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FROM TRADITIONAL "ROMANCERO" POEM/SONG  
TO NOVEL: HISTORY AND LEGEND OF THE  
SPANISH WARRIOR MAIDEN IN TERESA SAGRERA'S  
"LA DONCELLA GUERRERA"

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**From Traditional “Romancero” Poem/Song to Novel: History and Legend of the Spanish Warrior Maiden in Teresa Sagrera’s “La doncella guerrera”**

**Synopsis:**

Teresa Sagrera, in "La doncella guerrera" ("The Warrior Maiden"), creates a fictional journey through events of Spain's unification describing the perspective of a disguised female knight. This paper explores history and legend as well as literary devices used in this novel inspired by a traditional Spanish poem. Also, Sagrera invents new characters and adventures allowing us to learn about Spanish culture and to vicariously imagine the life of a gender-concealing soldier in fifteenth century Spain.

**From Traditional “Romancero” Poem/Song to Novel:  
History and Legend of the Spanish Warrior Maiden  
in Teresa Sagrera’s *La doncella guerrera***

Teresa Sagrera’s recently published book (2022), *La doncella guerrera* (*The Warrior Maiden*<sup>1</sup>) takes the reader on a fictional journey through the historical events of 1475-1476 that will lead to the unification of the various kingdoms to form the modern country of Spain. The novel was written in Spanish by an author from Sant Pere de Vilamajor (Spain) and from the perspective of a woman. The main character in the novel is inspired by a poem that is also sung and has been passed down over the centuries by oral tradition about the legendary warrior maiden. The legend is about a young woman who disguises her gender and takes the place in the armed forces that otherwise would have been held by her aging father or by a brother had her family not consisted completely of female daughters. The novel, *La doncella guerrera*, reflects the overall structure of many versions of the song but we will also see connections to a specific version that refers to Arintero in the province of León about a warrior maiden named Juana García and known as “la Dama de Arintero” (“the Lady from Arintero”). The novel connects with Spanish history, geography, and culture creating a dynamic reading experience as we vicariously learn what it might have been like to have lived and loved as a disguised female warrior in fifteenth-century Spain. This paper is an exploration of both the historical and legendary character of the warrior maiden and an analysis of the literary devices used in the novel *La doncella guerrera*. Sagrera takes inspiration from a poem from Spanish oral tradition

and then diverges giving the reader insight into her interpretation of the historical events of the time and the central warrior maiden character.

In Spain, there are many versions of “La doncella guerrera” and it figures strongly in the oral tradition in a genre referred to as “Romancero”—often a poem called a *romance* (spoken and/or sung like a ballad in English) passed down from one generation to the next informally in homes, among friends, in areas of work done in groups and formally in concerts of traditional folkloric music throughout the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America. The different versions of the *romance* of “La doncella guerrera” also go by different names: “La Dama de Arintero” (“The Lady from Arintero”), “La maldición del conde”<sup>2</sup> (“the Curse of the Count”), and the “Romance de Marquitos” (“Ballad of Marquitos”)—are all names for different versions of the legend of the Spanish maiden warrior. The title choice could also reflect a sympathy for one character or another—for example, the title of “La maldición del conde” draws attention to the father who feels cursed for not having a son he could send to represent his family in battle; “La Dama de Arintero” reflects both the gender as well as origins of the soldier; and, interestingly, the title of “Romance de Marquitos”<sup>3</sup> is a reference to the name that the maiden takes on when disguised as the male soldier “don Marcos” but with the diminutive ending “-ito” that creates a term of endearment used by a soldier in the poem who falls in love with her.

The cover of Sagrera’s novel includes the title, *La doncella guerrera*, and this description: “La apasionante historia de Juana de Arintero, la primera guerrera y soldado de España” (“The passionate story of Juana from Arintero, the first warrior and soldier of Spain”; my trans.). Furthermore, the author includes a version of the *romance* published by Mariano D. Berrueta in *Del cancionero leonés* at the end of the book that is specific to León (province of Spain) and mentions the town of Arintero (qtd. in Sagrera 442). In this way we know that

Sagrera uses the title *La doncella guerrera*, on one hand, making a reference to the legend in its entirety including the many different versions of the poem/song *romance* and she is also linking her novel with the geographic location and cultural context specific to Arintero and the region of León.

The author explains that she was interested in writing about the story of Juana García from Arintero because it was less known than the stories of other female warrior heroes like Joan of Arc, Agustina of Aragón, and Mulan—whose stories have a similar structure (Sagrera). Furthermore, the topic presented an opportunity to explore “. . . una historia bonita de explicar, pero aparte, . . . podía adentrarme en la explicación de la guerra desde el punto de vista femenino . . . un punto de vista poco usual tanto en novela histórica como en historia en general. La guerra siempre se nos explica o se nos ha explicado tradicionalmente con ojos . . . masculinos.” (“. . . a beautiful story to explain, but in addition, . . . I could enter into an in-depth explanation of war from the feminine point of view . . . an unusual point of view in an historical novel as well as in history in general. War is always explained to us or traditionally has been explained to us through masculine eyes”; Sagrera; my trans.).

The musical version of “La doncella guerrera” has been performed and recorded by many musicians and is still popular today. One of the most well-known versions of the song that is still sung throughout Spain begins, “En Sevilla un sevillano / siete hijos le dió Dios” (“In Seville a Sevillian / to whom God gave seven children”; 196; Díaz et al.; my trans.) We then find out the seven were all daughters and there were no sons<sup>4</sup>. Because this version taking place in the southern part of Spain is so famous, it is interesting that Sagrera’s novel relates to a different version—one that takes place in the north and in the small village of Arintero. As Sagrera tells us at the end of *La doncella guerrera*:

La memoria colectiva conserva multitud de romances y canciones que nos recuerdan la figura de la Dama de Arintero, y que en muchos pueblos de la montaña leonesa y durante el siglo XX aún se cantaban. Las composiciones recuerdan la gesta de esta mujer leonesa que fue a la guerra y de cuya historia existen muchas versiones.

The collective memory preserves a multitude of *romances* and songs that remind us of the figure of the Lady of Arintero, and that in many places in the mountains of Leon and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were still being sung. The compositions remind us of the deeds of this woman from León and many versions exist of her story (441; my trans.).

Sagrera has also based her novel of historical fiction on a version of the warrior maiden story connected to real events of the Castilian War of Succession (Sagrera 435-437). The author explains the historical context at the end of her book in the section “Nota histórica” (“Historical Note”): King Henry IV known as the “Impotent” died in 1474 and the claim to the throne by daughter Juana was delegitimized by both the absence of a will and the rumor that her real father was Beltrán de la Cueva (Sagrera 435) and she became known as “la Beltraneja”. Then, Juana’s half-sister Isabella proclaimed herself queen and this led to the Castilian War of Succession. The war crossed borders when Isabella married Ferdinand from Aragon and Juana married her uncle Afonso, king of Portugal (Sagrera 435-436). The Catholic Monarchy (Isabella and Ferdinand) would eventually win soon after the Battle of Toro in Peleagonzalo in 1476 (Sagrera 436). Some of these same historical figures and events, important for Sagrera’s novel, are mentioned or alluded to in Berrueta’s version of the *romance*—for example, when the poem mentions “Beltraneja” (“La Dama de Arintero” 306).

Whether or not Juana García, “la Dama de Arintero,” really existed is yet to be determined as little documentation exists. From oral tradition we have many versions of the

poem that mention specific historical events and places so we have an idea of the timeframe as well the geographic setting. Ángel Fierro, in *La Dama de Arintero: análisis crítico*, examines and details the various documents, paintings, and related coats of arms (95-121). Both Fierro's book and Sagrera's novel include a photo of a painting, "La dama de Arintero", painted by José Luis Villar in 1946 and located in the Army Museum in Toledo, Spain (Fierro cover and 48; Sagrera 443). This portrait is from centuries later but is sometimes used as the image for the Spanish maiden warrior reflecting both feminine attributes, for example in the face, but with shorter hair that could suggest a masculine haircut while wearing armor and military clothing traditionally worn by men. Like the portrait, many items related to the supposed life of the warrior maiden present some element of doubt or disconnect. Both Sagrera and Fierro agree that research so far on the maiden warrior from the ballad of "La doncella guerrera" from Arintero does not undeniably prove or disprove her existence. Fierro summarizes his research saying: "Las apoyaturas en favor de la existencia del personaje abarcan aspectos muy diversos. Quizás cada uno por separado no constituye prueba suficiente para conceder carta de naturaleza histórica a La Dama, pero su variedad y concordancia apunta a indicios de verosimilitud, . . ." ("The support in favor of the existence of the character extend over very diverse aspects. Perhaps each one by itself does not constitute sufficient proof in order to grant a letter of historic naturalization to The Lady, but its variety and agreement point toward indicators of verisimilitude, . . ." (96; my trans.). Likewise Sagrera writes at the end of her novel, "Que no se tenga hasta el momento más documentación que nos confirme y detalle su existencia, no significa que no exista, sino que hasta ahora no se ha encontrado" ("That we do not have at this moment more documentation confirming to us and detailing her existence, does not mean that it does not exist, only that up until now it has not been found"; 443; my trans.).

In preparation for writing the *La doncella guerrera*, Sagrera did extensive research and visited many of the sites like Burgos, Valladolid, and the bridge of El Paso Honroso that are related to the story of the warrior maiden as well as correlating historical events. In Arintero, she met with the owner of the supposed home of Juana García that has been reconstructed because the town was burned down in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War. There, she saw “. . . el escudo de la casa donde aparece la dama con su armadura sobre el caballo” (“. . . the shield of the home where the lady appears with her armor on a horse”; Sagrera; 445). The author visited the area where the novel takes place to see “. . . cómo es el río, cómo son las montañas, cómo es la vegetación y conocer un poco más de cerca . . . . Creo que la novela también esto lo respira si tú has pisado el terreno” (“. . . what the river is like, what the mountains are like, what the vegetation is like, and become familiar from close up . . . . I believe that the novel also breathes this if you have stepped on the ground” (Sagrera; my trans.).

The author has strategically chosen the dates as well as the travel itinerary for the characters in the novel so that they are eyewitnesses of important moments in Spain’s history especially during the years 1475-1476. In addition, the characters she has created in this work of historical fiction are cleverly able to finesse their way into front row seats for the events as well as conveniently locate themselves in order to eavesdrop on important conversations at key moments. Furthermore, the characters reflect so that we get their opinions and commentary on the events as if they were happening right now and we were there with them.

In addition to timing the novel to take place during important moments, Sagrera has also arranged a travel route for the characters through beautiful natural scenery depicted in the novel and places of cultural interest. Juana and her squire Hugo travel through Spain at times on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage both on the more popular *Camino Francés* (“French Way”) as



well as an alternative route—*Vía de la Plata*. While on the Camino, they will travel through Hospital de Órbigo (León, Spain) where they will learn about the celebration of the “Paso Honroso” that includes festivals and jousting still celebrated in Spain every year on the first weekend of June. In these ways, the author shares Spanish culture with the reader and we learn (along with the characters) about important historical moments and cultural events. As Juana and Hugo ride their horses along the Camino de Santiago they observe pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. The Camino pilgrimage includes the bridge that will take them over the Órbigo river. Sagrera writes that Juana, “. . . quiso andar lentamente por él, como si cada paso fuera una caricia y de ese modo pudiera captar toda la historia que guardaban aquellas piedras, los sueños y las ilusiones de todos los que lo habían cruzado” (“. . . wanted to walk slowly over it, as if each step were a caress and in that way she might be able to capture all the history that was kept by those stones, the dreams and the hopes of all who had crossed it”; 96; my trans.). A priest explains to the main characters that the bridge is known as the “Paso Honroso” (“Honorable Pass/Bridge”) because the knight Suero de Quiñones made a vow to break 300 lances to free himself from an iron ring around his neck symbolizing his love for Doña Leonor de Tovar. He, and the knights who assisted him, then made the Camino pilgrimage after completing the challenge (Sagrera 97-98).

The story about Suero de Quiñones and the bridge over the Órbigo river is important because it serves as a lesson to Juana and Hugo about the world of chivalry including acts of bravery in the name of their beloved and also expectations both of knights and their companions. The story also connects the imaginary characters in Sagrera’s novel with real historical figures and even celebrations that continue to this day. On the first complete weekend of June there is still a festival to commemorate the historical importance of these events that includes jousting,

medieval dinners with folkloric music from the period, and those attending generally wear period costumes. The celebration ends with fireworks near the famous bridge.

The legend of the warrior maiden has been passed down through oral tradition in Spain principally through music and, specifically, by the lyrics<sup>5</sup> to the song titled “La doncella guerrera” (“The Warrior Maiden”). However, there are many versions of the song. Just in the province of León, Ángel Fierro in *La Dama de Arintero: Análisis crítico* writes that approximately 60 literary versions of the poem have been found and published with many variations in the wording (166)<sup>6</sup>. Though the versions vary regarding the names and the origin of the main characters as well as number of offspring, they mostly agree with regard to the structure and content as detailed in *Romances tradicionales* by Joaquín Díaz and colleagues (194-195). Sagrera follows a similar structure in her novelization of the legend of the warrior maiden but with important variations.

One important difference between the version of “La doncella guerrera” from Spanish oral tradition and the novel by Sagrera is the introduction of Hugo and his character development including an evolving relationship with the warrior maiden, Juana García (also known as the knight, Diego Oliveros). After being orphaned at an early age, in Sagrera’s fictional narrative, Hugo began to work for Juana’s father (27), Count García. He enjoys privileges other laborers there do not have as well as attention from the Count that others (including, at times, members of the García family) do not receive. There is a rivalry between Hugo and Juana for her father’s preference (27). Juana is the favorite daughter, “la niña de sus ojos”<sup>7</sup> (“the apple of his eye”; 43) while Hugo is much appreciated and valued by Count García who tells him, “. . . eres mucho más que un simple vasallo para mí. Y contar con tu apoyo siempre me ha sido de gran ayuda” (“. . . you are much more than a simple servant to me. And counting on your support has always been a

great help”; 42, my trans.). Hugo offers to go to war and represent the García family, but Juana insists that she must go because she is his daughter (41). Eventually the father, Count García, sides with Juana to give her a chance to go to war in his place and announces that she will go, “. . . como caballero, como el hijo que no engendró tu madre . . .” (“as a knight, as the son that your mother never had...”; 76; my trans.).

In Sagrera’s novel, Count García places two conditions on his daughter’s participation: she must agree to a rigorous amount of training with Hugo as her instructor and Hugo must accompany her as her squire. In many versions of the *romance*, there are specific examples of the training that would prepare Juana to become the warrior maiden ready for battle—however they gloss quickly over the details of her instruction. The creation of Hugo by Sagrera for the novel includes several chapters that detail the preparation he will oversee: strength building as Hugo requires Juana to move rocks from the riverside to an ash tree and then return them again; hiking that she must do while wearing her heavy armor; sword fighting with Hugo as her teacher and opponent; and, finally, a series of hunting trips for a variety of animals (47-78). Count García has armor and weapons specially made for his daughter and gives her his shield that he used when he fought serving king John II (78). In a final act of symbolically blessing her endeavor and her new identity including her concealed gender, he gives Juana the name of “el caballero Diego Oliveros de Arintero” (“the knight Diego Oliveros from Arintero”; 79)—an assumed name that is also used in some variations of the ballad from Spanish oral tradition including the version from León. As the squire, Hugo is careful to call her by this name whenever they are in public.

Perhaps foreshadowing the characters in the novel by Miguel de Cervantes, *El Quijote*,<sup>8</sup> Sagrera creates a relationship between Juana García in *La doncella guerrera* and her squire, Hugo, resembling at times, that of the legendary and fictional knight Don Quijote and his squire

Sancho Panza. From the beginning of Sagrera's novel we start to notice some similarities between Juana and Don Quijote for example in their mutual interest in reading novels of chivalry. About Juana, Sagrera explains: “. . . los que más le gustaban eran los de caballerías, soñaba con aquellos viajes por tierras lejanas, luchando por la justicia y el honor, combatiendo junto con otros caballeros, convertida en el paladín de los oprimidos” (“. . . those [books] that she most liked were those of chivalry, she used to dream about those travels through distant lands, fighting for justice and honor, in combat together with other knights, converted into a champion of the oppressed”; 19; my trans.).

Furthermore, in the later chapters of the novel, Juana becomes aware of her own notoriety and starts to see how her life is becoming legend. This is another similarity with the novel by Cervantes as Don Quijote also has a similar self-awareness of his fame and how it is spreading in the second part of *El Quijote*. Sancho tells Don Quijote that he has been told (by the son of Bartolomé Carrasco) “. . . que andaba ya en libros la historia de vuestra merced, con nombre del Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha;. . .” (“. . . that the story of your grace is already coming out in books, with the name of “El Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha”; *El Quijote II*, ch. 2; my trans.). In Sagrera's novel, the innkeeper asks Juana (dressed as a knight), “¿No seréis acaso aquel valeroso Diego Oliveros del que todo el mundo habla? . . . Vuestra historia circula por toda Zamora, hablan de vos como de una auténtica heroína . . .” (“Aren't you by chance that courageous Diego Oliveros of whom everyone is speaking? . . . Your story is going around all of Zamora, they speak of you as a real heroine . . .”; 332; my trans.). The innkeeper refuses to charge Juana for the stay out of respect and appreciation for her feats in war but he also realizes the prestige for his inn. He knows that Oliveros is really a woman and Juana realizes that everyone else will know as well very soon. The Innkeeper gives her an initial

legendary moniker suggesting the name that she will later acquire as he requests the honor to be able to say, “. . . que en esta humilde pension pasó una noche la Doncella de la Guerra” “. . . that in this humble pension stayed one night the Maiden of the War” (Sagrera; 333; my trans.).

In the poem from Spanish oral tradition there is often a man in the army, the king or, as mentioned by Díaz et al, the king’s son (*Romances tradicionales* 194) who befriends the warrior maiden and falls in love with her but needs to confirm his suspicions regarding her true gender before pursuing a romantic relationship. In these versions of the song, the love-sick man seeks advice—often from his mother—about how to discern the warrior maiden’s gender without asking her directly (Díaz et al. 194).

In the version of the warrior maiden poem “La Dama de Arintero” published by Berrueta, it is the General in the army who takes it upon himself to investigate these gender-related suspicions. The General uses the same sorts of situations as the love-sick soldier in other versions to attempt to discreetly ascertain Juana/Oliveros’ gender—for example, the General takes her for a walk one day where there are things made from silk so he can see how she reacts. Juana, in the poem posing as Oliveros, pretends to despise “aquellos labores” (“all those labored items”) as trivial to which men pay no attention and instead looks strongly at a variety of shields and weapons (306). After he was still not certain that Juana was male, an order went out for the soldiers to bathe and Oliveros (Juana) began to cry realizing that her secret would soon be revealed. The General, in the poem, asks why she is crying and she makes up an excuse that will prevent her from having to take off her clothes and, at the same time, give her a reason to need to leave the war and return home. Juana/Oliveros says that her mother has died and her father is about to pass away. The General tells her not to lie, that he knows who she is and he commends her for her valor. He grants concessions to her, to her family, and descendants and tells her to go

home (307). Interestingly, in Sagrera's novel, it is precisely when Juana decides to bathe in the river (and separated from Hugo's protection) that she is left most vulnerable and her gender is discovered by a suspicious and vengeful thief who had been spying on her since an earlier incident with Hugo and Juana (*La doncella guerrera* 213).

Sagrera's novel also differs from the *romance* of "La doncella guerrera" because of who falls in love with Juana and it is not the king nor his son. The squire, Hugo, falls in love with the warrior maiden but, in a significant change from the poem, in the novel he continues to conspire with Juana to conceal her gender so that she can continue fighting as the soldier Oliveros and they can continue their secret romance together in the army. The relationship that begins like sibling rivalry changes drastically when the characters take on their new roles, join the army, and eventually fall in love. According to the author:

Hugo es un personaje creado de ficción, pero me parecía bien darle un poco la vuelta porque siempre el papel secundario o de acompañante es el de la mujer . . . pero en este caso . . . el escudero es Hugo y aparte Hugo haciendo una transformación de cuando su relación en si va cambiando desde esta envidia o este roce inicial a verla pues, aparte de enamorarse de ella, con respeto que realmente se ha ganado la posición que está jugando.

Hugo is a character created from fiction, but it seemed good to me to turn things around a little because the secondary role or that of the companion is always that of the woman . . . but in this case . . . the squire is Hugo and, in addition, Hugo makes a transformation from when his relationship goes from envy to friction to seeing her, aside from falling in love with her, with respect and that really she has earned the position that she is now exercising. (Sagrera; my trans.)

Juana/Oliveros and Hugo are known to be a knight and squire to those around them while they are traveling, staying in the camps, or fighting on the battlefield but their relationship evolves into a secret love affair that transpires in the intimacy of the moments they can spend privately but together. When Hugo and Juana are traveling from Astorga to Benavente on the *Vía de la Plata* (an alternative route to Santiago that goes from Seville to Santiago de Compostela) they stay at San Salvador Monastery and are assigned to a room with only one bed (101-102). Hugo sleeps on the floor but realizes he now has completely different feelings for Juana: “. . . por primera vez, pensó en ella como en una mujer y no como en aquella chiquilla de la que siempre había estado celoso por ser la hija de quien él amaba como a un padre (“ . . . for the first time, he thought of her as a woman and not as that little girl that he had always been jealous of for being the daughter of the man he loved like a father”); 103; my trans.). Later, in the military camp in Benavente, Hugo starts to fall completely in love with Juana: “. . . Hugo no conseguía apartar sus ojos de Juana. Aquella mujer lo estaba empezando a volver loco y no podía separarse de ella, ni tampoco quería” (“ . . . Hugo was not able to take his eyes off of Juana. That woman was beginning to drive him crazy and he could not separate himself from her, nor did he want to”; 115; my trans.). As readers we learn Hugo’s thoughts of love that torment him as he initially cannot share them with Juana and he must maintain a professional appearance as her squire so as to not risk revealing her gender to those around. To do so, would ruin their endeavor to serve in the army of the Catholic Monarchs and would put them in danger from the other soldiers as well as in legal jeopardy. Hugo and Juana, along with Juana’s parents, were aware of the consequences. Sagrera’s narrative explains, “El padre de Juana sabía que accediendo a que su hija fuera a defender el nombre de su linaje, estaba violando las leyes civiles y religiosas que prohibían a las mujeres en la guerra . . .” (“The father of Juana knew that allowing his daughter

to go to defend the name of his lineage, was violating the civil and religious laws that prohibited women from participating in war . . .”; 84; my trans.).

At first Juana is angry that Hugo must accompany her but after he saves her life during an encounter with thieves she begins to realize the importance of having someone with her and with whom she can be her true self “. . . porque con él no tenía que fingir ser quien no era” (“. . . because with him she did not have to pretend to be who she was not”; 109; my trans.). The mutual dependency (142-144), the bonding that can take place when traveling with someone (141-142), and the intimacy of shared quarters (118) are all factors that lead up to Juana’s realization during the celebratory events in Valladolid of Abril 1475 that she too has romantic feelings for Hugo.

Another important innovation in Sagrera’s novelization of the legend of the warrior maiden is the insight we get into the possible mindset of Juana García who is simultaneously a young woman experiencing a range of emotions related to self-doubt, homesickness, falling in love, embarrassment, and fear but she also feels emotions that emanate from her role as the knight, Diego Oliveros: anger, disgust, rage, glory, unwillingness to accept defeat, and pride. The first time she went to battle (in Arévalo), those in front of her “[s]e aprestaron el combate ululando y gritando para aturdir y acobardar al enemigo” (“They prepared themselves for combat by wailing and yelling in order to stun and intimidate the enemy”; 156; my trans.). However, Juana/Oliveros is excited by the noise and reacts quite differently to the sounds made by the soldiers facing imminent battle than she had previously expected. Sagrera writes, “Oliveros oía resonar aquellos gritos salvajes en su interior, y sentía que le producían un desconocido efecto de excitación” “Oliveros heard those savage yells resonate inside of her, and she felt that they were having a strangely arousing effect on her”; 156; my trans.). Despite all her concerns and those of



her family (and Hugo) as to whether or not she would be prepared and able to engage in battle—when the time arrived—she was completely engaged and successful. In *La doncella guerrera* Hugo observed her on the battlefield

luchar con la lanza, poniendo todo su empeño. Se movía con agilidad a caballo, soportando el peso de la armadura como si lo hubiera hecho siempre. Era rápida. Compensaba la diferencia de fuerza respecto a sus adversarios con su bravura y con su dominio de las armas, tumbando a más de uno.

fighting with the lance, giving it all her effort. She moved with agility on horseback, bearing all the weight of the armor as if she had always done it. She was quick. She compensated for the difference in strength of her adversaries with her bravery and her control over the use of arms, knocking down more than one. (157; my trans.)

At first, when Juana García is successful on the battlefield fully taking on her role as the knight Diego Oliveros, “. . . la victoria sobre los oponentes la emborrachaba de orgullo . . . luchando con coraje, sin dudar ni un solo segundo en descargar la espada sobre sus adversaries . . .” (“the victory over her opponents made her drunk with pride . . . fighting with courage, without doubting for one single second in wielding her sword against her adversaries . . .”; 157; my trans.). Later, she will reflect on the battlefield and start to see the dichotomy of her life: as Diego Oliveros she is living out the fantasy she dreamed of when reading the books of chivalry and she is upholding the honor of her father, family and lineage but as Juana Garcia she is faced with the reality of the horrors of war: “. . . Juana volvió la vista para contemplar con cierta perspectiva el escenario de la batalla donde había luchado como Diego Oliveros, y una sensación de desconcierto le cubrió el alma. Cuerpos de hombre y animales pisoteados, cubiertos de sangre . . .” (“. . . Juana looked back to contemplate with some perspective the scene of the battle where

she had fought as Diego Oliveros, and an unsettling feeling covered her soul. Bodies of trampled men and animals, covered in blood . . . ; 158; my trans.). After the fire in Burgos caused by warfare, Sagrera writes, “Juana no entendía de guerras, ni de estrategias militares. Solo entendía de hombres, mujeres, niños, y ancianos que perdían sus casas con el fuego, de hijos que perdían a sus padres, de padres que perdían a sus hijos . . .” (“Juana did not understand about wars, nor about military strategies. She only understood that men, women, children, and the elderly lost their homes to the fire, children lost their parents, and parents lost their children . . .”; 181; my trans.).

In the Berrueta version of the *romance* in *Del cancionero leonés*, Juana’s gender is about to be discovered by the General (after his order for the soldiers to bathe) so she begins to cry and the General asks her, “—¿Por qué lloras, Oliveros?” (“Why are you crying, Oliveros?”; 307; my trans.). Juana makes up an excuse that she needs to return home because supposedly her mother has died and her father is about to pass away. The general realizes that she is a woman and tells her not to lie to him. He recognizes her courage and grants privileges to her and her family (307).

In the novel, Juana receives similar privileges but they are bestowed on her by king Ferdinand. In both the song and the novel she leaves for home but is killed in Candana (close to Arintero) before she arrives. Some soldiers killed her in a cruel way because she refused to turn over to them the document that promised all the privileges for herself, her family, and those from Arintero. From the Berrueta version of the *romance* in *Del cancionero leonés*:

Unos cuantos soldaditos

la dieron muerte cruel,

porque se negó a entregar

el codiciado papel.

Some little soldiers

gave her a cruel death

because she refused to turn over

the coveted document (“La Dama de Arintero” 308; my trans.)

It is interesting and also disconcerting that the last part of the *romance* clearly says they were soldiers (“soldaditos”) and not just bandits. After reading the poem, we are left wondering why the soldiers would have wanted the document that was specifically for the family of Juana García. Presumably there would have been no value in it for them as the benefits were for very specific lands in Arintero and her family members (unless someone else wanted to try to keep Juana from receiving these benefits!). The song leaves us with unanswered questions but, by the end of *La doncella guerrera*, the readers of Teresa Sagrera’s novel will know the author’s creative explanations for the unexplained mysteries.

In this paper we have seen how the novel, *La doncella guerrera*, follows the overall structure of the warrior maiden legend and, as a work of historical fiction, takes us on a vicarious journey back in time to key events taking place at specific geographic locations in Spain. As the main character is a woman disguised as a male soldier who enters the army camps and fields of battle—areas that were almost exclusively for men—we see war from a different point of view. Those familiar with the legend depicted in the poem of “La Dama de Arintero” from Spanish oral tradition and known more generally as “La doncella guerrera” will recognize key elements of the *romance* in this book of historical fiction. At the same time, Teresa Sagrera, the author of

the novel *La doncella guerrera*, introduces new characters into the storyline and innovations into the storytelling that create an entertaining and informative reading experience.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All translations are either commonly accepted or are my own.

<sup>2</sup> For a written version of the warrior maiden ballad with the title “La maldición del Conde” see *Folk-lore Leonés* by Manuel Fernández-Núñez, pp. 97-99.

<sup>3</sup> To listen to a version of the warrior maiden with the title “Romance de Marquitos”, see version by the group Nuevo Mester de Juglaría, on youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVgFMxEKxGc>

<sup>4</sup> To listen to a version performed by a group of Spanish musicians with these lyrics and video, see Alalumbre Folk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tziVqB0yuc>.

<sup>5</sup> To hear a version of the song and read the lyrics in Spanish, see Joaquín Díaz at <https://funjdiaz.net/joaquin-diaz-canciones-ficha.php?id=187>.

<sup>6</sup> Fierro lists them by place, transcriber and first verses (166-171).

<sup>7</sup> An expression used in Spanish to mean the preferred one—the one who has someone’s attention in a favorable sense or, using the idiomatic expression in English, “the apple of one’s eye”.

<sup>8</sup> The first part of *El Quijote* by Miguel de Cervantes was published in 1605 and the second in 1615. Sagrera’s novel, *La doncella guerrera* was published in 2022 but takes place in 1475-76. The books of chivalry would become especially popular in Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For a definition of the genre and timeframe see Ch. I “A Definition” in *Romances of Chivalry in the Spanish Golden Age* by Eisenberg.

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