayo, Catalina's biography was a forgery, conceived by Cándido María Trigueros "known through other literary forgeries, for which he had a certain talent. The manuscript that Muñoz copied in Seville and that Ferrer printed was his and nobody has seen it again, nor has another copy been found". Letter from 16th January 1904 addressed to don Carmelo Echegaray, in: Boletín de la Biblioteca Menéndez Pelayo, Santander 1925, 369, quoted by Gema Areta Marigó, El barroco y sus máscaras: Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez, in: Anuario de Estudios Americanos, 56, 1 (1999), 241–252, 242. It has never been possible to prove this assertion.

7 This moment should be understood as a rite of passage into her new personality: the haircut and the change of clothing – a pair of trousers that she makes for herself with scissors, needle and thread, which are the only utensils she has taken from the convent – mark the beginning of her new existence.

8 One of the contemporary accounts of the facts recorded in Mexico (known as "relaciones de sucesos" or "memoriales"), reports that she actually obtains the rank of sergeant major. However, according to Vallbona, the official documents state that she only receives the rank of lieutenant. Cf. de Vallbona, Vida, see note 2.

eighteen years after arriving in America, Catalina is compelled to declare her identity, an event that rapidly captures the attention of the society of her time and turns her into a celebrity. She takes refuge in a convent in accordance with the orders of the Bishop of Guamanga, and when he receives a letter from Catalina stating that she never professed as a nun, the gates of freedom are opened up to her once more. She decides to return to Spain with a double objective: to receive an official pension due to her military merits as a soldier in the service of the king as well as to request official permission to continue living her life as a man. Thanks to her merits, Catalina achieves both, since King Philip IV rewards her with a generous pension for the services rendered to the Empire, and Pope Urban VIII grants her permission to wear male clothes.[9] Also around that date, in approximately 1624, Catalina is said to have put pen to paper and started writing her autobiography, which remarkably concludes with a reaffirmation of her male identity, and in 1630 she decides to return to America, where she spends the last twenty years of her life in Mexico using the name of Antonio de Erauso.

2. The Genre

In general terms, autobiography was a genre in which female writers at that time could also participate.[10] However, in spite of there being several fictional biographies portraying a female main character that would fit into the picaresque genre, ("La lozana andaluza", attributed to Francisco Delicado (1528) and "La pícara Justina" by Francisco López de Úbeda (1605) are probably the most relevant), the truth is that autobiography in the seventeenth century still represented a form of discourse that served only to consolidate the power of men, since its acts and enterprises are aimed at surviving in a world which is governed and determined by masculine power structures to which women have to adapt and which they must try to imitate. In this respect, one can easily understand that concealing her identity would have been Catalina's main objective. By doing so, the author and main character is not only showing how conscious she is of the fact that she will only be able to succeed in a masculine world by hiding her femininity, but she is also complying with the literary taste of the Baroque by portraying identity changes and disguised realities. Just as these elements helped her in her life, they equally made her autobiography a great success. It is a perfect example of a hybrid text, which narrates in

9 A number of recent studies (cf., for instance, Chloe Rutter-Jensen, La transformación transatlántica de la monja alférez, in: Revista de Estudios Sociales, 28 (2007), 86–95) underline Catalina's virginity as the determining factor for the Pope granting her petition. Nonetheless, it seems more plausible that it was in actual fact her defence of the Catholic faith, conveyed by the Spanish conquerors, which made Urban VIII consent to her wishes and grant her permission to dress like a man.

10 Cf., for instance, Matías Barchino Pérez, La autobiografía como problema literario en los siglos XVI y XVII, in: José Romera ed., Escritura autobiográfica, Madrid 1993, 99–106.

fact the life of a woman and a man.[11] The character of the lieutenant nun appealed to the audience of its time, as it embodied precisely the tension between a social reality that aimed to repress women and their desire to achieve freedom. In particular, it illustrated the problem of appearances and deception, which provided the text with a charming effect similar to that of women dressed as men on a theatre stage.[12]

Moreover, the audience of the time also delighted in curious and prodigious phenomena. Catalina certainly represents one such phenomenon, since she suppresses at a stroke all of her femininity in order to live and act as a man in the very masculine sphere of the army. As a result, she quickly became a prodigy, a legend even in her own time. It was precisely the belief that her life constituted something exceptional that allowed her to put it in writing, since baroque morals, which thought of her adventures as having no parallel in history, toned down all of her transgressions of the norms. In this way, Catalina shaped her story with the aesthetics and the imagination of the Baroque period. The concept of "the wonder of reality" allowed her to narrate her prodigious story as a saint, a sinner, an adventuress and a fighter, since within the aesthetics of the period the supernatural fulfilled a very clear didactic function: that of *admiratio*[13], which evoked the admiration of the reader or spectator, increasing their receptivity, while also limiting their critical capacity.[14]

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11 The fact that the author constantly alternates her gender when talking about herself makes it impossible for the reader to know who the protagonist really is, a device that corresponds entirely with the tastes of the Baroque period.

12 With regard to this question, cf. Juárez, Mujer, see note 5, 150f., and Carmen Bravo Villasante, La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español: siglos XVI–XVII, Madrid 1976.

13 The Bishop himself tells Catalina that hers is "the most prodigious case he had ever heard in his life" ["el caso más notable en este género que había oído en su vida"]. Esteban, Historia, see note 2, 161. Cf. also Stephanie Merrim, Catalina de Erauso: Prodigy of the Baroque Age, in: Review: Latin American Literature and Arts, 43 (1990), 38–41.

14 The didactic function was essential in any text of the time and, for that reason, short novels were disregarded as a literary genre. Considered as an inheritance from the Italian *novellieri*, novels were believed to lack any verisimilitude. Besides demanding the presence of moral teachings, the norms of the time required – as an ultimate goal – that narratives surprised the reader in accordance with Aristotelian principles, that is, respecting all plausibility, by setting the story in a recognisable location, attending to historical parameters and by allowing fantastical deeds worthy of admiration. These kinds of rules were established, for instance, by Antonio López Pinciano in his "Philosophia Antigua Poetica" (1596), one of the most prestigious literary treatises of its time. It is not surprising then that Catalina chose the autobiographical approach to narrate her story, in order to present it as a true event worthy of admiration, or, in other words, in a manner that differed completely from the genre of the novel. In spite of all this, at first glance the events narrated by Catalina do not seem either edifying or didactic, e.g. her prompt use of the sword for apparently insignificant reasons, or her cruelty towards the native people of America do not appear to be signs of right or virtuous behaviour. Nonetheless, her loyalty to the King and the spirit of colonisation of the Empire, as well as her will to defend national and Catholic values, elevate Catalina as a model within the culture and the governing order of the seventeenth century. Therefore, the text restructures facts as well as values and symbols in a very remarkable way.

However, the success of the text cannot only be ascribed to this element. When working on the literary account of her life, Catalina revealed her skills as a writer: She chose the most typical autobiographical models of her time – the soldier's account, the confession and the picaresque – and intertwined them to achieve a text with highly innovative characteristics,[15] which at the time constituted one of the most singular ways for a woman to present herself in society as a writer.

As a matter of fact, the first reading of her autobiography enables the reader to observe that the text has been constructed using the model of the soldier's account, in which the author explicitly indicates her personal circumstances, clearly describing the reasons that motivated her to change her identity and the means to which she had to resort in order to achieve her objectives. It goes without saying that her efforts to disguise her womanliness and the resulting events contain a great amount of drama, which also links her text with one of the most popular genres of the time: the comedy of intrigue.[16] Despite the narration masquerading behind this genre, it offers something unique, which is not present in any other texts of this type. It portrays the everyday life of a soldier at the time of the Spanish "Conquista" under the façade of heroism that is usually inherent to such accounts of life in the colonies.

In addition to elements common to these two genres – autobiography and the soldier's account –, the account of Catalina's life contains numerous similarities with other biographical portraits belonging to the picaresque genre, which was also so in vogue at the time. These include the ideas of being constantly subjected to the tyranny of honour and involved in the most diverse fights as well as the continuous changes of domicile and master.[17] Finally, as has already been mentioned, the text contains numerous elements that are distinctive of the genre of confession. The most important

15 Rima de Vallbona differentiated between the different types of narrative present in the text: picaresque (chapters 1–5), a chronicle of the Conquest (chapter 6 among others), the comedy of 'cloak and sword' (chapters 6, 11–20) and travel narratives (chapters 6, 11–20) – four of the most appreciated genres in Spanish literature of the time.

16 Confusion, the element around which Catalina's autobiography revolves, is one of the determining factors in baroque comedy, which frequently presents changes of identity, mockery and disguise, and always in relation to a love conflict. This permits the intervention of young and handsome men – rivals or relatives – who oppose the relationship, also allowing the development and separation of the loving couple by fortuitous chances, changes of partners, unfortunate events, undelivered letters, or treason. Even if a happy ending is expected in most cases, the truth is that very frequently characters are forced to accept endings such as death, insanity or reclusion in a convent: Willingly or unwillingly they renounce life and freedom. Catalina also rejects the opportunity of the life that she is offered, returning to her old identity, the fictitious, the created, far away from public life and general recognition.

17 Before becoming a soldier in the company of Captain Gonzalo Rodríguez, Catalina is the servant of a professor in Vitoria, a page in Valladolid and Estella, a cabin boy in a galleon that takes her from Sanlúcar de Barrameda to Cartagena de Indias, where she again becomes the servant of one of her uncles, who is in turn the assistant of a captain in Panamá. In the third chapter, she is given the responsibility of administering the properties of a merchant from Trujillo, who takes her from Panamá to the port of Paita in Peru, where she is to be in charge of a shop in the town of Saña.

example of this genre is, without a doubt, "The Life of St. Teresa de Jesus" (1588), written by St. Teresa de Jesus herself.[18] In Catalina's account, the motif of confession occupies a relevant position, since her identity and sex are revealed within a confession when Catalina decides to talk to the Bishop of Guamanga, don Agustín de Carvajal, in order to be able to save her life.[19]

By bringing together the genre of confession, the picaresque tale and the soldier's account, Catalina's autobiography questions the transcendental meaning of confessional literature. She never makes adequate use of the introspective levels required in this genre, stating facts without any sentimental detail or stylistic ornamentation. At the same time, she modifies the structure of the soldier's account by employing elements that this genre shares with the picaresque tale and manipulating their parameters in order to create a unique and credible text. Catalina's autobiography represents more than a simple transgression of literary and genre conventions, giving rise to a text that is both complex and ambiguous and in which even the figure of the narrator is difficult to define, since it oscillates constantly between feminine and masculine traits.[20] It is

18 In the case of Catalina's account, it is not possible to speak of autobiography in the modern-day sense. In one of his studies about "Lazarillo de Tormes", Francisco Rico describes the only two circumstances that allowed individuals at that time to write about themselves without appearing too vain: defence before infamy and the existence of a potential moral teaching. The first may be the case for Catalina; the second, for Saint Teresa, who wrote her "Vida" by command, without even wanting her name to appear on the cover. Cf. Francisco Rico, Problemas del "Lazarillo", Madrid 1988, 420. On the other hand, it should also be taken into account that, as Encarnación Juárez states, Catalina's story, in which the authenticity of the author cannot be proved, "presents an important obstacle to be considered an autobiography. One of the fundamental requirements of the autobiographical pact as described by Lejeune is missing: the author, the narrator and the protagonist must be the same person". Encarnación Juárez, Señora Catalina, ¿dónde es el camino? La autobiografía como búsqueda y afirmación de identidad en Vida i sucesos de la Monja Alférez, in: Claire J. Paolini ed., LA CHISPA '95. Selected Proceedings. The Sixteenth Louisiana Conference on Hispanic Languages and Literatures, Tulane University, New Orleans 1995, 185–195, 185. Nevertheless, in spite of the critical voices that have denied Catalina any artistic skills, or other equally critical voices that condemn the introduction of novelistic elements to the text, the most recent research (Beatriz Ferrús, Catalina de Erauso: ¿otra historia o historia otra?, in: Quaderns de Filologia. Estudis Literaris, VII (2002), 115–124; Rainer H. Goetz, The Problematics of Gender/Genre in *Vida i sucesos de la monja alférez*, in: Joan F. Cammarata ed., Women in the Discourse of Early Modern Spain, Gainesville 2003, 91–107) has refuted such opinions and made it plausible for Doña Catalina de Erauso to be the author of this text.

19 With regard to this genre cf. María Zambrano, La confesión: género literario, Madrid 1995.

20 It is noteworthy that, despite writing her story retrospectively, Catalina keeps alternating the usage of the masculine and feminine possessive pronouns: feminine until she flees the convent, masculine until her confession to the Bishop of Guamanga, feminine again during the following three years and masculine for the rest of the account. The reader remains in a constant state of doubt, unable to find out anything about the sex that the protagonist attributes to herself. This game of hiding and deceiving, characteristic of the Baroque, makes it clear that Catalina never tries to claim a specific sexual orientation. For that reason, the peculiar interpretation of Catalina's autobiography by Sherry Velasco, The Lieutnant Nun. Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire & Catalina de Erauso, Austin 2001, should be questioned.

therefore clear that in order to be able to compose her autobiography, Catalina was compelled to create a unique genre, and for this purpose she resorted to a synthesis of forms. By means of her story, Catalina creates a new genre, possible for a woman with an errant life, who lived between two worlds, on the border, a woman in constant movement, at the heart of the great experience of transculturalisation that was the Conquest of America.[21]

In this respect, the synthesis of genres accomplished in Catalina's autobiography corresponds to the necessity of giving a voice to an "I" that is divided in two, an "I" in possession of a double identity. For this reason, the first part of the story, which could be assigned to the genre of the soldier's account, corresponds to a type of writing that is very apt for describing war events and the ways of life characteristic of the men responsible for the Conquest. In contrast, the last chapters, which could be categorised as part of the genre of confession, employ a much more personal style of writing. Even so, the re-writing of Catalina's confession to the Bishop of Guamanga comes closer to being a parody. This leaves the reader once again with no clear information about her, and again plays with the clichés of reality and appearance so characteristic of baroque literature:

> Your Grace ...; this is the truth: I am a woman, I was born somewhere to someone who at some age put me in some convent with some aunt of mine; there I grew up, took on the habit, I became a novice and, about to profess, I left exactly for that reason; I run away somewhere, I took off my clothes and put on new ones, I cut my hair; I wandered around; I embarked on a ship; I paid my taxes, worked, killed, wounded; I was a rascal, but here I am, at the feet of Your Grace.[22]

21 In their studies, both Mary Elizabeth Perry and Stephanie Merrim have underlined the existence of a great number of women who dressed as men at different periods in the history of Spain. In all of the cases, the reason for this disguise was either honour or love. Merrim also states that, in contrast to English literature, in which the case of the female soldier is common, the tradition and moral code of Spain tried to repress such stories. However, neither of these authors dwells on the particular context of the Americas and its significance with regard to this type of biography. Cf. Stephanie Merrim, Catalina de Erauso: From Anomaly to Icon, in: Francisco Javier Cevallos-Candau et al. eds., Coded Encounters: Writing, Gender, and Ethnicity in Colonial Latin America, Amherst 1994, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, "La monja alférez": Myth, Gender, and the Manly Woman in a Spanish Renaissance Drama, in: Claire J. Paolini ed., LA CHISPA '87. Selected Proceedings. The Eighth Louisiana Conference of Hispanic Languages and Literatures, Tulane University, New Orleans 1987, 239–250. Nevertheless, it is also very probable that Catalina's account might not have been sufficiently interesting to warrant a literary version.

22 Esteban, Historia, see note 2, 160. [Señor ...; la verdad es ésta: que soy mujer, que nací en tal parte, hija de fulano y sutana; que me entraron de tal edad en el convento, con fulana mi tía; que allí me crié; que tomé el hábito; que tuve noviciado; que estando para profesar, por tal ocasión me salí; que me fui a tal parte, me desnudé, me vestí, me corté el cabello; partí allá y acullá; me embarqué, aporté, trajiné, maté, herí, maleé; correteé, hasta venir a parar en lo presente, y a los pies de su señoría ilustrísima.]

This premeditated alteration of literary conventions is nothing less than a method of depicting masculinity by adapting to the canon of her time, since only her military actions grant her the authority necessary for her to tell her story.[23] Those who met her in life describe her by means of physical traits that are appropriate for a military career. Such is the case, for example, of the painter Francisco Pacheco from Seville, who, when painting Catalina's portrait in 1630, described her as "having a rough gesture in her mouth, an expression not even becoming for a man",[24] or of a certain Pedro del Valle, who in a letter to his friend Mario Schipiano portrays Catalina in the following way when summarising her life:

> She is of great stature and too large for a woman, nothing in her would mistake her for a woman. She has no breasts: when very young she told me she had used some ointment to dry and flatten them, and so they are now. Such ointment was given to her by an Italian and it was very hurtful, but it took effects with no further consequences or more pain. Her face is neither beautiful, nor ugly, and shows signs of maltreatment, but not of age. Her hair is black and short like a man's, down to the nape of her neck in the fashion of today. She looks actually more like a capon than a woman. She dresses like men do in Spain: with her sword close to her body, and as it may, her head hanging down, a bit in sorrow, more like a brave soldier than like a courtesan with an active love life. Only her hands are evidently feminine, because they are big and fleshly, robust and strong, but she moves them in a feminine fashion.[25]

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23 Her physical strength makes it possible for the "lieutenant nun" to become a sailor, a soldier and a merchant. It also helps her when she is fleeing or on her long and frequent journeys with meagre means. Crossing the Andes mountain range is undoubtedly the greatest challenge for her physical and moral strength. In the city of Concepcion, after killing her brother Miguel de Erauso in a duel, the young woman is compelled to flee to Tucuman. After a perilous journey, she remains alone, having to kill her horses to feed herself and her two soldiers who eventually die anyway. Nonetheless, the fact that she is able to survive all alone in the wild is of great importance, since it signifies a vital step in her becoming a soldier.

24 Quoted by Gema Areta Marigó, Rutas de la identidad: la monja alférez doña Catalina de Erauso, in: Mateus Ventura and Maria da Graça eds., As rotas oceânicas. Sécs. XV–XVII. Quartas Jornadas de História Ibero-Americana, Lisboa 1999, 109–118, 114f. In addition to this portrait, which was painted by Pacheco in Seville, Francisco Crescencio painted another one in Italy around 1626.

25 Quoted by Munárriz, Presentación, see note 5, 85f. [Ella es de estatura grande i abultada para muger, bien que por ella no parezca no ser hombre. No tiene pechos: que desde mui muchacha me dixo haver hecho no sé qué remedio para secarlos i quedar llanos, como le quedaron: el qual fue un emplasto que le dio un Ytaliano, que cuando se lo puso le causó gran dolor, pero después, sin hacerle otro mal, ni mal tratamiento, surtió el efecto. / De rostro no es fea, pero no hermosa, i se le reconoce estar algún tanto maltratada, pero no de mucha edad. Los cabellos son negros i cortos como de hombre, con un poco de melena como hoi se usa. En efecto, parece más capón que muger. Viste de hombre a la española: trahe la espada bien ceñida, i así la vida: la cabeza algo baja, un poco agobiada, más de Soldado valiente, que de cortesano i de vida amorosa. Sólo en las manos se le puede conocer que es muger, porque las tiene abultadas i carnosas, i robustas i fuertes, bien que las mueve algo como muger.]

Last but not least, the account of Catalina's life also borrows several traits from the picaresque.[26] It is an episodic tale narrated in the first person with an ironical undertone, with chapters introduced by paratexts composed in the third person and with a young main character lacking morals, who holds several occupations and served different masters in different places. Since Catalina possesses all the abilities associated with masculinity, she fits into the picaresque tradition. On account of her shrewdness and intellectual sagacity, she can pretend to be a compulsive and despicable player, able to manipulate all those around her. This is ultimately a character that possesses all the typical characteristics of the antihero in picaresque literature.[27] Nonetheless, Catalina manages to avoid the final destiny that awaits the majority of picaros who never achieve the social recognition that they pursue. In contrast to these, Catalina gains fame and always moves in the most varied strata of secular and religious society, even reaching the very summit: the royal spheres and the Vatican. Once she obtains the desired recognition, Catalina chooses to set out on another journey, this time to America, an opportunity that is very rarely granted to a picaro. As a result, and in spite of the combination of different genres, Catalina's trajectory is indeed unique: After having been born into a Basque aristocratic family, she enters a convent, which she abandons in order to frequent taverns and to participate in military life in the peripheries of the Spanish Empire. From there, she climbs to the highest social strata in Madrid and in Rome, before travelling back to the New World, where she is to lead an anonymous and nomadic life travelling the roads between Veracruz and Mexico with her herd of mules. Such circumstances seem to confirm that Catalina could only have led the life that she so longed for within the borders of the colonies. These territories – with their politics and geography – seem to provide the appropriate setting for such a hybrid biography as Catalina's. All of this can without a doubt be seen as the result of the cultural encounter between Spain and the Americas, which placed new limits on social and literary conventions and opened new possibilities for women. Women then took up traditionally masculine activities and were able to subvert conventional roles in many different ways. Thus, the gender transgression allows Catalina to enter the Americas and move freely without being recognised or hunted, as the clothes that she wears grant her a freedom

26 I addressed this issue in the paper "Cruzando fronteras, traspasando umbrales: trasgresiones en la novela picaresca alemana y española de protagonista femenino" that I presented at the 13th Conference of the "Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios Germanísticos" (September 2009, Córdoba, Argentina).

27 Belén Castro Morales very pertinently reminds one of Charles Aubrun and Claudio Guillén, who situated the origin of the picaro novel in a particular servant-master relationship. Usually a person of lower class narrated his or her life experiences in the first person when trying to obtain favours or prizes for merits that were never recognised. Apparently, this sort of text proliferated with the Conquest of America when many soldiers wrote or dictated their feats in the New World as if they were "evidence of their merits", in order to justify the petition for rewards. The affinities between Catalina's autobiography and these narratives are evident. Cf. Belén Castro Morales, Catalina de Erauso, la monja amazona, in: Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana, 52 (2000), 227–242, especially 233.

of movement that was inconceivable for women of her time. Consequently, the process by means of which a new personality is constructed in her speech is intrinsically connected with the construction of a new identity within the borders of the New World. Therefore, the close connection between Catalina's autobiography and America must be underlined, since it was precisely in the American colonies that her particular identity as a man and her life in general took shape.

Catalina – just like many other Spaniards at that time – finds in America the promise of adventure and prosperity and, in particular, the freedom and opportunity to remain unnoticed and to be able to live her life as she pleases. Catalina decides to embark for America for the same reasons as many other Spaniards: the search for adventures, wealth, freedom and, fundamentally, a new life. She leaves behind a life with very few prospects where she was enclosed within four walls, and a whole world full of possibilities opens up before her. All of these elements contribute to increasing the *admiration*, something that baroque literature valued so highly. During the numerous travels that shape her autobiography, not only is the character of Catalina constantly transformed, but the story itself experiences profound and necessary alterations in its structure that enable the reader to place it within a specific genre, as it not only oscillates between the aforementioned genres, but also between the elements that should contribute to the construction of an identity.

This is also relevant in relation to the instances in which Catalina has to prove her physical strength and in the episodes that describe her loving relationships with other women. All of these events help to complete the process of identity construction, additionally providing the story with comical and entertaining moments. However, even if Catalina is indeed attracted to certain women, her sexual orientation is not explicitly defined. She never openly expresses her attitude in relation to any of these affairs, thereby avoiding the necessity of revealing her identity in this respect.[28] The shifts from

28 It should be taken into account that "lesbianism" was not even a concept at this time. In this respect, one should question the arguments of the articles written by Goetz, Problematics, see note 18, Paloma Martínez-Carbajo, The (Mis)Adventures of Catalina de Erauso, in: Prism, XIII (2000), under <http://www.plu.edu/~prism/carbajo.html>, or Rutter-Jensen, Transformación, see note 9. The same applies to the translation into English by Michele and Gabriel Stepto, Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World, Boston 1996, or the most recent novel by the German author Markus Orths translated into Spanish with the title "La mujer trasvestida" (Madrid 2008). It is very probable that both elements, "basque" and "transvestite", have contributed to a greater reception of the text. However, the truth is that both are anachronistic and do not comply with the intention of the author, namely to avoid being identified with either of them. In this respect, cf. the inspiring essay by Maria Odette Canivell, Catalina de Erauso – Basque Transvestite: Translating Gender, in: Human Affairs, 2 (2006), 170–178, 171: "My claims are not unfounded. According to Merriam Webster's New College Dictionary of English, the use of the word Basque dates from 1835. The word transvestite, according to the same source, dates from circa 1922. As Catalina's words were penned in the late 1600's, these terms are unnecessary anachronisms not present in Catalina's original title." Throughout her tale, Catalina is proud to be Spanish and to serve the King of Spain. Cf. Esteban, Historia, see note 2, 174.

one gender to the other, from the masculine to the feminine, take place constantly throughout the text. This can be explained as a reflection on the period in which she lived – a time when the role of women (with nuns being the only exception) – was confined to that of a caring mother and an obedient spouse, essentially as a possession of men.[29]

3. Shifting Identities

It is evident that, from the beginning to the end, Catalina transgresses all manner of ideas and notions and crosses many boundaries. Indeed, her first act of transgression – leaving the confines of the convent – frees her from a whole range of conventional bonds, allowing her to continue transgressing the remainder of the barriers that she encounters. The same happens when, without giving it the slightest thought, she disguises herself and takes on a different persona, with which she intensely identifies, even giving herself a new name. Only this masculine identity would allow her to traverse the borders between the New and the Old World and to participate actively in the process of colonisation of the Americas that is entirely a masculine realm.

Furthermore, her life constantly transgresses the frontier between what is legal and illegal, between religious convictions and sin, as she repeatedly adopts and rejects the role of either the criminal or the repented Christian. Her remorse is not real, but instead is yet another strategy to continually avoid the certain death to which she was condemned. Her originality lies precisely in this fact: She is able to transverse all manner of conventions barriers, both as a man and as a woman.

It is more than probable that, during this constant process of transgression, Catalina modified her story voluntarily, in order to satisfy the military, civil or ecclesiastical authorities, providing them only with what was necessary for them to know.[30] Her auto-

29 One should bear in mind that, according to the patriarchal tradition, women were always defined in relation to their male counterpart as a daughter, sister, spouse or mother. The resulting relationship is therefore not one between a man and a woman, but rather between a man and a no-man. Women are, thus, defined by negation. A woman's inferiority was explained from a theological perspective: Eve was created from Adam's rib so that she could accompany and serve him. Moreover, their condition as Eve's daughters made women bearers of sin. Their inferior position was their punishment. Their soul still granted them salvation, but they were essentially inferior to men and their nature was essentially unfaithful, voluble, corporeal, irrational, lustful, and chaotic. For the situation of women in the seventeenth century with respect to Catalina's autobiography, cf. the essay by Castro Morales, Catalina de Erauso, see note 27.

30 There are numerous examples of these kinds of voluntary alterations. For instance, Catalina's date of birth and date of baptism vary between 1579 and 1592 in the different accounts of her life. This difference of thirteen years affects not only the character's age, but also the chronology of all events portrayed in the text. This would explain the existing debate and doubts among critics with respect to the veracity and authorship of the text, and even to Catalina's identity.

biography itself transgresses and subverts traditional writings by women: It not only goes beyond gender boundaries to seek a masculine perspective, but it is also structured upon a tension between her different identities, and also upon the impossibility of being able to distinguish between the two: her own characterisation as the lieutenant nun is in itself a hybrid, both masculine and feminine at the same time. The reader is confronted here with a tale that is always surrounded by doubt, and with an oscillating flux, a constant coming and going from one place to another: A tale that aims to represent an "identity in process, on the run".[31]

Catalina's biography is, therefore, not extraordinary: Her life and writing transgress borders because they in no way conform to previous limitations. Exceptional circumstances make this possible: The narrative is created within a rapidly expanding empire, within a continent, Europe, in the process of being reconfigured. Such exceptional circumstances offered authors the opportunity to move beyond conventional codes.

During this process of transgressing identities and gender, it is particularly interesting to note that the motivation behind her petition and the telling of her story is to justify her fights as military actions and to make them part of her service to the King. She does not try to justify her infraction of adopting a masculine identity. On the contrary, she never offers an explanation in this respect. The confession of her biography allows her to accept her current identity, without having to deny her former personality. In any case, when she reveals her real identity as a woman in order to avoid legal prosecution, and then proceeds to reclaim her masculine garments, she transforms the gender role in the most complex manner, since she recovers her former identity using her family surname and has no fear of anyone discovering her. However, her ultimate decision to adopt a masculine identity cannot be accomplished without a necessary change of scene, since old Europe does not offer the appropriate opportunity for this kind of a transgression. In contrast, transgressions can easily take place in the New World, seeing as transatlantic voyages are the geographical metaphors of change at the time of the colonisation of America. America is seen as a suitable space for an individual to construct a new identity, and allows Catalina to travel freely without being discovered. The Spanish imperial context, so distant geographically, permits her to use war in order to demonstrate her patriotism, a circumstance that, in return, allows her to justify her transformation.

At this point, I would like to return to my initial idea and underline the great interest of Catalina's autobiography for literary studies, emphasising in particular the way in which the text is organised in terms of the constant journeys that the protagonist embarks on throughout the entire Spanish Empire. This geographical displacement coincides, in turn, with the literary displacement experienced in the text in relation to the three different literary genres that are explored. Even if all three present eminently autobiographical features, they also display three totally different writing styles. The

31 "... identidad en proceso, en fuga". Ferrús, Catalina de Erauso, see note 18, 119.

combination of such styles creates a unique text that, nonetheless, completely fulfils the expectations of the baroque reader. In this respect, the idea of "journey" should not be understood solely in the sense of geographical movement here. As has already been established, Catalina's entire biography is constant movement, a continuous crossing of borders between truth and fiction, between genders, identities and literary genres, which could ultimately lead to new interpretations of the text with regard to the question of transculturality. In my opinion, this aspect provides evidence of the relevance and interest that Catalina's autobiography still inspires today: When she composed her unique account, which differed from the usual forms of her time, the author infused the text with universal values that have enabled it to survive the test of time.