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FEMALE WARRIORS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: A PERVASIVE TREND  
IN  
BALLADS, PROSE AND THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES

By  
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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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In the eighteenth century, women masquerading as men joined the military and these female warriors were represented in every type of popular literature. The right intersection of geopolitical and social conditions occurred allowing female warriors to flourish in literature, and by examining these conditions and utilizing the contemporary gender theories of female masculinity and performativity, for the first time we can holistically understand the reasons these women became popular cultural icons, and how they have impacted female warriors of today.

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## **Introduction**

On January 24, 2013 Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff signed a directive that removed the ban on women in the military serving in combat jobs and direct combat units. Previously, the 200,000 service women in the active duty force had been officially banned from jobs that were considered to be on the front line. The Department of Defense decided that during a three-year assessment period all occupations not currently integrated will decide on an assimilation plan and will have the opportunity to justify the occupations that remain closed to women with permission from the Secretary of Defense (Lawrence). This change is a step forward for female equality in the United States military, especially because many military women have already been in direct combat unintentionally without proper acknowledgement due to the legal restrictions in place. In the twenty-first century Iraq and Afghanistan wars, battle lines were not clearly defined, so it was impossible to keep women out of direct battle. When it comes to guerilla warfare tactics, the front line can morph. It may come as a surprise to many members of the general public that women have been participating not only in support roles, but also in combat roles as soldiers and sailors for centuries. These women, as those who have recently been in combat, were rarely recognized as participating during fighting. Only years or decades later were their courageous accomplishments acknowledged and celebrated.

Many scholars have discussed how women tend to be written out of history or their accomplishments brushed under the rug. Pioneering women are often only celebrated by later generations. The Women Airforce Service Pilots or WASPs of World War II are a prime example as they were only given veteran status in 1977 and the

Congressional Gold Medal in 2009. Their wartime contributions were not recognized for almost 30 years after their service. This historical pattern has occurred because women warriors break traditional gender conventions, which can be viewed as subversive. While society is just now acknowledging that contemporary women have unintentionally and successfully participated in combat in the eighteenth-century Western world of Britain, France and America, women who joined the military in masquerade did not wait for permission to be in direct fire, let alone participate in the military. These female warriors—women who willingly volunteer to engage in war as a warrior, and who enact a whole or partial departure from traditional feminine gender roles and responsibilities—were surprisingly prominent in eighteenth-century culture and literature. There was a specific and pervasive trend in the eighteenth-century of cross-dressing female warrior soldier and sailors found not only in real life but all available forms of popular literature: ballads, prose (novels and memoirs) and theatrical performances (plays and ballad operas). Many of these female warriors not only experienced combat situations, but also directly participated in them. The examinations of historical, literary and cultural precursors to eighteenth-century military women elucidate the origins of the female warrior in a wartime century fascinated by cross-dressing. The eighteenth-century female warrior's persistency ensured a rich literary legacy that helps us understand the reasons why the female warrior was so popular. By understanding female warrior achievements, cultural significance and gender implications in the eighteenth-century, our contemporary values that have led to legalized women in combat can be fully appreciated. Twenty-first century military women do not have to cross-dress to be a part of the force but continue

the legacy of women in combat that eighteenth-century female warriors permeated on all levels.

In the past, scholarship about female warriors in the eighteenth century has focused on one or two literary genres at a time. Diane Dugaw's research on eighteenth-century broadsides and ballads is brilliantly comprehensive and provides an in-depth look at the lower class forms of literature in which the female warrior appears. Broadsides were popular with all classes because they were inexpensive and a good medium for printed ballads and political or cultural commentary. Female warriors in ballads generally followed a traditional pattern of behavior and were domesticated in the last few lines. Other authors touch on the female warrior in a specific genre, without recognizing the literary conversation and effect every text has on others. Additionally, dramatic works involving the female warrior were delivered to theaters that catered to all classes, and the theatricality and performance of the cross-dressing actress influenced the audience's perception of the female warrior. A more upper-class audience received female warriors in prose, and lengthy accounts enabled the author to explore her personality, motivations and the influence she had on other characters. The first-hand accounts and memoirs of female warriors prove action in traditional wars and revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Memoirs transcribed for publishing sometimes exaggerate facts to be more sensational, but with careful reading the truth can be ascertained with some degree of certainty. There are times when genres of female warriors cross, as was the case with the historical woman Hannah Snell who turned to the stage in cross-dressing regalia after her time in the military in order to capitalize on the intriguing performative nature her gender bending created. Although there are multiple literary

genres and conflicts within which the eighteenth-century female warrior participated, as a whole there are overarching similarities that create the composite picture of the popular female warrior.

The reasons the diverse female warrior permeated all levels of culture have been neglected, as has her relation to contemporary female warriors and their societal value. Eighteenth-century female warriors had ancestors as early as the Classical Amazons, and later in stories of female medieval knights. These predecessor female warriors created the prologue to the intersection of the right set of geopolitical and cultural conditions in the eighteenth-century, which led to a startling number of rich accounts of real and fictitious women warriors. There were over a dozen major conflicts and wars in the eighteenth-century involving Europe and America.<sup>1</sup> The necessity for a large number of soldiers and sailors meant that recruiters were desperate, enlisting or impressing young boys from a mixture of villages, making it easy for cross-dressing women to masquerade as military youths, and for audiences to imagine a dramatic character doing the same. The lack of sanitation in the field in this era made it easy to avoid detection because those in the military rarely took off their clothes. The female warrior who went to war was usually from the lower class—she was heartily conditioned to difficult labor, less restricted by strict upper-class feminine guidance, stood to gain an adventure along with skill sets denied to her sex and had the opportunity to move outside domestic tedium. Her work ethic and bravery appealed to the lower class that sang about her in ballads, and permeated the upper class that found her curious enough that her character repeated itself

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<sup>1</sup> The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), first Jacobite Rebellion (1715), The Anglo-Spanish War (1727-1729), The War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1748), The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), The Carnatic Wars (1744-1763), The Second Jacobite Rebellion (1745), The Seven Years' War/The French and Indian War (1754-1763), The American Revolution (1775-1783), and the French Revolution (1789-1799).



in drama and prose. In a society obsessed with masquerade, donning a costume and masculine mannerisms only enhanced the theatricality of cross-dressing. The reciprocal influences of various forms of literature created a fabricated female warrior who influenced real women to become female warriors, which in turn inspired memoirs and further conjured literature involving cross-dressing warrior women. All of these factors created the perfect conditions for the female warrior to rise in popularity. In closely examining the eighteenth-century female warrior, it is clear that her adventuresome spirit, patriotism, aptitude and disregard for gender boundaries remain in the twenty-first century female warrior, who will finally be sanctioned to participate in combat roles.

On the simplest level, the reasons that the female warrior had to cross-dress to go to war boil down to sex and gender roles and expectations. While sex is biological and defines most humans as male or female, gender is created by male and female characteristics and attributes that are historically, culturally and traditionally defined as “masculine” or “feminine.” In the eighteenth-century, gender was firmly fixed with female and male attributes in distinct categories. Female warriors often showed that gender codes culturally learned from childhood are actually performative rather than inherent identities. The definitional concept of performativity utilized in this paper is evoked from the contemporary source of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” Butler explains that “gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express” and that performativity is both anticipatory and results from “repetition and a ritual” (“Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 24; *Gender Trouble* xv). The performance of gender is expected to be in the two traditional and separate categories of “masculine” and

“feminine;” therefore these norms are anticipated to occur without deviation. Butler explains “repetition and a ritual” is that the action of propagating gender and reinforcing the standard social norms is constantly reenacted and re-experienced by people to ensure stabilization of a binary gender system. People like female warriors can go outside the traditional repetitiveness, but they are still performing, just subversively. If genders are constant impersonations of an ideal, it indicates there is no original gender that was imitated. Therefore, “*gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself” (Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 21). If there was no original, there are no set categories that are “natural” when it comes to gender as was popularly implied in the past. The female warriors in this paper move beyond a two-part “natural” gender system because they have realized the histrionic effects gender can have. Because it is performative, the eighteenth-century female warriors recognized that gender could be destabilized, providing an early example of Butler’s theories. To distract and deter readers from the blatant blurring of gender roles that female warriors participated in, some authors instead focused on other virtues they possessed like chastity.

The idea of gender being performative enabled the real and fictitious military masquerade of women that society then utilized to bolster male masculinity, especially in war. Female warriors are what Judith Halberstam defines as “female masculines,” a term utilized throughout this paper. In Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* she explains that “female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of

dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (Halberstam 1). Only by studying female masculines can the constructs of traditional masculinity be uncovered, because by appropriating masculine traits in what was considered a binary gender system for hundreds of years, these women shaped the concurrent characteristics of what defined masculinity for men. As female warriors never limited themselves to all the appearances and behaviors of their gender, they have shaped masculinity from Amazonian times to current military women in combat. In accordance with Halberstam’s theories, this paper asserts that all female warriors are inherently female masculines. Attempting to masquerade and take on a different type of gender role can become its own identity when the endeavor at passing as something new is successful, and this was the case for eighteenth-century female warriors who transformed into female masculines (21). The power dynamic throughout Western history has been in favor of men, and so women who desired the power and freedom of a man had to cross-dress or take on masculine traits. In the military world, female warriors become their own class of female masculines. They destabilized gender with their adoption of masculinity, which in turn showcased the performative nature of gender.

### **Historical Context**

Female warriors in the eighteenth-century have long-standing historical precedents. The first women warriors in Western literature, Amazons, were traditionally associated with the Roman Empire in the Classical Era into Late Antiquity. These women warriors—who lived in the area around the Black Sea from 1600-1100 BCE and the steppes of southern Russia and Kazakhstan from 600-400 BCE—were renowned for their prowess and fighting ability and lived in communities which contained only women

(Pennington 526). The Amazons' men-eschewing military lifestyle had a two-fold effect. Their skills and behaviors defined them as strong, military warriors, but because they took on many characteristics of manly warriors, some scholars believe describing women as "Amazons" has historically had negative connotations. In medieval times, women labeled as Amazons behaved far outside traditional gender roles; they deliberately lacked femininity and their independence was unprecedented. When discussing the significance of the Amazon myth, Simon Shepherd contends that the Amazon and the woman warrior are in opposition and that in fact the Amazon "constitutes a harmful antithesis to the warrior woman" (Shepherd 13). The Amazon does not temporarily appropriate a masculine role; it becomes her identity. The role the female warrior of the eighteenth-century dons is temporary and this is more acceptable to society. Amazons created the first standard of comparison for the female warrior. "Since the Amazon's shedding of her 'femininity' is never static the retelling of her story over time is also a useful indicator of society's changing understanding of male and female roles" (Wheelwright 15). In each era the morphing of the female warrior explains traditional gender roles for that period (including those that are subverted), and in the middle ages, the female warrior took on new forms and storylines. In the thirteenth-century French romance *Le Roman de Silence*, Silence, the only daughter of a noble family, is raised as a boy to circumvent the law which banned women from inheriting property. When Silence enters puberty "nature" and "nurture" disagree on her masquerade. At first Silence is interested in taking up female habits but then realizes "that a man's life / was much better than that of a woman" because a man has more freedom to choose a lifestyle and in the hierarchy he is "on top" (Roche-Mahdi 2637-48). As Halberstam explains of masculinity in Western

society, it “inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege” and these characteristics have “been reserved for people with male bodies and has been actively denied to people with female bodies (Halberstam 2 and 269). With the power of masculinity, Silence becomes a great warrior who endures multiple trials and tribulations. She is referred to as “he” for the majority of the poem, effectively allowing the reader to experience Silence as the other characters do, as an epic hero. Silence has homoerotic interludes with the queen—who is enamored with Silence’s beauty and skills—and the queen’s rage at Silence’s refusal of her advances forces Silence to undertake an arduous task resulting in the reveal of her disguise. The king does not punish her deception because he says “There is no more precious gem, / nor greater treasure, than a virtuous woman” (Roche-Mahdi 6633-34). After Silence’s reveal, the only traits that the court sees are her womanly virtues, not her impeccable character and military prowess. As soon as she is in female garb, Silence’s masculine personality aspects and accomplishments are invisible, overshadowed by virtues that are acceptable for women. The change of gender label and clothing that remake Silence’s character underscores the performative nature of gender. Although the social theory of performativity did not exist during this time, the concept that dress and perception completely influence gender demonstrates awareness of the concept at some level of society.

In the Renaissance during the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries there were three types of female warriors. One was the divine woman warrior saint such as Joan of Arc, who believed God spoke to her and inspired her to lead the French Army in several key battles in the Hundred Years’ War. The second type of female warrior took on the more traditional feminine quest of fighting for love like Bradamante in the *Orlando*

*Innamorato* and *Orlando Furioso* cycles. Within the *Orlando* epics the female knight Bradamante fights with a magical lance for her commitment to love and chastity (Bateman 3). Also within these texts is Marfisa, the third type of female warrior who fights savagely, fueled by anger and characterized with unorthodox behavior. As queen of India, Marfisa fights as a warrior for the Saracens, never takes on a traditionally female role and is committed to fierce violence from birth as she was “suckled by a lioness” (4). Both women dressed as men in knightly gear but did not intend to pass as men. While Bradamante closely typifies eighteenth-century female warrior of balladry who goes to war to follow a man and retains her femininity at the ending, Marfisa is similar to the traditional Amazon figure. In the less satirical *The Faerie Queene* (1590) two strong female warrior characters battle in Book III, which parallel Bradamante and Marfisa. Britomart dresses as a knight and fights to rescue her lover Artegall who has been imprisoned by the lustful and controlling warrior woman Radigund. Britomart, like Bradamante, is a more balanced character than Radigund. “The balance of ‘typical’ female beauty and ‘untypical’ aggression is important because it insists that someone like Britomart is both warrior and woman” (Shepherd 8). Britomart, as a chaste virgin, occupies a middling space as both a beautiful and virtuous maiden but also a formidable warrior, demonstrating a mix of medieval masculine and feminine attributes. The juxtaposition of these traits has the effect of making Britomart desirable even though some of her behavior is subversive. In contrast, Radigund is identified as an Amazon in the text. She demeans her male prisoners by dressing them like women and placing them in traditional feminine occupations, proving that she has the privilege of masculine control. With Radigund, “the loading of the name Amazon is pejorative; it can indicate

aggressive lust, unbridled will, disobedience” (14). The battle between Britomart and Radigund (similar to that of Bradamante and Marfisa) can be seen as a victory of Britomart’s virtue over Radigund’s pride, firmly indicating that Britomart possesses the correct characteristics to be a successful female warrior (Rupprecht 581). In the end, Britomart rescues her lover and restores rule to men in Radigund’s land, placing masculine privilege back with men, and righting the most traditional gender constructs.

The seventeenth-century continued the trend of women dressing as men and taking on masculine characteristics, but in a realistic and civilian way. Linda Woodbridge asserts in *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind 1540-1620* that there was little evidence of female cross-dressing in the 1590s and early 1600s when Shakespeare was publishing plays with female transvestism<sup>2</sup> (Woodbridge 141). However, by 1620 there was enough of a trend of partial-cross dressing to warrant the publishing of an anonymous pamphlet called *Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman: Being a Medicine to cure the Coltish Disease of the Staggers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times, Expressed in a brief Declamation: Non omnes possuus omnes*. The pamphlets brought to the public’s attention the “problem” of women becoming more masculine and taking on mannish airs and attire. The *Hic Mulier*, as these women were called, was not merely in disguise like the female knights of the Renaissance but rather adopted several masculine characteristics. The anonymous author of *Hic Mulier* was aghast that many women morphed to be “Masculine in Case, even from the head to the foot; Masculine in Mood, from bold speech to impudent action...” (*Hic Mulier*). The *Hic Mulier* was not confined to one class as the pamphlet asserts that,

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<sup>2</sup> *Twelfth Night* (Viola), *Henry VI* (Joan of Arc) and *As You Like It* (Rosalind)

“It is an infection that emulates the plague and throws itself amongst women of all degrees, all deserts, and all ages; from the Capitol to the Cottage are some spots or swellings of this disease” (*Hic Mulier*). The author specifically complains about the Hic Mulier changing her dress to a more masculine appearance.

From the other you have taken the monstrousness of your deformity in apparel, exchanging the modest attire of the comely Hood, Cowl, Coif, handsome Dress or Kerchief, to the cloudy Ruffianly broad-brimmed Hat and wanton Feather; the modest upper parts of a concealing straight gown, to the loose, lascivious civil embracement of a French doublet being all unbuttoned to entice, all of one shame to hide deformity, and extreme short waisted to give a most easy way to every luxurious action... (*Hic Mulier*)

The wording sounds humorous to the modern reader, but the author is seriously concerned about the Hic Mulier’s appearance which, to him, is directly connected to her unraveling moral state. The Hic Mulier’s masculine clothing makes her appear attractive because more of her face and body are revealed, which the author indicates leads the Hic Mulier to non-virtuous behavior. It is paradoxical that the women becoming more masculine could also be more attractive to men, indicating that her transformation goes beyond revealing clothing and enters the realm of homosexual panic.

The author does not approve of female warriors in epic romances because he is concerned these tales have the influence to change women’s behavior. This concept is not outlandish as the pervasive theme of the female warrior became prevalent in many outlets during the eighteenth-century due to the reciprocal influence between fictitious and real behavior. Women in literature who adopted masculine characteristics, and thus became powerful, concerned the author of *Hic Mulier* as he told women not “to believe every vain Fable which you read or to think you may be attired like Bradamant...that you may fight like Marfiza and win husbands with conquest; or ride astride like Claridiana and



make Giants fall at your stirrups” (*Hic Mulier*). In the author’s opinion, seventeenth-century women were not “justified” to act like female warriors from the *Orlando* poems, nor like Claridiana, the heroine from the Spanish romance *The Mirror of the Knighthood* (1578-1601). In the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet, “Mary Anbries” are mentioned as another influence women should not follow, referencing the popular *Mary Ambree* ballads that encouraged women to actively pursue masculine characteristics.

The author is so intent on having completely stable gender categories that he states the *Hic Mulier*’s behavior is “all base, all barbarous, in that it is exorbitant from Nature and an Antithesis to kind, going astray with ill-favored affectation both in attire, in speech, in manners, and, it is to be feared, in the whole courses and stories of their actions” (*Hic Mulier*). The women who adopt masculine traits in any way disrupt the gender hierarchy, which threatens 1620s patriarchal society. There is no place in the seventeenth century for a woman who embodies both masculine and feminine characteristics at the same time. In the pamphlet, the author calls on men to stop allowing their women to be “Hermaphrodites,” a common and inaccurate term used in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to describe women who exhibited masculine characteristics. There is an underlying fear that the *Hic Mulier* was one step closer to women trying to pass and live as men like Amazons, an idea separate from temporary masquerade. More than 350 years before Judith Halberstam called women who challenged gender roles and shaped the very nature of masculinity “female masculines,” the author of the *Hic Mulier* refers to the *Hic Muliers* as “Female Masculines.” He directly links them to prostitution to deter their subversive and norm-challenging gender behavior. He finds them “guilty of Lust or Imitation” which Simon Shepherd explains

characterizes female sexuality during this time that is “manly” or “aggressive” and the behavior is viewed as analogous to prostitution (*Hic Mulier*, Shepherd 69). The author of *Hic Mulier* was concerned that the adoption of masculine characteristics would not end at temporary masquerades and result in permanent appearance and behavior changes.

In the eighteenth-century temporary cross-dressing became fashionable with the rise in popularity of Masquerade Balls replacing the tradition of Carnival. During the Masquerade Balls people of all classes wore disguises. “The flaunting unrealism of carnival disguise permits the acting out of forbidden fantasies: but of course it also limits the meaning of these gestures, by its very theatricality” (Rogers 253). These balls allowed a woman to dress as a man for a night, but only temporarily. The reoccurring nature of formal Masquerade Balls in Britain most likely led to inoculation against the shock of cross-dressing and contributed to its proliferation.

The *Hic Mulier* pamphlet indicated a pervasive trend among women for light cross-cross dressing, but other sources showed that some were aware of an even more gender subversive activity that began to occur. Rudolf M. Dekker, whose primary research focuses on women’s transvestism in the Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, found that across Europe there were over 170 cases documented of real women who dressed as men (Dekker 1). Linda Grant De Pauw’s extensive research on women soldiers and sailors in Europe and America showed that “From the late sixteenth through the eighteenth century, there were hundreds of women soldiers and sailors passing as men, and everybody knew about it” (105). These statements provide evidence that militarized cross-dressing was more than an occasional phenomena or fantasy in the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth-century there were sanctioned wartime duties for women in Europe and America, although they excluded fighting and combat roles. Some women in the eighteenth century became campfollowers and moved with the army, providing services such as the laundering of uniforms, luxury food and drink sales and nursing. Campfollowers “were not...parasites who trailed after the army, and milched the soldiers of their pay...camp followers identified themselves with and as a part of the army...They provided a large and diverse range of good and services to the armies. To a large degree they were an army’s logistical system” (Hendrix 48). The army relied on campfollowers to keep up the hygiene of its soldiers, and keep up morale and health with purchasable food. In France the campfollower system was regulated with the jobs of *Vivandieres* (sutlers) and *blanchisseuses* (laundresses) requiring licenses because they were the most important to army life (Cardoza 189-191). Most campfollowers (of all regions) were the wives, not prostitutes, of lower-class soldiers who decided to follow their husbands to war—sometimes with children—because they otherwise could not make a living at home. Military members were not paid regularly on a schedule, if at all, so lower-class wives tried to survive by laboring in camp. In the eighteenth century the “military world was, in fact, a martial culture; it moved beyond the business of soldiering, extending into and affecting the private and social lives of all its members, military and civilian” (Hendrix 41). In a wartime culture, campfollowers worked as hard if not harder in their duties in camp, shared difficult living conditions and often faced the same dangers as the men even though they were not soldiers.

The campfollowers were never supposed to have jobs with direct combat roles—much like the military women of today that have had non-combat supporting roles in

war—but sometimes they saw or were part of direct battles, proving that courage and survival skills were necessary for more than just soldiers. The myth of Molly Pitcher—a woman who took over an artillery position when her husband fell in battle during the American Revolution—represented campfollower women who faced combat head-on. There were “real” Molly Pitchers like Margaret Corbin who was a campfollower in the American Revolution when her husband enlisted. During the defense of Ft. Washington on Manhattan Island in 1776, Corbin’s husband was killed by Hessian troops while manning a small cannon in an exposed position. Immediately Corbin jumped into action and took over his duty at the cannon, sustaining serious injuries that would leave her an invalid. Corbin blurred the lines between campfollower and female warrior when she showed the same bravery and forthrightness as male soldiers. Corbin lived on charity in the Invalid Regiment at West Point, NY until 1783 (Grand de Pauw, *Founding Mothers* 189). She is distinguished as being the first woman to be awarded a military pension in the U.S. by the Congress Board of War, three years after her heroics (Purcell 110). Corbin received recognition for her bravery, but many female warriors on both sides of the Atlantic did not, reducing them to penury, unable to live a working class life due to injuries. Some governments were stricter in acknowledging or recognizing women who took up the female warrior role.

Most military women were boxed into ‘female’ roles as they struggled to reconcile two sets of conflicting values. On one hand the everyday reality of working class women required them to work to support their families; on the other hand, emerging ideas of middle- and upper-class femininity—ideas that increasingly influenced government and military leaders—asserted that women should not be employed outside the home and strongly condemned those ‘amazons’ who engaged in combat. (Cardoza 188)

Women who morphed from campfollower to female warrior threatened the gender categories and hierarchies of the eighteenth century, more so because they still appeared as women. Other women actually cross-dressed and participated as soldiers and sailors in the military, becoming full-fledged female warriors.

It is not surprising that cross-dressing female warriors, like campfollowers, were mostly working-class women with lower-class behavior because upper and middle-class women had more conduct restrictions. Aristocratic women were instructed on appropriate feminine behavior by conduct books and religious sermons and this behavior was not conducive to a female warrior. “The eighteenth century’s ideal view of the nature of woman, her purpose in creation, and the roles proper to her was most clearly set forth in the conduct books which were popular and pious reading” (Brophy 6). Conduct books were so popular that by the mid eighteenth-century, “virtually everyone knew the ideal of womanhood they proposed” and this ideal became the norm that upper class women strove for (Armstrong 98). One of the most popular conduct books, Richard Allestree’s *The Ladies Calling*, was originally printed in 1673, but was still in print as late as 1787. *The Ladies Calling* discusses the virtues of modesty, meekness, compassion, affability and piety, and the appropriate behavior for virgins, wives and widows. Meekness and obedience were particularly important in ladies for both virtue and accomplishment (Allestree Part I, Sec II). Regardless of their marriage state, the correct behavior for all women was subjugation and virtuous subservience to men. As the author of the *Hic Mulier* had been, Allestree was worried that women were taking on masculine traits:

Just as This is a piece of daring manliness, which they may affect without breach of Modesty; would God they would take it in exchange for that virile Boldness, which is

now too common among many even of the best Rank. Such a degenerous age do we now live in, that every thing seems inverted, even Sexes; whilst...women take up the Confidence, the Boldness of men, and this too under the notion of good Breeding. (Part I, Sec I)

The *Ladies Calling* echoes the sentiments of clearly defined gender roles in the *Hic Mulier*: “Those Virtues that in women merit praise Are Sober shows without, chaste thoughts within, True Faith and due obedience to their mate, And of their children honest care to take” (*Hic Mulier*). All other behaviors of women were unnecessary. Behaviors outlined in conduct books like *The Ladies Calling* were meant to keep women of the upper echelon of society in a compliant and pure virtuous state with few freedoms. Men believed this virtuous subservience was necessary for women’s own good since they had a “weakness of intellect” and a “natural imbecility” when it came to reason and thus needed to be controlled by men who exhibited the superior characteristics of “wisdom, rationality, and strength” (Brophy 38). Although the middle class would try to emulate the upper class in dress and manners, these women had their own balance to strike between the overly moral, feminine aristocratic women and lower-class women who were ignorant of the types of rules governing femininity laid out in conduct books. “The norms of middle-class female propriety and domesticity developed not only in reaction to the lavish display of the aristocracy, but also in contrast to the public employment of their bodies by wage-earning women in agricultural jobs, trades, and other menial positions” (Craft-Fairchild 186). The middle-class woman did not want to be associated with personal labor of the physical kind like a peasant, but it would also be difficult to completely follow the strict behavioral code of the upper class. It is not surprising that most female warriors in the eighteenth-century came from the lower class who were not burdened by staunch conduct books specifically dictating behavior. Lower-class women

were still seen as inferior to lower-class men, but they were unconstrained by having behavior norms drilled into them.

Ballads about female warriors focus on lower-class women, and as there are few accounts of the daily lives of the lower class in any region in the eighteenth-century, these ballads are key to understanding eighteenth-century society as a whole. The female warrior emerges as a “surprisingly accurate, if conventionalized, reading of lower-class experience. Indeed, these ballads are valuable precisely because they not only depict the behavior of lower-class women whose actual lives have left few traces in other accounts, but they also illuminate telling conditions and preoccupations of an entire age” (Dugaw, *Women Warriors* 122). Children of the common people of society were expected to execute tasks within the working world at a young age and were busy at labor-intensive jobs by young adulthood. Working-class women made the transition to female warrior easily: they were already skilled in tough jobs and had few exciting prospects or opportunities for good pay, and therefore their transition in joining the military was not incredibly difficult, offering new job options once in the male world (Dekker 12). The eighteenth-century lower-class female warrior was plausible to the public because she was hardened by work and unconstrained by upper-class propriety. The upper and middle class were interested because they found these unique heroines “appealing characters” in a variety of literature mediums beyond ballads (Bowen 22). The upper-class woman might not have been able to relate to the lower-class female warrior, but she could enjoy her freedom in reading about the woman in prose or seeing her on stage.

As a multitude of women in Europe and America became cross-dressing female soldiers and sailors in the eighteenth century, the trends of the *Hic Mulier* that began in

civilian life were fully realized. Female warriors were found in all types of literature and performing arts. These women and their fictional counterparts joined the military to pursue a husband, or for an adventure that would lead to a better situation. Many real female warriors “were unconventional women who spent their lives rebelling against their assigned role before they pursued a male career. Most could only conceive of themselves as active and powerful in male disguise” (Wheelwright 19). The gender hierarchy of the eighteenth-century severely limited women’s participation in any activities outside the domestic sphere, so pretending to be men opened doors to other possibilities. Unfortunately, female warriors’ participation in these subversive activities almost always stopped when they revealed their disguise and “She all but lost the equality that she fought so hard to gain and enjoyed” (Wheelwright 89). The influence these women had on cultural preoccupations with female transvestism was a reciprocal relationship. Based on the pervasive theme of female warriors in so many outlets throughout the eighteenth-century, it suggests that women had access to the idea of masquerading and going to war because it was so embedded in popular imagination. One can rationally conclude that the songs and broadsides of female warriors influenced real masquerading women, and they in turn inspired more ballads. “The songs reflect not only an imaginary but a “real world” that offered this option to some adventuring women—whose choice to cross-dress in turn may well have been shaped by the pervasive presence of songs and accounts on the topic” (Dugaw, “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 274). The trend of cross-dressing female warriors made its way into higher forms of theatrical performance and prose, providing an intersection of female warriors in high and low culture.



### **Female Warriors In Popular Balladry**

Female warriors were extremely popular in balladry during the eighteenth-century. Ballads were usually printed on broadsides: cheap, single sided fliers or posters that had songs, pictures or stories printed on them. The broadsides were very affordable and usually had unknown authors, or were short versions of works by other authors. “Cheap broadsides about female sailors and soldiers were sold by peddlers at venues like street corners, bookshops, docks, markets, and fairs. Buyers were ordinary people—milkmaids, apprentices, servants, sailors, shopkeepers, artisans, as well as members of the gentry” (Dugaw, “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 277). Diane Dugaw, author of *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry 1650-1850* and other articles on the subject, is the foremost expert in the field of female warrior ballads, chapbooks and broadsides. Her comprehensive research on these mostly lower-class popular forms of literature is excellent; the patterns in the songs and stories provide insight into the very foundations of the eighteenth-century female warrior. The earliest female warrior ballad *Mary Ambree* was found in Elizabethan times in London around 1600, though it remained in print in various forms into the 1800s of the Victorian Age (Dugaw, *Women Warriors* 1). Dugaw says of the female warrior that “At the outset of the popular trope in the early modern world, the cross-dressing and gender-masquerading heroine was a model, a comprehensive ideal” (Dugaw “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 277). These women were similar to other cross-dressing warrior women like Bradamante and Britomart, but they fully flourished in the eighteenth-century.

There are specific reasons female warrior ballads reached the height of their popularity in the eighteenth century. Dugaw explains:

That they [female warrior ballads] reached the apex of their popularity during an age of deeply ironic satire and literary playfulness, is no accident. They belong to that world. The Female Warrior trope celebrates its romantic world in a matter-of-factly topsy-turvy way. Essentially double, essentially ironic, its dissembling vision inverts, transforms, and certainly exposes the structures of that world as it is usually set-up. (*Women Warriors* 4)

Female warriors were certainly ironic as women were supposed to be confined to the domestic space. Most of these ballads are patterned: they start and end within the patriarchal structures of the father or husband's house, and in the middle the woman masquerades as a man and goes to war, turning the world upside-down in terms of sexuality, gender roles and behaviors. The female warrior of balladry is allowed a time in the middle of these songs where she is master of her surroundings and changes the world to suit *her* purposes—a characteristic found again and again in female warrior literature. The similar storylines, imagery and language are consistent in female warrior ballads that “supplied a particularly vivid and marketable form of the interrelation between the gritty facts of actual people and events and the conventionalized fictions and valences of fantasy” (Dugaw “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 277). This interrelation leads to the logical conclusion that there was a mutual influence between real and fictitious stories of female warriors. Women were trapped by male figures in domestic tedium, but their laboring lifestyle made them extremely capable of adopting the physical roles of a male soldier or sailor in a seamless transition. By having a female protagonist, the female warrior ballad opens a role usually reserved for men. The female warrior is placed in situations in the military where she can be heroic, and thus can be a hero like those in the epic style romances of the Middle Ages. She “performs” in both a feminine and masculine way, and “Thus she steps into an uncustomary agency and a measure of ‘equality’,” able to inspire both men and women who identify with her heroic virtues

(Dugaw “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 274). The female warrior is powerful because she has her own story, and is able to navigate representing both feminine and masculine characteristics, often expressed in literature as “Love” and “Glory.”

Although there are many female warrior ballads to choose from, *The Bristol Bridegroom; Or The Ship-Carpenters love to the Mer-chants’s Daughter* provides a prime example of the woman warrior in balladry. *The Bristol Bridegroom* is an excellent example because of its popularity—it first appeared as an eighteenth-century Irish chapbook, but has publication dates of 1760, 1775, and 1790—and it extends the tradition of cross-dressing to pursue love from medieval romances (Dugaw “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 287). In *The Bristol Bridegroom*, a merchant does not approve of his daughter’s love for a young ship-carpenter, so the father ensures the lover goes to sea. The daughter loved him so much that

Without the thought of dread or fear,  
She drest herself in seaman’s shew,  
And after him she did pursue. (*The Bristol Bridegroom*)

She does not accept her father’s actions with meekness or obedience as *The Ladies Calling* would instruct an upper-class woman, but takes an active role in her future with the carpenter. These lines also show how easy it was for her to “put on” the appearance of a man, highlighting the performativity of gender. She is accepted onto the ship by the captain, pretends to be a young male sailor and ends up becoming the surgeon’s helper. Historically, there was a constant need for soldiers and sailors in the eighteenth-century due to the many conflicts in Europe and America, so recruiters “routinely drew boys and very young men into service (either by ordinary employment or coerced impressments),” which therefore, “made it easier for smaller, less muscular and beardless women to pass

as men” (Barnard 336). The author of *The Bristol Bridegroom* is aware of these facts as the ballad says:

Unto the captain she did go,  
And said, Right worthy sir, ‘tis so,  
You do want men, I understand;  
I’m free to fight with heart and hand. (*The Bristol Bridegroom*)

Here, the cross-dressed female character knows how desperate a captain can be for sailors, and plays on this by acknowledging she is a “boy” and saying she will be all the more valuable since she is eager to fight and is there of free will.

During the ballad, recurring motifs identify the female warrior pattern in literature. The ship comes under fire and her ship-carpenter receives a wound that sends him to the surgeon. The disguised daughter keeps her secret to herself, but used “her utmost skill, / To cure him with a great good will” (*The Bristol Bridegroom*). Like Britomart, the daughter rescues her lover, breaking the traditional pattern of masculine rescue. The ship-carpenter is attracted to the “surgeon’s mate,” telling him that if his lover were dead when he got back he would become the true companion of the surgeon’s mate and never marry. As with many other female warrior stories this trope allows for explorations of “homosexualism and the ambiguities of sexual desire, as women and men alike fall for these ‘handsome cabinboys’” (Dugaw, “Heroines Gritty and Tender” 288). The audience knows the sexes of everyone involved, but the characters do not, allowing them to play out a sexual side of subversive gender behavior that would normally be forbidden, making it exciting and titillating. The daughter in *The Bristol Bridegroom* is intriguing because she is able to cross-dress and act as a man so well that no one—not even her lover—recognizes her. “The ballads present an ideal of transgendering as the hermaphroditic, gender-confounding heroine passes as a man with an ease and applause

that seems surprising to us, who live in a world where such behavior is deemed at best unlikely or odd, at worst threatening or depraved in its ‘unnaturalness’” (Dugaw, *Women Warriors* xiv). The theatrical gender bending that female warriors are able to successfully achieve in ballads is part of why they are so heroic: they are able to navigate the world living a double life in a temporary fashion that is acceptable to an eighteenth-century society obsessed with masquerade. In *The Bristol Bridegroom*, the cross-dressing daughter possesses both “twin heroic polestars of Love and Glory,” the traditionally feminine “Love” and masculine “Glory” that she bends to suit her purposes (Dugaw, *Women Warriors* 35). The daughter proves she possesses “Love” by faithfully following her lover and nursing his wounds, and “Glory” by showing her valor as a heroine in joining a naval ship in disguise to go to war with her lover.

The *Bristol Bridegroom* follows a standard narrative pattern and at the end the cross-dressing heroine reveals her disguise and goes back to behaving in an acceptably feminine way. She is put into a dress instead of sailor clothes, and marries the ship-carpenter with a blessing from her father. The second to last stanza makes it clear that “She is now made a lawful wife, / And liveth free from care and strife” (*The Bristol Bridegroom*). At the end of the ballad, all players are seemingly happy as it “thus gives a particularly full-bodied female warrior tale of love, parental cruelty, disguising, testing, and happy resolution” (Dugaw, *Women Warriors* 95). However, the woman in *The Bristol Bridegroom* is re-domesticated at the end, which does not seem like an entirely happy ending for a woman who went on a grand adventure sailing the seas and experiencing battle. The ending suggests one reason why society celebrated the adventure of the female warrior in balladry—her actions are only temporarily subversive,

and she returns her rightful feminine gender norms at the end. Dugaw believes the tidy marriage at the end serves another purpose as it “just barely belies the subversive implications of her commandeering of *both* seemingly contradictory sides of a bipolar gender system” (Dugaw, *Women Warriors* 5). This observation is crucial: if the female warrior returns to her former life, her performance as a man showed that she did control gender norms for a time, a unique skill for the eighteenth-century. By adopting masculinity, even briefly, she became a female masculine and influenced male masculinity.

### **Female Warriors in Popular Prose**

Female warriors were found in prose in three variations in the eighteenth-century: memoirs, first hand accounts of real women and novels with fictionalized women. The memoirs about female warriors were about working-class women whose stories were dictated to an author for publishing. Authors sometimes misrepresented the facts or embellished these stories to make them more enticing for the public to buy, but many of these women’s stories have been verified with a great degree of accuracy. As these memoirs were about women of a similar class, many of the admirable traits they displayed were consistent with each other, even if the original reason for joining the military was different depending on the wars and location of the women. The most popular European memoir from the eighteenth-century was *The Female Soldier; or The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* about the female warrior by the same name, while the most popular American memoir was *The Female Review* about Deborah Sampson. Both memoirs contain some of the common tropes of female warrior Ballads, indicating the reciprocal influence between literature and cultural events.

The story of Hannah Snell's life was written and published at her request by Robert Walker who set her up as a heroine destined for the role of a female warrior, indicating gender subversive behavior from the beginning of her life. *The Female Soldier* was published by Robert Walker in two main versions in quick succession: a 46-page text memoir that was later broken down into 24 and 16-page Chapbook versions and a 187-page engraved illustration memoir with more adventures (Dugaw, "Introduction" V). Snell was born in 1723 to a lower-class laboring family that was fiercely patriotic and full of military men or military wives, and Snell as a child pretended she was a soldier herself (Walker 2-4). Unfortunately, Snell's husband led a life of debauchery and when she was seven months pregnant deserted her for the military, setting her in the pattern of female warriors of balladry that joined the military for a husband or lover. Snell was motivated by hate rather than the womanly objective of "Love." When her daughter died Snell realized she was "now free from all the ties arising from nature and consanguinity, she thought herself privileged to roam in quest of the man who, without reason, had injured her so much, for there are no bounds to be set either to love, jealousy, or hatred in the female mind" (Walker 5). In the next line Walker speculates on why Snell dresses in male clothing and decides to join the army. "That she might execute her designs with the better grace and the more success, she boldly commenced a man—at least in her dress—and no doubt she had a right to do so, since she had the real soul of a man in her breast" (5). Walker indicates that Snell is a man at heart, or that at least her inner qualities more closely matched those of a man. This comment demonstrates a hypothesis of what is defined today as a transgender person, and insinuates that Snell is inherently a female masculine who has innate qualities of masculinity. Snell easily enlisted in the English

army as James Gray in November of 1745, showing both how willing the army was to take troops with minimal questions, and the performativity of gender as Snell moved in society as a man just based on her appearance in masculine clothing. Snell's working-class background assisted her in withstanding and succeeding in rigorous military life as when it came to exercises she "now performed with as much skill and dexterity as any sergeant or corporal in his Majesty's service" (7). The lines highlighting Snell's impressive skills in a traditionally masculine occupation serves to continue her role as a female masculine.

Snell's re-enlistment as a marine two years later in 1747 gave Walker opportunities to stress her pursuit of traditionally masculine "Glory," and the unique sexual situations her masquerade caused. Her ship, *The Swallow*, ends up in India at Fort St. David's during the Carnatic Wars (1744-1763). In a battle at Areacopong on shore Snell proved her quest of "Glory" by excelling as a soldiering marine. "This adventure [Areacopong] animated our heroine afresh, and gave her a fairer opportunity than before of displaying her intrepidity and thirst after glory, and she embraced it in such a manner as that she gained the applause of all of her officers" (Walker 14). Walker carefully presents with readers evidence that Snell is the ideal military man. In Snell's next battle—the siege of Pondicherry, India—she was wounded. Snell fired thirty-seven rounds, but received six shots in her right leg, five in the left leg and a shot to the groin that she was unable to receive medical attention for without revealing her masquerade (21). Snell ended up taking the ball out herself, which is described in lengthy detail. The idea of a wound in an area that could be sexualized intrigued and fascinated the public based on how many cross-dressing ballads contain groin wounds, and emphasized her



laboring-class ability to endure hardship. It also suggests the idea of castration, highlighting that Snell was in a sense a castrated male during her masquerade. Like many other female warriors, Snell had homoerotic encounters as a result of her cross-dressing. These encounters were crucial to proving her masculinity as she was nicknamed “Miss Molly Gray” based on her lack of beard. When ashore she promoted all types of carousing and seemed to take particular “delight” in these activities in order to remove suspicion about her sexual preferences (27). Snell had a relationship with a woman, but Walker explained how this was the lesser of two evils: she could beg off drinking with her shipmates if she was to visit this woman later in the evening. Whether or not this was Snell’s real motivation, the reason for the encounters helps Snell appeal to a larger audience that included the upper and middle class. As *The Ladies Calling* explains, for women, drinking is vile and leads to other vices, so a woman who actively chooses something else over drinking would be seen as more virtuous. “Drinking...a vice detestable in all, but prodigious in women, who put a double violence upon their nature, the one in the intemperance, the other in the immodesty... She who is first a prostitute to Wine, will soon be to Lust also...(Allestree Part I, Sec I). By choosing to spend time with a woman, Snell has removed herself from tempting vices that result from drinking, and has emerged virtuous.

Throughout *The Female Solider* Walker embellishes Snell’s hardships and lauds her positive characteristics, yet seems slightly incredulous of her amazing and subversive adventure, which is reflected in the narration. During her time in the army Snell was unfairly accused of negligence, which resulted in a punishment of 500 lashes. Either Walker or Snell embellished the number of lashes to emphasize the hardship she

experienced because 500 lashes would undoubtedly kill. *The Female Soldier* takes breaks in the narrative to reflect on Snell's hardships, and asks the reader to "imagine" all the emotions she was plagued with in regards to her "perfidious husband" who broke all vows to her and "drove her to the very brink of despair," and to "imagine" all the sufferings she endured in war, especially as a woman (Walker 14). *The Swallow* was heavily damaged in a storm and Walker uses this occasion to praise Snell's courage because this adversity had no effect on "our intrepid heroine: it proved only a motive for her being more active and industrious both for her own safety and that of her fellow sufferers" (12). Walker ends the memoir by saying of Snell that "we think we may very well recommend her to all our readers as a grand patten on patience and perseverance under the worst of afflictions" (51). It seems as if Walker is overcompensating in his praise of Snell to overshadow her extensive subversive gender behavior. Walker states how amazing Snell's ability was to "preserve her chastity amongst a whole crowd of military men at the famous siege of Pondicherry" which draws attention to the sexualized aspects of cross-dressing (45). Although Walker praises Snell, his tone is both curious and almost disbelieving. By focusing repeatedly on Snell's ability to practice chastity in the army, female virtue is transformed "from something external and tangible (the ability to put the body forward to labour courageously) to something internal and emotional (the ability to regulate one's desires and remain chaste)" (Craft-Fairchild 185). Like in Silence's story, Snell's qualities in war are almost forgotten about in order to reflect on the womanly virtue of chastity. For the upper and middle-class reading public to accept her as a heroine however, Snell needed to have some virtues that made her more appealing. Readers would not have necessarily identified with Snell, but found her a

curious real life version of a masquerading female warrior from popular ballads. Walker, as the middle-class narrator, works to interpret a story that is unfamiliar to him in its “unpalatable events, behaviors, sentiments, and themes” (Dugaw, “Introduction” viii). Snell’s story is therefore full of the codes and expectations of the “novel-reading—as opposed to the ballad-singing—public” accounting for the prominence of certain traits that are not emphasized in female warrior ballads (Dugaw, “Introduction” ix).

When Snell revealed her masquerade she immediately started trying to capitalize on her time in service to make a living, assisted by Walker, who seems to be her biggest supporter but who has his own marketing motives for making her story appealing. He says her reveal to her family and shipmates on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1750 is met with positivity: they “applauded her intrepidity and presence of mind as a soldier in the most imminent dangers, even when death itself stared her in the face” (Walker 41). Snell applied to his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland for a provision for her time in service and was rewarded with £18 5s. per annum, which is roughly £2,216 or \$3,560 in the year 2011 (measuringworth.com). As this was not enough money to live on for the year, the narrator says that we must “content ourselves...with wishing...that it may be some farther annual pension, in order to enable her to spend the remainder of her days in some degree of credit and reputation” (Walker 49). In the same month Snell revealed her cross-dressing adventures *The Female Solider* was published. She also appeared on stage at New Wells in Goodman’s Fields as a stage act, transferring the performativity of masculinity into even more of a theatrical performance. The advertisements for *The Female Solider* as well as her performances at the end of June 1750 were listed in newspapers including the *General Advertiser* and *The Classified Ads* in the *Whitehall*

*Evening Post* and *London Intelligencer*. The advertisements say she will “Sing a New Song made upon that Occasion”—the occasion being the siege at Pondicherry of which she was part (*General Advertiser*, Issue 4905). She was so successful that her act continued into November, with it adding “Manual exercise of a soldier in her regimentals” and Walker describes as this resulting in her “regularly dressed in her regimentals from top to toe, with, all the accoutrements requisite for the due performance of her military exercises” (*General Advertiser*, Issue 4930, Walker 48). Walker commends her success on stage, and her long run of performances speaks for its popularity. He says “the amazing success which she met with on her benefit night at the New Wells, in Goodman’s Fields” was due to her “common dexterity and address in representing the jovial tar and the well disciplined marine, is an incontestable demonstration” and he even publishes one of the ballads Snell sings during her performance (Walker 44). The more popular Snell’s stage career was, the more popular her memoir, so it is impossible to determine how much Walker’s adulation for her stage presence was a marketing ploy, if at all. Snell benefited in all aspects of the popularity of the female warrior after her real experiences: she dictated a memoir, performed on stage, and sang ballads during her stage performances. The performance of masculinity in real life and on the stage seems to draw on the same theatrical skills as she easily transferred from one type of act to the other.

In some ways, Snell’s memoirs were utilized to strengthen national support of war and to bolster male masculinity as related to wartime duties in England. *The Female Soldier* and Snell’s stage time came right after the War of the Austrian Succession, which the British public did not see as a great success. By examining stories like Snell’s,

Scarlet Bowen explains, “we can gain insight into the symbolic richness of the figure of the female soldier in rallying both men and women’s support for the ensuing war, and sustaining British national pride in the face of the military losses that resulted from the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle” (21). Snell’s memoir includes descriptions of her soldiering skills, bravery, steadfast work ethic and patriotism even in the roughest and most unsuccessful of battles. She embodies the pursuit of Glory traditionally reserved for men. All of these traits are celebrated to inspire a lower-class British nationalism, which “adheres to populist rhetoric by depicting Snell as a “deliverer” of the British nation” even though the outcome of the battles she fought in was not necessarily successful (Bowen 35 and 37). Snell’s memoir and stage performances, “illustrate the ways that the laboring-class heroine can bolster nationalist appeals to a wider audience” by inspiring a nationalistic spirit in the class of those who would become fighting soldiers (22). In the beginning lines of *The Female Soldier* Walker identifies the current military situation as corrupt and emasculated. He says: “In this dastardly age of the world, when effeminacy and debauchery have taken place of the love of glory and that noble ardour after warlike exploits which flowed in the bosoms of our ancestors, genuine heroism, or rather an extraordinary degree of courage, are prodigies among men” (Walker 1). He goes on to say that women are not always honored as heroic, military figures, but Snell is certainly one. She is contrasted with other comrades who are more focused on seducing women than defeating the enemy, while she is focused on being a productive and virtuous soldier. Snell, by possessing “the real soul of a man in her breast” as Walker puts it, shows up as a “provocative model of ‘proper’ masculinity” meant to inspire others, specifically men (Bowen 25). To ensure British masculinity in wartime activities during

this period it had to be refashioned by a female masculine like Snell who blurred traditional gender roles. Snell's masquerade was accepted because her presence and comportment as a cross-dressed soldier pushed men into being "real men." Because Snell's story reached so many through the multiple version of her memoir and her stage presence, it is logical to assume her story inspired new ballads and stories and well as real women to become female warriors, even though she ended up back in a more normalized living arrangement when she got re-married in 1751. It is unclear if the love aspect of "Love" and "Glory" or economic necessity prompted her marriage.

The American Revolution gave women on the other side of the Atlantic the opportunity to become female warriors as well. Deborah Sampson, who put on male clothes and enlisted in the Continental Army as Robert Shurtlieff May 20, 1782, was unique for more than her geographic location. Almost fifteen years after her time in the army, she collaborated with Herman Mann who published her memoirs, *The Female Review; or Life of Deborah Sampson The Female Soldier in the War of the Revolution*, in 1797. The memoir is full of embellishments and exaggerations, but the most important facts are correct: she did enlist in the army in masquerade, and she was wounded in battle during her enlistment. It is difficult to ascertain if the inconsistencies in the narration stem from Sampson's memory or Mann's artistic liberties. John Adams Vinton explains that Mann "speaks in her behalf, as her representative and interpreter" and that "Instead of presenting a simple narrative, 'a round, unvarnished tale,' the writer made a kind of novel, founded, indeed, on fact, but with additions of his own...He introduces a great deal of extraneous matter, which serves only to fill out his pages..." (Vinton xiv, xi). Like most other female warriors, Sampson was from a lower-class background. Mann

was not able to navigate integrating a laboring-class story into an upper-class publication nearly as well as Walker, even though both were published to make money and capitalize on the intrigue of the female warrior. Mann says of his artistic license in Sampson's memoirs that he is obligated to write disinterestedly, but then introduces a caveat with this statement: "But where a total sacrifice of truth does not forbid, I take pride in publicly avowing, in this place, my desire (as every one ought) to extol virtue, rather than give the least countenance to vice under any name, pretext or sanction" (Mann 40). Mann spends the entirety of the narrative focusing on Sampson's virtues—like the working-class ones of industry and economy—instead of more pertinent details.

Sampson's main reason for enlisting strays from the central female warrior motif of going to war for a man, and in fact Mann specifically states that her desire to be in the military had nothing to do with a man (122). Mann indicates that although Sampson's background was of the lower class, she was "distinguished, during her minority, only by *unusual* propensities for learning, and *few* opportunities to obtain the inestimable prize. At the age of eighteen<sup>3</sup>, she stepped forward upon a more exalted stage of action" (Mann 38). Mann asserts that Sampson was very interested in education and philosophical debates, even with her minimal education as an indentured servant. After two unexciting years as a local schoolteacher, Sampson was interested in something more stimulating and lucrative, and Mann asserts these factors combined with her love of liberty, gave her the idea to join the Army dressed as a man. The pursuit of liberty was seen as masculine during the eighteenth-century, so Sampson's ideals were subversive before she even committed to joining the Army. Mann explains how she was different from other

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<sup>3</sup> She was actually twenty-two, not eighteen as the memoir romanticizes (Vinton 38).

women: “It seems, her attention was of a different nature from that of many of her sex and youth. Whilst they were only dreading the *consequences*, she was exploring the *cause* of the eruption” (95). Sampson was concerned by the reasons America was fighting, not the consequences of war on the population. She was able to masquerade as a man based on the clothing she enlisted in, and her general appearance. Mann says she was “more than the middle size” at 5’7 and average looking, “But her aspect is rather masculine and serene, than effeminate and sillily jocose” (134). Her movements that were “erect, quick and strong” marked her affectations masculine enough to pass as a man (134). Sampson’s modification of her appearance and behaviors demonstrates her capitalization of the performativity of gender. She was able to easily pretend to be a man because she already had physical characteristics that were more masculine than feminine. Mann positions the juxtaposition of maiden youth and military warrior within Sampson in the same way Spenser did with Britomart. He uses the combination to make Sampson more desirable and gain admiration for her sacrifice: “She is a nymph, scarcely past her teens!” (137). This statement also suggests she has not yet reached full womanhood, which makes her gender subversive activities more of an experiment than a permanent change.

The influence other female warrior literature had on Sampson’s memoir is unmistakable. Sampson was wounded at Tarrytown according to official records and letters, but *The Female Review* says she was wounded in a different battle (Vinton 139). Regardless of when it happened, she received a head wound and one ball in her leg and another in her groin. Like Snell, she had to extract the ball in her groin by herself to avoid detection. The similarity of these events are uncanny, and scholars believe that this



might be one of the generic features Mann intermixed in the narrative based on previous female warrior stories (Barnard 342). Sampson did receive a pension from the government partially because of these wounds. Mann also says, “Europe has exhibited its chivalry and wonders. It now remains for American to do the same...” indicating that after reading about Europe’s greatest warriors, Sampson is America’s example (Mann 43). As a fighter for liberty, Sampson exemplified the newly free and independent America.

When Sampson was discharged in October of 1783, she returned to a domestic life—marrying and having three children—a transition made by almost all female warriors. Mann says, “Spring having once more wafted its fragrance from the South, our Heroine leaped from the masculine, to the feminine sphere” (227). Although Sampson returned to a traditionally appropriate feminine occupation, she did occupy and control both gender roles for a time, a feat proving gender roles are theatrical, and that female masculines have shaped masculinity in history. When other men wanted to desert, Sampson argued that “it would not only be evidence of disloyalty to their country, a token of cowardice, a breach of civil obligation, but the greatest jeopardy of their lives,” which coaxed these men to raise their masculinity to prove they had as much as Sampson (156). Sampson followed Snell’s footsteps to the stage to try to make money but waited almost twenty years after her time in the army. In 1802 she toured New England towns giving a dramatized version of her history and then performing a manual of arms exercise (Grant De Pauw 125-126).

At the very end of *The Female Review*, Mann returns to focusing on the virtues of

Sampson, and places them firmly in the feminine sphere, which undermines all of the virtues she extolled in the masculine sphere.

And may we never have it to lament—that while any females contemplate, with abhorrence, a *female*, who voluntarily engages in the *field of battle*—they forget to recoil at the idea of coming off victorious from *battles*, fought by their own domestic—*firesides*! We have now seen the distinction of one *female*. May it stimulate others to shine—in the way, that VIRTUE prescribes (Mann 251).

Mann compares Sampson's military battles to domestic disputes to help her relate to her eighteenth-century audience better. For readers today, comparisons like this throughout *The Female Review* only show the author's failure: "Most conspicuously, Mann is unwilling...to explore the interior life of his heroine...The result is a novel that fails to capture its striking subject: a cross-dressing woman, at home in both genders, moving from the domestic sphere to the world of war and then back home, able to weep and fight" (Lewis 41). Mann discusses Sampson's unusually strong love of liberty extensively in the beginning of her memoirs, and then forgets these admirable ideals at the close, leaving her contribution to liberty unexplored.

Louise Françoise de Houssay de Bannes's story of her experiences as a cross-dressing soldier differed from Snell and Sampson's memoirs in two main ways: she was from the upper class, and she authored her own story (though it was translated to English before it was published). Bannes self-published her narrative *A Narrative of Louise Françoise De Houssay, De Bannes, Who Served In The Army As A Volunteer, From 1792, to July 21, 1795; When She Was Made a Prisoner At Quiberon, with Her Examination At Vannes, From whence she made her Escape, the Day before that which was appointed for her Execution* (1796) in London. The narrative functions as a plea for assistance after her harrowing adventures, constant hardships and state of economic

distress following her escape from France. Bannes admits in her first-person memoir that she is writing it to make money (the reason both Snell and Sampson dictated their experiences), but the review that came out about *A Narrative* in the *London Monthly Review* in 1796 indicated that her story was not fabricated or exaggerated (Barnard 339). Bannes and her nobleman husband fought on the counter-revolutionary side of the French Revolution after her husband declined a commission with the National Guard, which then targeted him as an aristocrat. They were both arrested in 1791 and only a lucky escape saved them from execution. They decided to join the princes of France in the war and Bannes, as an upper-class woman, became a very rare type of female warrior in the eighteenth-century.

Bannes's narrative allows unique access to the reasons a woman would cross-dress and fight like a man in war because she clearly explains them in her narrative. She accounts that she succinctly stated to her husband why she wanted to fight by his side: "in defense of our Religion; for the restoration of our lawful Sovereign" (Bannes 11). She argues she is as equally moved by religious and nationalistic fervor as her husband, proving that these emotions are not just reserved for men as she asks him "Can you imagine that such noble motives are not capable of warming a female breast equally with that of one of your sex?" (11). Her position is extremely unconventional for an upper-class woman because she was probably taught from strict conduct books that determined which emotions and traits were considered appropriate for women. As a strong and tall woman, Bannes is confident that she will be able to cross-dress and perform as a man in order to follow her husband in battle:

I am stronger and taller than the generality of my sex: we are told that nature never exceeds her wants; I am not less inclined to believe that my Creator has permitted I

should be endowed with this bodily strength, only, that I might be enabled to keep the oath I have taken never to forsake you. I am determined, therefore, to disguise my sex, to follow your fortunes, and to fight the same battles: the same hand which has delivered me from prison, will aid and support me in the field. (11)

Bannes shows how easily gender roles can be subverted by physical characteristics like height and strength, and demonstrates loyalty usually found between male comrades in war when she vows to fight side-by-side with her husband. Lower-class women in female warrior literature often joined the military for personal reasons: to follow a lover or to escape and experience a different life. The revolutionary forces of the French Revolution forced Bannes to face war directly by trying to execute her and this made her motivations for becoming a female warrior very personal and political.

During her military time, Bannes proved herself capable of overcoming traditional feminine and upper-class gender behavior to become a successful soldier. In the 31<sup>st</sup> Company of the *Hommes d'armes* she and her husband joined as “cousins,” with her masquerading as Chevalier de Houssay. After their training Bannes revealed that she was a woman to her commanding officers and while they are surprised, they do not mind, implying Bannes was an effective warrior in training and that the army was willing to accept anyone to fight. The female warrior was not far outside popular imagination. Bannes said that they “paid me very high compliments on my resolution, and promised never to abuse my confidence” and her cross-dressing stayed a secret to the rest of the soldiers (Bannes 18). During her first battle near Thionville, Bannes found inner courage while she did her part of “warming the ball” and reflected that she was just acting mechanically during the fight (19). Bannes’s training made her just as effective as a man in battle, which demonstrates that a female masculine is easily created by subverting gender and appropriating masculine behavior. Bannes was so inspired to fight for the

disenfranchised French upper class she convinced her husband to serve in another campaign in the corps of the Loyal Emigrants. She participated in a battle at Jemappe with her husband, which frightened her, but she mustered her courage to fight. Bannes exhibited the ability to overcome the traditional female gender role in order to fight for belief in an ideal. Her husband died in battle in July of 1794, which resulted in Bannes being senseless with grief and driven to avenge his death.

Bannes continually displayed quick thinking and cunning during her military time that enabled her to continue her masquerade and stay alive, traits that would usually be found among the lower class. She learns, like other female warriors, that the best way to earn respect is to behave as a man with complete confidence. She recalls a time she dueled with another soldier over a woman to earn his respect and civility afterwards. The duel was a performative measure “to remove suspicion” that she was a female with her fellow soldiers (Bannes 22). When she is made a prisoner of war at Fort Neuf she reveals that she is a woman to the General. To avoid execution, she says she is a woman, not an Emigrant or a soldier. When the General asks why she is with the regiment and wearing a man’s clothing she says she worked for the men and male clothing “is more convenient, and not so expensive” (36). During further questioning she lies and pretends to be someone else, which saves her life. When she is finally discovered to be a noble by enemy forces she escapes and sails to Plymouth with the British Fleet. Bannes’s ability to fluidly move between genders to suit her purposes shows the arbitrary construction of gender roles.

The last variation of female warriors in prose is found in the fictional characters of novels. In Charles Brockden Brown’s *Ormond* (1799) the protagonist, Constantia, has

traits of the female warrior in her, but it is the supporting character Martinette de Beauvais, who fought in the American and French Revolution dressed up as a male soldier, who is the epitome of the eighteenth-century female warrior. Other stories involving women warriors in the 1790s are all “more timid and less celebratory than what Brown is up to in *Ormond*” as Martinette’s influence saves Constantia’s life (Lewis 40). By the time *Ormond* was published, the female warrior was in all forms of popular literature and had seeped into eighteenth-century European and American culture. Female warriors had gained intensity from their achievements in the American and French Revolutions (40). Martinette’s narrative in *Ormond* is unique in that it celebrates the masquerading soldier in a transatlantic way, and provides more of a holistic view of female warriors rather than one based on specific experiences and conflicts.

Martinette’s history provides a fictionalized explanation of the geopolitical and social reasons a woman became a female warrior. She explains she was from a wealthy merchant family in the Mediterranean area who had provided her with a comprehensive and cosmopolitan education that included extensive travel after her parents died. Martinette was not lower class like Snell, Sampson and female warriors in ballads, and she was not upper class like Bannes. “By endowing the cross-dressed women with money and status enough to allow her economic and social viability, novelists enabled the transvestite to approach the heroine as an equal” (Craft-Fairchild 188). Martinette’s obviously wealthy middle-class background made it easy for Constantia and the wider reading audience to relate. Martinette married a man who was traveling to fight with the Americans in the American Revolution. She explains that she was devoted to her husband in every way, and had an adventurous spirit, which led to her next actions. “I

vowed to accompany him in every danger, to vie with him in military ardour; to combat and die by his side. I delighted to assume the male dress, to acquire skill at the sword, and dexterity in every boisterous exercise” (Brown 154). Martinette is inspired by loyalty to her husband and the idea of “Glory,” demonstrating she quickly embraces both feminine and masculine roles in stories. After her husband died, Martinette’s reasons for fighting morphed, and she moved to fight in the French Revolution. She speculates why hundreds of other women have been compelled to cross-dress and become soldiers: “Some were impelled by the enthusiasm of love, and some by a mere passion for war; some by the contagion of example; and some, with whom I myself must be ranked, by a generous devotion to liberty” (158). Martinette was never daunted by the idea of danger in a war. She explains to Constantia, “Danger, my girl? It is my element. I am an adorer of liberty, and liberty without peril can never exist” (158). Martinette shows how easily she has slipped outside of traditional gender roles and has reduced emotions and driving forces to being human, rather than masculine or feminine, similar to Sampson. She believes in liberty so she gloriously fights for this conviction. Bannes does the same thing for her own liberty, but from an upper-class perspective.

Martinette’s narrative suggests it was easy to subvert gender roles once she started to cross-dress. She explains that once she masqueraded as a man, “The timidity that commonly attends women, gradually vanished. I felt as if imbued by a soul that was a stranger to the sexual distinction” (Brown 154). Martinette unequivocally explains—even more explicitly than Bannes—that the transformation to become a female warrior was learned. The suggestion that “timidity” is not an innate feminine characteristic because it can be vanquished in order to acquire other traits traditionally considered

masculine infers that gender is performative. After Martinette comes to this realization about genders, she is able to completely bend convention and seems aware that she is a new hybrid of woman: a female masculine. Martinette's masquerade is different from one of a hearty lower-class woman or Bannes' because she is described as "small but of exquisite proportions" (Brown 60). However, Constantia observes her overall effect in a way that explains her female masculinity "Her's were the polished cheek and the mutability of muscle, which belong to woman, but the genius conspicuous in her aspect, was heroic and contemplative" (60). Martinette physically embodies aspects of male and female comportment, proving her ability to subvert gender roles.

The reciprocal influences of real and fictitious female warrior accounts are clear in *Ormond*. Martinette revealed her masquerade back in Europe after her husband died in the American Revolution and says that, "My character was known to many officers, returned from America, whose report, joined with the influence of my conversation, rendered me an object to be gazed at by thousands" (Brown 155). The influence popular memoirs about female warriors had on Brown is apparent when Martinette's military time puts her in the spotlight and—in a similar fashion to Snell and Sampson—she was "exhibited at operas and masquerades, made the theme of enquiry and encomium at every place of resort, and caressed by the most illustrious among the votaries of science, and the advocates of the American cause" (155). Here Brown self-consciously reflects on the female warrior as a literary phenomenon. After her exhibition, Martinette fought in the French Revolution. She explains to Constantia of her time in Paris, "I could shew thee a fusil of two barrels, which is precious beyond any other relique, merely because it enabled me to kill thirteen officers at Jemappe. Two of these were emigrant nobles,



whom I knew and loved before the revolution, but the cause they had since espoused, cancelled their claims to mercy” (158). The reference to the battle at Jemappe and two emigrant nobles is comparable enough to Bannes’ narrative that it implies an intersection of real and fictional female warriors. Constantia’s reaction to Martinette’s narrative provides insight to the way the reading public perceived female warriors, and how women could be inspired by these accounts. Constantia “listened greedily, though not with approbation” to Martinette’s history (159). She does not approve of the female warrior’s complete disregard for gender behavior and violent tendencies, but is fascinated by her exciting life. Martinette is unaware of Constantia’s adversities and tells her, “You, sitting all your life in peaceful corners, can scarcely imagine that variety of hardship and turmoil, which attends the female who lives in a camp” (Brown 154). When Constantia hears Martinette’s story, she has already lived through what she thinks are her greatest challenges in life. However, at the end of the novel Ormond violently tries to rape Constantia and she realizes that she can defend herself against his masculine aggression by summoning her own violent impulses she knows are possible because of Martinette. “Compelled to choose between sentimental, passive failure and Amazonian assertiveness, Constantia strikes back” (Lewis 48). The influence of Martinette demonstrates the inspiration female warriors could have on other women to take on masculine characteristics, even temporarily, an influence the author of the *Hic Mulier* predicted in the seventeenth-century.

Although Martinette’s unique experiences connect her to female warriors of multiple regions, she does not return to the domestic sphere or get remarried during *Ormond* which makes her the most subversive of the female warriors in this paper. Most

female warrior stories of the eighteenth-century end with the politically acceptable reinforcement of gender norms when the “hero” becomes a “heroine” and goes back to a tidy domestic life in women’s clothing after a masquerading adventure in the military (Mayer 174). These women challenged gender roles and shaped the perception of masculinity, but did not establish new and permanent social behavior for women.

Martinette, however, takes being a female warrior to a new level. She moved beyond the idea of the naturalness of the domestic life for women and creates her own place in the world based on what she likes and wants, not her sex. “As a soldier in two revolutions, Martinette fights and kills in the name of radical social change...she tells her own story, celebrating its moments of triumph over men and regretting her moments of sentimental attachment to them” (Lewis 44). Snell’s memoir tried to motivate male soldiers to raise their level of masculinity beyond debauchery, but Martinette’s story seems to coax masculinity out of women by inspiring them to join her exciting life of rejecting “domesticity, religious piety, sexual purity, and submissiveness to male dictates and expectations” (Barnard xxxvi). She says of her life of blurred gender roles, “Necessity, it is true, and not choice, set me in motion, but I am not sorry for the consequences” (Brown 146). Like Silence, Martinette sees the value in the ability and option to live like a man, and has resolved to keep these freedoms.

### **Female Warriors in Popular Theatrical Forms**

In addition to verse and prose, female warriors were found in a variety of popular theatrical performances. In London in 1746 a broadside called *The Female Volunteer or, an Attempt to make our Men Stand* was published. The poster brings a stage epilogue to print—the header says, “An EPILOGUE intended to be spoken by Mrs. Woffington in

the Habit of a Volunteer, upon reading the Gazette containing an Account of the late Action at FALKIRK.” In this broadside, two outlets for literature intersect and show the pervasiveness of the female warrior in popular forms. The broadside references The Battle of Falkirk Muir, fought in Scotland in January of 1746 between the Jacobite Highland Army and the Royal Hanoverian troops of King George II. The battle was an embarrassing event for the English Army who had more cavalry and artillery and still lost. The broadside, which “shames the loyalist army for its lack of manliness in erotic terms,” also features a picture of the famous actress Margaret “Peg” Woffington (Bowen 39). In the picture, Woffington is onstage dressed in the full military garb, with a gown hung up behind her. There cannot be any confusion over whether or not she is a female based on the tailoring of her costume, and behind her on the floor is a newspaper that is supposed to be the Gazette, which inspired her epilogue speech on the broadside.

In *The Female Volunteer*, the speaker is amazed at the news in the Gazette and publicly calls out the soldiers who were shamefully defeated by an inferior force. She is incredulous at their retreat and makes a suggestion:

Well, if ‘tis so, and that our *Men* can’t *stand*,  
 ‘Tis Time we Women take the *Thing* in *Hand*.  
 Thus in my Country’s Cause I now appear,  
 A bold, smart, *Kevenballer’d* Volunteer. (*The Female Volunteer*)

The Female Volunteer’s humorous solution for if “*Men* can’t *stand*” is for women to stand instead for them. She is implying, on both a military and sexual level, that if men are not masculine enough to fight, women can don their role. The Female Volunteer continues saying, “For if in Valour real Manhood lies, / All Cowards are but Women in Disguise” (*The Female Volunteer*). The broadside reminds men that hallmark traits of masculinity are pursuing valor or glory, and a man without these traits is feminine. The

reversal of this equation suggests that any woman could be a man by pursuing glory, highlighting the performativity of gender characteristics. The next lines explain the effect that courageous women would have on the enemy.

Had we an Army of such valorous Wenches,  
What Man, d'ye think, would dare attack our *Trenches*?  
O! how th' Artillery of our *Eyes* would maul 'em.  
But, our *mask'd Batteries*, lud! how they would *gall'em*!  
No Rebels 'gainst such Force dare take the Field;  
For, d—mme, but we'd *die* before we'd yield. (*The Female Volunteer*)

The Female Volunteer is trying to raise male masculinity by showing female masculinity that is more masculine. The pun on “trench” that draws a parallel between a woman’s experiences in defending her body from rape and defending a piece of land indicates the ferocity of an army of women. The overall intention of the broadside is twofold: to shame or inspire men to join the army, and to rally women to only give their charms and affections to good, patriotic men. The Female Volunteer finishes her epilogue by telling women how they can assist in the cause:

To no base Coward prostitute your Charms,  
Disband the Lover who deserts his Arms:  
So shall you fire each Hero to his Duty,  
And *British* Rights be fav'd by *British* Beauty. (*The Female Volunteer*)

The broadside’s text and picture is political, humorous and suggestive all at once.

Women can fulfill their patriotic duty by denying sex to cowardly soldiers, which will inspire men to fulfill their military duties.

When examining depictions of female warriors in drama, it is important to note how aspects of performance influence the text’s message about gender. Breeches roles involved a woman wearing men’s clothes for some or all of a play and were popular during the eighteenth-century. “All sources agree that Woffington cut quite a convincing

figure as the dashing young man” and based on her prominent breeches roles in both London and Dublin her appearance on the broadside is not surprising (Friedman-Romell 468). In the “breeches” role, male disguise is part of the storyline construction and the transvestite woman is trying to seek a lover or husband, usually appears to said man unrecognized (sometimes for revenge) and has homoerotic interactions with another woman on stage because on the disguise (464). These cross-dressing roles were easily adapted to the theme of the female warrior because the actress literally “put on” masculine characteristics to play the role. These roles allowed women in the audience an outlet to imagine “a world of female activity and agency” (470). Many times the breeches roles were dramatized with exactly the intentions the *Hic Mulier* was concerned about when a woman donned male attire. An actress’s femininity was meant to show through her masculine costume and behavior by highlighting her “charms” in staging to emphasize her sexual appeal (Rogers 249, 255). Since the intent of most cross-dressing on stage was meant to be obvious, the eighteenth-century audience “was a ‘knowing’ one, always ‘in’ on the transvestite’s joke, and therefore in a position of power over the spectacle” (Friedman-Romell 467). They knew that the transvestite was really a woman, and the popularity of these roles in the eighteenth-century fits with society’s fascination with cross-dressing.

Eighteenth-century theater audiences were comprised of all classes, so the popular masquerading female warrior characters in dramatic roles were in the public consciousness at all levels. In Charles Shadwell’s 1713 play *The Humours of the Army; or, The Female Officer*, the main character, Belvedera, pretends to be a military officer. The play’s initial run was a respectable six nights, and was then revived in London in

1716, 1746 and in Dublin in the 1740s when Peg Woffington played Belvedera (Friedman-Romell 471). John Phillip Kemble even performed his own altered version of Shadwell's play in Dublin in 1763. The character of Belvedera, who joined the British army as a commissioned officer in Portugal (probably during The War of the Spanish Succession) to find her lover, Willmot, is physically in breeches in the entire play. In *The Humours of the Army*, the combination of the cross-dressing players, the lower class army soldiers from various regional backgrounds and the clash between merchant army suppliers, officers and enlisted results in chaos. In this environment:

Shadwell's forceful humour engages in a double-edged critique of masculine and feminine norms which it simultaneously satirizes British army life. Far from a disciplined, 'masculine' sphere, the army world functions as a carnivalesque world-upside-down, in which inversion of status and gender continually threaten to disrupt established order. (Friedman-Romell 471)

Belvedera doesn't enter until the second act of the play, and the disorganization and lack of discipline in the army demonstrated in the first act hint at the ease with which a woman might masquerade in the army.

Belvedera immediately tests the believability of her theatrical performance as a military officer successfully. She "puts on" an arrogant masculine military officer attitude, which gives her authority as not only a man, but also a powerful man. Belvedera tells the porter who asks for money she promised, "P'shaw! 'Tis too late now; I'm an Officer, therefore know your Distance, and don't be saucy Merchant?" to which Bisket replies, "Pert and military enough" (Shadwell 22). Bisket's acceptance of Belvedera's masquerade is the first test that she passes by doing her best imitation of masculinity, immediately drawing attention to the performativity of gender roles. She admits to her commanding officer that she knows little of being a military man—"I come very raw into

the Service, and know little of the Discipline of the Army, nor can I tell what true Courage is, but am sure I have Resolution enough to do every Thing I am commanded” (25). Because Belvedera is not very familiar with the way the army works, her histrionic affectation of masculinity is overdone. “Hers is a hypermasculinity which at once critiques men’s most bellicose aspects and underscores her lover’s utter passivity. From the start, Belvedera assumes the male prerogative that breeches and an officer’s coat affords her...” (Friedman-Romell 476). Her exaggerative behavioral approach to pretending to be a man is humorous, but simultaneously makes fun of the construct of masculinity.

As Act II proceeds, Belvedera reveals why she is searching for Willmot—whose feelings were hurt by her “Wounding, Piercing, Killing Usage” of his heart—and the reasons she decided to go to war as a military officer. Willmot left Belvedera with only a note saying he was leaving for the army. She blames him for her difficult journey thus far—“What have I suffered for the Fatigueing Journeys, a Tempestuous Voyage, and all those Dangers which my Sex are unaccustom'd too” and is outraged when her maid (dressed as a footman) can find no trace of him in camp (Shadwell 26). She tells her maid, “since Willmot has so barbariously resented the Weakness of my Sex, I’ll now Revenge it on all his...Clara, I’ll shake him from my Heart; put on all the Saucy Airs of a real Man, and make my Brother Officers stand in fear of me” (27). Belvedera acts exactly as she says she will as she exhibits overly strict and commanding masculine behavior around her troops. She even aggressively fights with a Lieutenant because she says that the only way to secure herself from more quarrels is to deter them by winning the first one with no dispute. She says:

*For he they say is Brave who makes a Noise,  
Your Gallant Fighters are your blustering Boys*

indicating that bravado is the key to masculinity and a manly reputation (30). “By revealing a trick which props up masculinity, the actress and character assert dominance over posturing males on and off-stage” (Friedman-Romell 476). The actress playing the female warrior on the stage has power as a man within the play, but also in her performance as a man. The bravado premise is revisited in the play multiple times as Belvedera believes it so key to being accepted as a man. She jokes to her maid about how easy it was to become an officer and potentially move through the ranks: “Come along *Clara*, I'll gain a Regiment and make thee a Captain” (Shadwell 56).

Belvedera becomes an effective commanding officer, and therefore an even more powerful example of masculinity after instruction by File-Off. All of File-Off's instructions focus on Belvedera's appearance and the performance of behavior she gives to the soldiers. He tells Belvedera that in order to be an officer she must “pull out your Snuff-Box, walk pragmatically two or three times along the front...Erect your Cane with a sort of a Florish—now you may if you please Swear a Hundred Oaths at each Solider...now Sir give yourself a few Military Airs” (Shadwell 53). There are three levels of performance here: the actress playing the character of Belvedera, Belvedera playing a man and Belvedera—as a pretend man—performing as an officer. All are achieved by clothing and behavior; gender and societal roles are merely theatrical performances of a set of recognized codes in the play. When Belvedera goes to inspect her troops she is ruthless in her critiques and takes her “military airs” to an extreme, an obvious adjustment of perceived shortcomings. Willmot is inspected, but neither one recognizes the other. She is especially harsh with her evaluation of him: “what the Devil



for a Fellow have we got here, Clap your Piece thus Sirrah, your Hand here, and hold up your Head, or I'll knock it off your Shoulders" (53). The reactions amongst the rest of the characters are mixed. Willmot thinks this officer is the "worse Plague" than any he has so far seen in the army. File-Off is impressed with Belvedera's aggressive discipline, and Clara observes in an aside that "I find my Mistress is resolved to be Revenged upon the whole Sex" (54). Because Willmot has spurned her, Belvedera is intent on yelling at and shaming those in the most masculine profession of the army. She is an active female warrior with all the antipathy towards men of an Amazon.

Willmot and Belvedera have reversed gender roles until the end of the play. He disobeys Belvedera, which causes a sequence of actions that end with his weapon pointed at his commanding officer. This action makes Willmot look effeminate instead of masculine, for the only acceptable form of dueling during this time was with swords, not rifles (Friedman-Romell 476-477). For his mutiny, Willmot is condemned to a Court Martial and execution, which excites Belvedera as she explains to her maid: "Revenge, Revenge my Dear Clara...and since I've lost my Willmot, I'll conspire the Death of all his Sex" (Shadwell 56). Besides condemning all the men in the army to die, Belvedera is resolved to stay long enough to reveal her masquerade so that "the World see how much they are mistaken in my Sexes Cowardice" (56). However, her actions are too extreme and therefore her desire for revenge and humorous overcompensation make her seem more like a villain than a heroine. In ancient times Belvedera's language would make her an Amazon, today a feminist. Belvedera's character is not punished for her outlandish behavior because her time as a military officer ends. When she realizes she has condemned Willmot to execution she faints, and this moment of weakness begins her

journey to being reintegrated as a woman into a traditional role within society.

Ultimately, “feminine sensibility will out—she exhibits her ‘inner’ nature by swooning when she discovers her mistaken vindictiveness has condemned her lover to death” (Friedman-Romell 477). At the end, all is rectified under the patriarchal authority of marriage between Belvedera and Willmot, and the character of Belvedera is re-domesticated.

The Epilogue, spoken by the actress that played Belvedera, was performed while the actress was still dressed like a male officer (Friedman-Romell 476). This staging was an interesting choice as it made her masquerade less temporal. Yet, the nature of acting makes her rebellion appear only temporary, and therefore acceptable, as evidenced by the popularity of the play. She says at the beginning of the Epilogue:

*The Gay, the Gaudy Blustering Man of War,  
Thinks no Body can Act his Character;  
But I, you see am turn'd an Officer,  
Can Huff and Strut with Military Art,  
And pass at least amongst you for a Smart.  
No Warlike Weapons are to me unknown,  
Here She does the Motions with the Fuzee  
To Prime—to Charge—and Cock let me alone,  
I'll Exercise with any one in Town. (Shadwell 73)*

The actress explains how easy it was to pass as a pompous military officer by learning the male secret of huffing and strutting while putting on a military air, highlighting her subversion because she has explained the secret of masculinity to the audience. Learning to perform as a male has given her insight that societal and gender roles are merely extensions of performing on the stage and by finding the right combination of dress and behaviors, one can pass as the opposite sex. “As the cross-dressed actress, she is equipped to make as well as mount (wear) breeches, but as the rakish performer of

masculinity, she may also mount and enter the breach sexually” (Friedman-Romell 478-479). Like the *Hic Muliers*, the actress gains an overt sexuality as a man to the audience, especially when during the Epilogue she makes motions with the light musket. This probably intrigued and titillated audiences who watched a cross-dressed woman act as a man for the entire play, not only to take charge as a powerful male, but exude a commanding sexuality. One of the characters quips when Belvedera reveals her masquerade “Waunds an Woman begin to turn Officers, ‘tis time for Men to gang home about their Affairs” proposing, as in *The Female Volunteer*, that women could assume the role of military officers (Shadwell 66). The suggestion is meant to be humorous, but it does leave the idea to percolate in the public’s consciousness.

The last type of theatrical performances female warriors were found in were ballad operas like John Gay’s *Polly* (1729), the sequel to the ballad opera *The Beggar’s Opera*. In 1728 when *The Beggar’s Opera* was introduced, Gay had put together two types of musical theater that were in direct dispute: aspects of balladry and Italian opera (Chao 300). The result was a blending of both traditional “low” and “high” musical styles that resulted in a satirical, yet playful comedy that was followed up in the same style with *Polly*. Many of the ballads in Gay’s operas are set to the same tune as popular songs, so there is textual interplay as these songs call to mind popular ballad songs (300). *Polly* was banned in December of 1728 before its opening night—and was not performed until 1777—although paper copies of the ballad opera were published and sold. Given the prevalence of the female warrior in the popular imaginary, it is not surprising that *Polly* was banned not for its representations of cross-dressing, but for its alleged critique of Prime Minister Robert Walpole.

In *Polly*, the title character by the same name becomes a female warrior slowly when she travels to the West Indies in search of her banished husband Macheath. He—unbeknownst to her—is hiding as a pirate with a new woman. Polly explains why she is following him: “In following him I am in pursuit of my quiet. I love him, and like a troubled ghost shall never be at rest till I appear to him” (Gay 8). Polly’s journey to find her husband results in cross-dressing military experiences similar to those experienced by female warriors of balladry. Polly’s travels result in her being at the mercy of a plantation owner who gives her the option of being a whore or a plantation slave. She chooses the slave option and says, “My freedom may be lost, but you cannot rob me of my virtue and integrity” (18). Polly fights for herself by protecting her chastity like Brandamante, and her focus on this virtue sets her up to masquerade in male clothing. Polly escapes in boy’s clothing because, as her helper points out, “In a man’s habit you will run fewer risques” (24). Polly’s male attire is meant to protect her, but it ends up giving her courage to become a female warrior as she slowly realizes her costume not only allows, but demands new masculine behavior. The music of the ballad opera assists the theatrical effect of Polly’s new gender role as “at a moment when gender boundaries are transgressed, music enhances the visual and discursive import of Polly’s new ‘identity’” (Chao 309). Like Belvedera, Polly realizes the key to her masquerade is making others think she is masculine. She says of her new clothes, “With the habit I must put on the courage and resolution of a man; for I am every where surrounded with dangers” (Gay 25). Polly understands her success in finding Macheath hinges on others believing she is a young man.

Polly uses the performativity of masculinity to navigate through the Indies. She joins a band of pirates by flattering their masculinity—she calls them “those brave spirits, those *Alexanders*, that shall soon by conquest be in possession of the *Indies*”—and is taken to meet Macheath, whom she does not recognize in blackface (Gay 29). The pirates praise Polly’s pretend vices as if they are virtues: “An as our heroes generally set out, extravagance, gaming and debauchery have qualify’d him for a brave man” (34). This statement is ironic on multiple levels as those types of negative qualities do not usually define heroes, but the pirates have a different definition and represent negative aspects of the masculine condition. Polly is quite virtuous as a woman *and* a cross-dressing man, which blurs traditional gender characteristics and leads her to possess both “Love” and “Glory.” As was popular in female warrior literature, Polly undergoes unsolicited erotic attentions by other women during her masquerade. She tries to placate Macheath’s lusty woman, but her lack of affection spurs the woman to get Polly in trouble.

Ideals of European masculinity are further undermined through Polly’s interaction with Cawwawkee. Polly helps free the captured Indian prince, who praises Polly for “his” virtue: “the love of virtue alone gain’d me his friendship” (Gay 52). Cawwawkee’s father, Pohoetohee, in an extremely satirical line exclaims that “This hath convinc’d me that an European can be generous and honest” (53). In the eighteenth-century, Indians of any kind were generally considered some type of “noble savage” or just “savage,” yet here Gay reverses the idea and the Indians find the Europeans devoid of many heroic and admirable traits. Cawwawkee is referring to masculine virtue and the only European “man” the Indians find virtuous enough is Polly, ironic because she is a woman. Polly’s

virtue is so impressive she is given the honor of fighting by Cawwawkee's side during the war between the Indians and the pirates. She is so intent on her duty with the Indians that she takes Macheath prisoner, but she does not know he is actually her husband in disguise. Polly shows how capable she is in battle as a female warrior. She tells Pohoetoe:

In the rout, Sir, I overtook him, flying with all the cowardice of guilt upon him. Thousands have false courage enough to be vicious; true fortitude is founded upon honour and virtue; that only can abide all tests. I made him my prisoner, and left him without under strict, guard, till I reciev'd your majesty's commands for his disposal. (Gay 61)

Polly's character has embraced traditionally masculine qualities of fortitude, honor and male virtue as a female warrior. Her fervor, similar to Belvedera's, stems from her unhappiness of being parted from the man she loves. Polly's aptitude for war and transformation into a female warrior causes her grief and distress in the end when Macheath's identity is revealed after his execution. This moment shows the performative nature of disguise and how easy it was for Polly to transform into a man and for Macheath to cross to a different race. Their costumes and behavior defined their identity for others around them. Polly accepts Cawwawkee's marriage proposal at the end and as a result *Polly* "argues for the utter failure of Love and Glory as Gay's boyclad female warrior leaves the play with noble New World Indians, exiting European culture altogether" (Dugaw, *Warrior Women* 198). Polly, as the embodiment of "Love" and "Glory" in the play, never got a chance to reunite with her lover—the reason she adopted masculine traits in the first place. Polly agreed to have a more traditional role as Cawwawkee's wife, which returned gender roles to the status quo at the end of the play.

### **The End of the Eighteenth-Century and Conclusions**

The eighteenth-century's view of sexuality was undergoing an epistemological shift toward the end of the century, which explains the decline in the nineteenth-century of the female warrior in popular literature. The one-sex model changed to a two-sex model (Friedman-Romell 461). In the one-sex model a woman is a man, just with inverted genitalia, creating a male/female binary of sex. In the two-sex model women are a distinct sex from men, and regarded as an imperfect version of them with weaker bodies and less intelligence. As the two-sex model rooted itself in society in the nineteenth-century, it became increasingly unnatural instead of just subversive for a woman to cross-dress and take on masculine characteristics. The Victorian ideal that women were frail by nature made it not only unnatural, but also unrealistic for women to pretend to be men in masquerade. Thus the cross-dressing female warrior declined in popularity in popular literature forms. The invigorating language of eighteenth-century female warrior ballads "was replaced by a vocabulary and tone of increasing delicacy and constraint. Then, going hand-in-hand with this dulcifying of language was a transformation of the female warrior heroine herself from a virago to a suffering helpmate" (Dugaw, *Warrior Women* 67). The female warrior becomes less the warrior, and more the sentimental woman.

The geopolitical and social conditions that allowed the female warrior to flourish in the eighteenth-century gave her pervasive popularity in ballads, prose and theatrical performances. The era's obsession with temporary masquerade makes it no surprise that the popularity of the female warrior "coincides...with this cultural preoccupation with disguise, performance, and potential discrepancy between appearance and reality" (Dugaw, *Warrior Women* 132). Popular masquerade balls allowed temporary new

“standing orders” in society, but like Carnival, did not “necessarily demand a complete reinscription” of traditional roles and hierarchies (Friedman-Romell 470). In all but one of the female warriors studied in this paper the role of female warrior was only a temporary adventure before going back to a more traditional feminine role. Martinette in *Ormond* refused to return to a domestic life, but the protagonist of the novel made the opposite choice. The major conflicts that required a large number of military men made blending in easy for female warriors. They were mostly from the lower class as they were less restricted by behavioral constructs and more conditioned to difficult work, but women directly affected by revolutions—like Louise Françoise de Houssay de Bannes—proved that upper-class women were up to the challenge as well. Female warriors were used to bolster national support of wartime activities by forcing inept men to perform masculinity better than female masculines who had demonstrated their patriotism.

Women who masqueraded as men and went to war understood that gender was performative and were able to successfully cross-dress because they used the theatrical aspects of masculine appearance and behaviors to their advantage. The reciprocal influence female warrior narratives had on each other, real or fictitious, propagated the female warrior throughout the eighteenth-century. Although the female warriors discussed are all slightly different, they all possessed an independent and adventuresome spirit, bravery and a willingness to disregard traditional gender boundaries. These traits allowed these female warriors, despite different personal situations and motivations, the ability not only to follow a man into war, but also to succeed in becoming warriors. The eighteenth-century was an important era for women’s military contributions and their legacy is significant in defining military women of today.



Even though scholarship has come a long way past the two-sex model and a binary system of gender, the American military world has taken much longer to catch up. Although women have been participating in unsanctioned combat for hundreds of years, it is only in 2013 that combat jobs will officially be open to women. World War I marked the first occasion when women were accepted in the American military without hiding their sex, and only after years of proving themselves were women recognized as being capable of occupations such as flying in the military. Female warriors, past and present, have demonstrated their own “female masculinity” as they shaped the conceptions and characteristics of masculinity. Although the situations that inspire women to become female warriors have drastically changed from the eighteenth-century, many of the same character traits are found in modern military women. They are bold, courageous, skilled, adventurous, patriotic and unconfined by outdated concepts of gender norms. They work hard to prove themselves in a landscape of predominantly male warriors, which often makes them seem subversive as they demonstrate their female masculinity.

My own background has been shaped by my intersection with past female warriors. When I was a cadet at the Air Force Academy I was sent with a contingent of other female cadets to Avenger Field in Sweetwater, TX to help with the grand opening of the Women AirForce Service Pilot (WASP) Museum. During World War II, famous female pilot Jackie Cochran established the Women’s Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) under Army Air Forces Chief General Hap Arnold. They were later combined with the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS)—who ferried aircraft around in the U.S. to relieve men for overseas and combat jobs—under the moniker of WASPs in

1943. WASP pilots flew nearly every type of airframe available during World War II. During their active time between September 1942-December 1944 they delivered 12,600 aircraft of 77 different types, which was over fifty percent of the ferrying of high-speed pursuit type aircraft in the United States (Parish). These women were largely unrecognized for over thirty years because the service they provided was bold and unprecedented in the male dominated flying world. The grand opening of the museum was May 28, 2005, 62 years after the first class of WASPs graduated, and twenty-nine former WASPs were able to make it to the event. As a cadet early in my military career, I had not contemplated the legacy of all of the female warriors that preceded me. Although the WASPs were well into their late seventies and early eighties, when they spoke of their military time it was like talking to those who were fifty years younger. They were cheeky and bold, and still had the sparkle of adventure in their eyes. They had relished their patriotic military role, even when their roles were diminished because they subverted traditional gender roles. For many of them, the disbandment of the WASPs meant an immediate return to civilian life, but they never forgot their flying contributions, and still embodied the female warrior ethos. Meeting the WASPs made me realize how far female warriors have come in society, and that there is room still for improvement. I am lucky because my promotions in the military are not determined by my gender, but rather my skill, and if I choose to apply for a combat job, it will no longer be denied to me if I am capable. As a twenty-first century military woman, I am thankful for the contributions of female warriors who have blazed the path and proved that traditional gender roles are just that: roles, like parts in a performance, not biological assignments.

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