



Hispanisms AND HOMOSEXUALITIES

SYLVIA MOLLOY & ROBERT MCKEE IRWIN, EDITORS

Hispanisms and Homosexualities





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and Homosexualities



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Introduction



Sylvia Molloy and

Robert McKee Irwin

Many of the contributors to this volume have at some point or another participated in, or even organized, panels on some aspect of queer scholarship related to Hispanic cultures. The mid- to late eighties were the heady days of the Lesbian and Gay Conferences at Yale, when we had panels with titles ranging from the academic dowdy (“Lesbian and Gay Literature in Latin America”) to—as we got more brassy—the flamboyant: “Readers on the Verge of a Textual Breakdown.” The question that lurked in the back of our minds was why we were having those panels in the first place, but in the thrill of what for many of us amounted to an academic coming out, the question more often than not went unanswered. Besides a random conjunction of more or less anecdotal facts—that many of us, panelists and audience, were queer, that the organizers and speakers were often Spanish, Latin Americans, or Latinos, that all of us taught Spanish or Latin American literatures and wrote about those literatures—was there anything, we asked ourselves, that justified the conjunction of nationality and homosexuality in specifically Hispanic terms? Were we really reflecting on an intersection that would further our intellectual practices, or were we creating a culture-specific space to which we could repair and into which we could fit queries that did not quite conform to hegemonic cultural formations and, within those formations, to constructions of sexualities that did not quite suit us? And who were “we,” to begin with? That these questions went unanswered—that they may always go unanswered—does not preclude their being asked yet once again.

If the gesture that these Hispanic panels had in common was an aca-

demographic coming out, what were we (are we) coming out to? What is the site of our visibility, of our performance? It may be useful to reflect, for a moment, on the particularly complex, even controversial, nature of Hispanism as an academic "field" before going any further. For what indeed does this term, grown so ample that it encompasses everything and nothing, *mean*? Handily, it describes the study of Spanish-speaking cultures, so that it includes Peninsularists and Latin Americanists, medievalists and modernists in its generous, deceptively innocent embrace. So accustomed are Hispanists to the term that one rarely pauses to think of its exceptional nature: one doesn't speak, after all, of Italianism, or Germanism, or Gallicism in the same sense. Hispanism, the Spanish dictionary tells us, besides being "an idiom peculiar to Spanish," is "*Afición al estudio de las cosas de España*," love for the study of things pertaining to Spain. That the term is closely related to *hispanidad*, which the same dictionary defines as the "*conjunto y comunidad de los pueblos hispanos*," the group and community formed by Hispanic peoples, shows the ideological nature of the construct, its indubitably expansionist bent. We tend to forget this as we go about our teaching, our writing, and use the term loosely, descriptively, as synonymous with Hispanic studies. We forget the fierce act of commitment that Hispanism, as an ideological construct, would exact of its practitioners, with its talk of love, group belonging, and communal loyalty, a loyalty to a mythical *patria* devoid of geographical boundaries that would bring together—unproblematically, of course—the cultures of a metropolis and those of its erstwhile colonies. Hispanism, this Hispanism, is more than a linguistic bond: it is a conviction, a passion, a temporal continuity, an imperial monument. If for some of us it may mean a (provisional) way of organizing the study of a set of cultures, we should remember that we are, most assuredly, in a minority; that what for us is functional, either as a way of organizing a subject of study or even as a means of postulating strategic identities, is for others an article of faith and a clear call to the heart.

It is useful to bring out these submerged meanings of Hispanism, not to resignify them, of course, but to reflect on their possible effect on the construction of Hispanic studies as a discipline and on the exclusion of dissident voices from that discipline. Indeed, strangely unfriendly to bricolage, Hispanism has traditionally conceived itself in monolithic terms, as an oddly defensive family whose members supposedly share basic cul-

tural values and engage in common cultural practices. Hispanism—that particular construction of Hispanism—has not usually taken kindly to the practice of rereading and revising and has not in general appreciated diversion, reformulation, and, more generally, the unsettling impact of critical inquiry. Hispanism—that particular construction of Hispanism—was begging, one might say, to be queered. To visit sexual dissidence on it at this point is not an impertinent gesture but a destabilizing move, a propitious fracture—in sum, an invitation to reread texts whose productive mobility has been deadened by sheer canonicity. “The notion of a *definitive* text,” Borges writes memorably, “belongs to religion or to fatigue” (106). It is against such notions of the definitive—be it a text, a field of knowledge, an academic discipline, or even a national identity—that the essays in this volume work. Ours was not, to be sure, the only destabilizing move possible: it was the one that we, as queer critics, chose to effect.

The Hispanism we have spoken of, that of the communal bonding in name of a Spanish (and by extension Latin American) essence that it behooves every Hispanist to represent and uphold, cherishes its classics, monumentalized in Spain’s Golden Age. Several authors in this collection have chosen precisely to go back to those classics, reading them against the grain, pausing at the margins of texts and seeing texts as narratives of the marginal, the better to bring out the unheeded story, the invisible queer. Mary Gossy focuses on the construction of female subjectivity in sixteenth-century narrative, more precisely on female desire as trouble. In her rereading of María de Zayas’s “Amar sólo por vencer,” cross-dressing enables the unspeakable (“Whoever heard of a lady falling in love with another?” asks María de Zayas rhetorically) to be inscribed in discourse. Cross-dressing as a place to be—or rather, as a place to say that one is, as a place to inscribe one’s being—is also explored by Israel Burshatin in his reading of the case of Elena/Eleno de Céspedes. Céspedes’s very body, the site of diverse institutional interpretations resulting in diverging gender adjudications, is an unstable construct, indeed, a text in conflict: in each new reading of that regendered body, desire, citizenship, power, even race, are diversely allocated. Benigno Sifuentes-Jáuregui, in his essay on *Lazarillo de Tormes*, recontextualizes the picaresque as “case history,” releasing it from the legal underpinnings of the *relación* so that it can, in turn, release its untold story. Analyzing the by now grudgingly accepted homo-

graphesis of the fourth chapter of the *Lazarillo*, Sifuentes seeks not to identify homosexual desire but to show “how the possibility or impossibility of homosexuality is written or marked in/on the text and, more importantly for us as hispanists, . . . how that homographetic marking in the *Lazarillo* has been *read* by our colleagues . . . as something that is morally wrong.” Emilie Bergmann considers the reading and rewriting of another gender-troubled life, that of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, in colonial Mexico, as told by contemporary feminist filmmaker María Luisa Bemberg in her film “*Yo, la peor de todas*” [I, the worst of all]. Bergmann focuses on the ambiguity of the filmmaker’s interpretive stance: Bemberg repeatedly points to (and even titillates her audience with) intimations of sexual dissidence while carefully avoiding any reference to Sor Juana’s clearly homoerotic texts, thus creating an ambivalence that comes close to disavowal. Although purporting to be a strong recuperative feminist reading of this seventeenth-century figure, “*Yo, la peor de todas*,” as Bergmann shows, effectively disempowers Bemberg’s subject.

Relations between nationalities and sexualities are uneasy at best; between nationalities and homosexualities, they are downright problematic, even personally dangerous, as many of us, growing up in Hispanic cultures, came to learn. If, as an academic discipline, Hispanism is suspicious of queer studies, in its larger sense—that “love of things Spanish” so suggestive of amorous bonds *pro patria*—it has always been downright unfriendly to queers. As one of the authors in this book succinctly puts it, “desire has therefore meant above all national desire.” Nowhere is this better grasped than in concrete national situations, usually situations of change perceived as crises, in which nationalities are (re)defined and national identities are (re)constructed defensively. Several essays in this volume address the vexed intersection of the national and the homosexual in different Hispanic cultures, examining institutional systems of surveillance, patterns of manipulation and exclusion, as well as practices of resistance and dissimulation. Considering the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, Daniel Balderston perceptively studies the paranoid rejection of *afeminamiento* and the anxiously strident construction of virility in Mexican official circles in the 1920s, where a witch-hunt was virtually declared on “hermafrodite[s] incapable of identifying with workers for social reforms.”

Queers problematize national formations, be they conservative or pro-

gressive. When, in addition, specific ideological constructs are presented as exclusive formulations of the national (which is always more or less the case, of course; we refer here to the more blatant cases), the queer is deleted from political action or manipulated in culturally revealing ways. In his essay on Cuban homosexualities, Paul Julian Smith acutely analyzes the mixed reception of, and even acute resistance to, Néstor Almendros's *Improper Conduct* and Reinaldo Arenas's *Antes que anochezca* [Before night falls] on the part of progressive U.S. and European critics: perceived by these critics as uncomfortable narratives—because they spell out a repression at odds with critics' political beliefs or postulate identities that don't fit into critics' expectations—both Almendros's film and Arenas's memoir were promptly denounced on reductive ideological grounds.

In an acute analysis of Juan Goytisolo's *Paisajes después de la batalla* [Landscapes after the battle], Brad Epps scrutinizes the Spanish novelist's denunciation of ideology and his attempt, through parody, to equate communism and gay activism as repressive (and terrorist) political practices. In so doing, Epps shrewdly uncovers, under Goytisolo's defense of ambiguity and of *libertad*, *libertad*, *libertad*, highly problematic constructions of dissident sexual practices and, more specifically, of sexual—and national—subaltern others. A particularly perverse combination of the national and the homosexual is analyzed by Agnes Lugo-Ortiz in her essay on Puerto Rican culture. Lugo-Ortiz reads two transparently symbolic Puerto Rican stories in which impotence and abject self-mutilation are clearly used to signify colonial anxiety, and then relates those texts to “El asedio” [The siege] by Emilio Díaz Valcarcel, the only Puerto Rican narrative depicting a (foreseeably mannish) lesbian. Embodying a grotesque displacement of the “natural”—a “natural” that stands in here for the national, heterosexual, and “vital,” that is, the nonintellectual—this lesbian clearly functions as an ideological vehicle, as one more monstrous emblem of Puerto Rican eviration. Finally, Rubén Ríos Avila further complicates the intersection of the national and the homosexual with a productive meditation on exile, a familiar component of many queer Latin American biographies. Considering Reinaldo Arenas and Manuel Ramos Otero, two Caribbean writers exiled in New York much like Martí before them, Ríos reflects on exile as a provocative critical condition, the site where the “unhomely” queer relocates his or her sexual/textual practice.

If, as some of these pieces illustrate, national genealogies and communal

bonding have been often founded on the repression of the queer—queer as monstrous, queer as alien, queer as definitely “not us,” not part of our national family—the queer can in turn affiliate him- or herself with alternative genealogies and construct dissident, queer family romances. Thus José Quiroga reflects on queer bloodlines, on precursors to whom one turns for recognition, on queer scenes of origins, such as the frivolous bickering between José Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera, the two tropical queens who are, arguably, two of the greatest Cuban writers of this century. Inviting readers to a communal recognition through that scene (one that Hispanism, traditional Hispanism, would never have dreamed of), Quiroga at the same time tempers that recognition with a careful reflection on the gains and losses of outing. In a related move, and going back to the turn of the century, Sylvia Molloy has attempted to reconstruct a scene of queer recognition around the act of *posing*, usually dismissed as frivolous and gender suspect (not to mention unpatriotic), and proposes that it be read as a significant political performance and a founding queer cultural practice.

Concentrating on performance, José Muñoz’s essay focuses on the performance of Latino queerness within the public space and perceptively analyzes the way in which Pedro Zamora, the young Cuban American AIDS activist who was part of MTV’s *The Real World*, through his rich performance as a Latino/queer/PWA successfully challenged prescribed representations of identity in the media and opened a space of resistance within the public sphere.

Searching for ways to facilitate queer readings of Latin American and Latino texts and, inspired by Henry Louis Gates’s powerful yet gender-cautious rendering of Esu as an agent of hermeneutics, Oscar Montero takes that same Esu one step further, to her Cuban incarnation as Echu-Eleguá in Severo Sarduy’s *De donde son los cantantes*. Destabilizing Gates’s neat reading of this Echu-Eleguá as a tutelary figure in a search for origins, in fact revising the whole notion of a search for origins, Montero literally brings out the (tacky) queen—“Baldie, limping, Havana here I come!”—in Echu-Eleguá, reclaiming this “tropical chimera” as one possible emblem for a Latino and Latin American queer signifying practice.

Such an emblem is sought, of course, as a means to empowerment against a still relentlessly present pathologizing discourse. The troubled relation of psychoanalysis and homosexuality is made clear by Robert Irwin. Jorge Cuesta’s paranoiac doctor employs the homophobic author-

ity of psychoanalytic discourse in an attempt to contain the subversions of biology itself. The much earlier story of Eleno/a, as recounted by Burshatin, with its repeatedly pathologized gender nonconformity, is no less tragic. And Molloy, by looking at medical discourse itself, makes clear its frighteningly significant politically repressive aspect.

Out of this repressive, pathologizing atmosphere, various strategies of resistance have emerged. However, neither the identities of Hispanic writers who are generally thought of as “homosexual” nor identity politics in general are notions easily defined in the context of Hispanism. The complex, thoughtful, often disquieting reflections on identity politics offered in this book—explored by Montero, whose Latino identity politics depend on a Latin American author exiled to France; by Epps, who reveals fragmentary postmodern anti-identity politics to be as troubling as the gay rights politics and Marxism they are meant to replace; by Muñoz, whose essay shows how the identity politics of a gay Latino PWA might be too disquieting even for the liberal and funky MTV; by Ríos, who examines the unnerving complications that exiled homosexual writers inflict on notions of “national desire” back home—reflect not only the political sore points within the world (the many worlds) defined by the term *Hispanism* but also the ways in which the boundaries (not just sexual but national, racial, and political) of Hispanism begin to break down when confronted by Hispanism’s own homosexualities. Furthermore, as seen in Gossy’s rereading of a tale of cross-dressing as one of lesbian desire, in Burshatin’s story of criminalized gender nonconformity, and in Irwin’s case study of the anxiety of biological gender flux and its confusing confrontation with psychoanalytic discourse on sexuality, even in cultures where a male/female dichotomy is accentuated in national rhetoric (and, is, in fact, a basic element of grammar in the very language spoken), gender can hardly be reduced to the comforting sureness of a biologically defined binarism.

“Confrontations and paradigms must be dissolved, both the meanings and the sexes [must] be pluralized,” writes Barthes in a burst of utopianism. “Meaning will tend toward its multiplication, its dispersion . . . and sex will be caught in no typology: there will be, for example, only *homosexualities*, whose plural will baffle any constituted, centered discourse” (69). Following this call to salutary dispersion, the essays in this book embrace the plural, not only of *homosexualities* but also of *hispanism*, decentered, noncapitalized *hispanisms*, hoping not only to stress diversity

but, more pointedly, to question prescriptive normalcy, be it cultural or sexual. This collection would like to bring hispanisms into homosexualities and homosexualities into hispanisms, would like to propose queer readings of Spanish and Latin American literatures and cultures, but would also seek to queer univocal constructions of mainstream homosexualities with its own, oblique, not easily assimilated hispanisms. It aspires to bring out the “disappeared” queerness of each text, however strange or disquieting that queerness may seem—to the resistant readers of traditional hispanisms but also, more importantly, to us, queer hispanists.

These essays urge homosexualities and hispanisms to profitably contaminate each other; to heed Cristina Peri Rossi’s playful and powerful admonition: “Be fruitful and divide / Multiply in vain” (76).

I



GENDER

AT

LOSS

Interrogating Hermaphroditism

in Sixteenth-Century Spain



Israel Burshatin

In 1546 Elena de Céspedes was born a female and a slave in Alhama de Granada. At age sixteen, however, her body was transformed into that of a hermaphrodite, as s/he would declare more than twenty years later while facing the tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Toledo, where in July 1587 s/he was tried. Several serious charges brought her/him there—impersonating a man, sodomy, witchcraft, and scorn for [*sentir mal*] the sacrament of matrimony; the latter was the gravest of the accusations, provoked by her recent marriage to a woman, María del Caño. Married first to a man, Christóval Lombardo, a stonemason from Jaén, with whom she lived for only three months, Elena gave birth to their son. That was how her body was metamorphosed. According to the “Discourse of her/his life” [*Discurso de su vida*] that s/he presented orally to the Toledo tribunal, Elena’s body extruded a penis during delivery of her first and only child, Christóval junior. The trial transcript, prepared by the tribunal secretary, gives the following account:

Dixo que en realidad de verdad ésta es y fue hermafrodito, que tubo y tiene dos naturas, una de hombre y otra de muger. Y que lo que en esto pasa es que quando ésta parió como tiene dicho, con la fuerça que puso en el parto se le rompió un pellejo que benía sobre el caño de la orina y le salió una cabeza como medio dedo pulgar, que ansí lo señaló, que pareçia en su hechura cabeça de miembro de hombre, el qual, quando ésta tenía deseo y alteraçión natural le salía como dicho tiene, y quando

no estava con alteraçión se enmüsteçía y recogía a la parte y seno donde estava antes que se le rompiese el dicho pellejo.¹

[She said that she really and truly is and was a hermaphrodite, that she had and has two sexes, a man's and a woman's. That what happened was that when she gave birth, as she has said, with the force that she applied in labor she broke the loose skin that covered the urinary canal, and a head came out [the length] of about half a big thumb, and she indicated it so; in its shape it resembled the head of a male member, which when she felt desire and natural excitement would come out as she has said, and when she wasn't excited it would wilt and return to the place where the skin had broken.]

Eleno's defense was that nature—and not her own cunning, as the inquisitors and the expert witnesses alleged—had wrought her sex change. The evidence of gender dissidence adduced by his/her accusers was, s/he argued, traceable to the genital mutation that occurred during labor. It was only after the birth of her penis that she altered her dress and social persona. She privileged masculinity and took up the “male habit” [*tomó hábito de hombre*]*—the masculine clothing, personal style, and identity that corresponded to his new physique. She also rewrote the female name that she had been given as a slave. Discarding the feminine ending of Elena, he replaced it with the o ending of masculine nouns and crafted the name Eleno, thereby signifying a gender reclassification suitable to a hermaphrodite. Thus transgendered and renamed, Eleno's social position improved. In her previous life as a female, she had received limited training in the garment trade and had held several low-paying positions traditionally associated with women. Postmanumission Elena had been employed as hose maker [calcetera] and weaver [texedora]. But postmetamorphosis Eleno rose to the more lucrative positions of tailor [sastre] and, eventually, licensed surgeon, after spending three years in military service.*

Though hardly unknown, Eleno's life story has been largely relegated to the periphery of historical investigation—never more than a curious footnote to the history of the Spanish Inquisition.² By reclaiming Eleno and taking her/his account of self with the seriousness and sympathy it so richly deserves, I am aware that I am also challenging the monocultural assumptions of “hegemonic Hispanism,” the institutionalization of which

has asserted the primacy of things Castilian, dragging with it the heavy cultural baggage of an array of myths of “purity”—of blood, nation, race, gender, genre, and ethos. These are founded on ideologies of cultural, racial, and gender difference, whereby Castilian national Catholicism and its pantheon of exalted—and typically male—writers and heroes triumph over enemies of the faith and the “race.” In contrast with the cultural fluidity that still prevailed in early modern Spain, hegemonic Hispanism has encouraged a reductive and monocultural formation, what Juan Goytisolo astutely dubs the “super-Spanish bind” [*españolísimo vínculo*]. It is this repressive chain across the centuries, guarded by austere patriots and “zealous watchmen of truth” [*guardianes celosos de la verdad*], that has exerted undue influence on the practice of Hispanism (*Reivindicación* 139).³

Although in the twentieth century several of the field’s most eminent practitioners have eloquently resisted aspects of the “super-Spanish bind,” the ruling regimes of dimorphic gender and compulsory heterosexuality that inform it have only recently come under critical scrutiny. Although not immune to heterosexist biases himself, Goytisolo has exposed the strategies of exclusion and demonization of the “other,” which in the peninsular context refers primarily to Islamic and Jewish communities, as well as the Christian converts descended from these. In Eleno’s world, these ethnic groups and their cultural legacies had been deemed extraneous or toxic to the Christian polity, even though their contributions were constitutive elements of Spanish culture. Regional and linguistic differences notwithstanding, the sixteenth century witnessed the construction of the hegemonic “Spaniard” as an instrument of absolutist control. It is this idealized subject-position that a powerful strain of modern Hispanism has revered and redeployed. In Goytisolo’s writing, the myth of Spanish identity holds that “indelible ethnic characteristics have held constant across centuries” [*perduración secular de ciertos caracteres étnicos imborrables*] (*Reivindicación* 139). By definition, this “super-Spanish bind” has barred women, racial “others” (Moors, Jews, Africans, Indians, etc.), and forms of sexual and gender dissidence that would belie the monocultural formations precariously poised on those exclusions. No matter how repressed their accomplishments or misrepresented their resistance might have been, these marginalized “others” were also at the heart of what Spanishness was about. Our engagement with diverse Hispanisms allows us to interrogate the Inquisition’s record of Eleno’s hermaphro-

ditism and thereby reclaim Eleno's voice—one of exemplary *mestizaje* in its articulations of the African, the transgendered, and the subaltern—for the widening conversation of “Hispanisms and homosexualities.”

Eleno's story is compelling in ways similar to the rich tradition of women's writing—especially in its autobiographical form—that feminist scholarship has recovered in recent years.⁴ Although feminism has already transformed the field, received notions of what properly constitutes the canon of the “Golden Age” and the subjectivities allowed to emerge under those formations have largely excluded same-sex desire. Only certain marginalized forms have been included for purposes of disapprobation—“Oriental” aberrations happily eradicated from their (all too) fertile soil by the expulsions of Jews and Moriscos, or contained in criminalized depictions issuing from secular or inquisitorial courts.⁵ Rather than the repressive and falsely transcendental “super-Spanish bind,” it is to the *articulations* among categories of difference that this study of Eleno's transgending attends.⁶ The inquisitorial dossier—a marginalized and repressed site of the official culture—enables us to interrogate the record of “Golden Age” subjectivities and to begin to write a queer history of gender and sexual dissidence in Spain. Although Eleno's voice is also one ventriloquized by the official discourse that represented it, a reading sensitive to the subaltern will uncover Eleno's fashioning and positioning of self precisely at points of interdependence, where multiple discourses allow diverse articulations of sexuality, gender, and race. As we shall see, Eleno was able to assume difference while also avowing the requisite orthodoxy expected of the subject in Habsburg Spain.

Eleno, as well as her accusers, former medical colleagues, and the inquisitors who judged her, subscribed to a basic tenet of medieval and Renaissance corporeal knowledge: that physique and mores, sex and gender roles, are bound together by nature. As Joan Cadden writes, “Physiognomy, like the theory of temperaments, [was thought to yield] evidence about the relation of physical characteristics to expected roles and behavior patterns” (186). Religious and lay prohibitions against homosexual acts between women and between men

were commonly put in terms of role reversals, bearing the implication that there is something inherently feminine about taking what was

construed as a passive role in intercourse and something inherently masculine about having sex with a woman. Early penitentials had used language that reflected those assumptions, and it turned up with some regularity later, both within and beyond ecclesiastical documents. . . . Like the prohibition of transvestism, which is associated, among other things, with preventing women from celebrating the mass, the ecclesiastical position against sexual acts between persons of the same sex carries the message of role differentiation, and like the tone of the medical and physiognomic texts which derogate masculine traits in women and feminine traits in men by calling them deceptions and hypocrisies, it communicates firm moral disapprobation. (Cadden 220)

What happens, then, with the “neuter” position; how does it affect the binary opposition between male and female, masculine and feminine, and the medical/social distinctions between the hot and dry complexion of man and the cold and wet temperament of woman? Is there really a one-sex body in medieval and Renaissance thought, as Thomas Laqueur has argued? Is there a viable middle position, a true intersex with corresponding social status?⁷ Alan of Lille, writing in the second half of the twelfth century, maintained his carefully constructed model of nature as a system homologous with the rules of Latin grammar by banishing from his system the third term that would disrupt his “ethical grammar” of genders (Ziolkowski 95–103). Although Alan entertained the notion of placing eunuchs and sodomite males in a third category modeled after the neuter grammatical gender, he chose instead, as Cadden puts it, “to dismantle the rules of grammar by declaring that nature and grammar have just two genders and that neuter is a different type of form, a negative and confused category. Although ‘neuter’ presented an opportunity to construct a grammatical category corresponding to ‘homosexuals,’ Alan declined to make use of it and thus accorded individuals engaged in stigmatized acts no natural category, no ontological status” (225).

We find in Eleno’s life story attempts to construct precisely a third, or neuter, position grounded in scientific and historical discourses and capable of furnishing a valid juridical basis for his transgendering. Eleno cited in his own defense examples from Pliny, Augustine, and Aristotle in order to insert his own story into the recognized sequences of natural history

with the aim of securing a legal justification for what he argued was his *natural* turn from sex with a man (her husband was her only male partner) to sex with women. Eleno had many female sexual partners, and he married one of them, María del Caño, an event that the civil authorities in Ocaña and the inquisitors in Toledo would subsequently regard with contempt as same-sex marriage and evidence of Eleno's animus against the laws of the realm and the holy sacrament of matrimony.

Eleno's legal troubles began when an officer and fellow veteran of the War of the Alpujarras (1568–1570) recognized Eleno, who was at the time newly married to María del Caño and living with her as man and wife. The officer, el licenciado Ortega Velázquez, recalling Eleno's dubious army reputation as someone who had two sexes, was quite perturbed that Eleno and María were living in connubial bliss, “*haciendo vida maridable*.” On trial in the provincial court in Ocaña, Eleno identified himself as a hermaphrodite, a “neuter,” and a man:

Preguntado en qué rreputación le tenían sus padres, deudos y vecinos deste confesante, si le tenían por onbre o muger, dixo que le tenyan por neutro y por onbre, que no era lo uno ny lo otro.

[Asked about his reputation among his parents, relatives, and neighbors, whether they considered him to be a man or a woman, this person confessing said that they considered him to be neuter and a man, that he was neither the one nor the other.]

Eleno's location of self betwixt and between male and nonmale is characteristic of the hermaphrodite, who is ontologically caught amidst competing discourses—the legal and the scientific. As Julia Epstein defines this predicament:

Hermaphrodites pose a particularly unsettling problem for medical jurisprudence. The law assumes a precise contrariety between two sexes, whereas medical science has for several centuries understood sex determination to involve a complex and indefinite mechanism that results in a spectrum of human sexual types rather than in a set of mutually exclusive categories. (101)

Daston and Park, in their examination of hermaphrodites in sixteenth-century France, conclude that homophobia played a decisive role in maintaining the “precise contrariety between two sexes” that Epstein describes (Daston and Park 7–8).

What exactly did Eleno understand by the term *neutro*? Covarrubias’s lexicon, published in 1611, helps, but not much: “Neutro. *Apud grammaticos*, es el nombre que ni es masculino ni es femenino” [Neuter: In the writings of grammarians, is the name that is neither masculine nor feminine] (Covarrubias, s.v. “Neutro,” 827). Covarrubias gives strictly a grammatical definition, one more suited to Latin than to the vernacular. Yet the clue that interests us in this entry is the linguistic structure that makes possible and validates gender indeterminacy. Eleno altered her name by substituting a masculine for a feminine ending and thereby rendered visible and socially meaningful his body’s own new sense of an ending. But because Eleno was not regarded as a suitable name for a man—as the Ocaña tribunal would carefully point out—the result of both the name and Eleno’s physical appearance (*lampiño*, without a beard) was to convey a curious mix of genders, which brought into play notions of altered gender and gender itself, rather than projecting the male persona that Eleno undoubtedly privileged.⁸ For Eleno certainly knew that neuter was not a felicitous subject-position. However, as with Alan of Lille, the analogy with linguistic gender was ephemeral.

Eleno was a mulatto and a freed slave in a society obsessed with exalted origins and the so-called purity of bloodlines. After her emancipation and the death of her mother, who was a slave of African origins, Eleno relocated to the city of Granada, where s/he continued to apprentice in ever more skilled manufacturing jobs. It would have been a kind of social suicide for Eleno to acknowledge and claim for him/herself publicly the status of hermaphrodite, which at best would have set back his social aspirations. Nevertheless we learn from various testimonies presented at the Toledo trial that his popular reputation was that he had two sexes. It was this “local knowledge” of being a hermaphrodite that Eleno sought to revise when he submitted to several physical examinations as part of his application for a license to marry María. Satisfied that all the witnesses who looked at and touched Eleno’s genitals declared that he was a fully endowed male, the vicar of Madrid granted his approval, thus en-

abling Eleno to marry María and to proclaim the unambiguous gender status that he had so assiduously pursued. If neuter was not a suitable subject-position, then neuter would only furnish an occasional locus, a sexuality to be transformed, and, all too briefly, a source of sensual pleasure.

We shall have to revise the notion that surgically assisted transgenderings occur only in modern times as we delve into Eleno's understanding of the neuter category. For Eleno, *neutro* initially signified a physical impediment to be overcome by a surgical procedure that would refashion the body and furnish the member necessary to play the masculine sexual role. Indeed, that Eleno had relations with women, and even married a woman after his surgery, was an opportunity not to be missed by the Toledo Inquisition, which dismissed Eleno's account of her transformation and, instead, staged on the body of the brown-skinned female who had formerly been a slave a cruel spectacle of phallocratic disapprobation and rank homophobia. If slavery was a condition that the law allowed to be superseded by manumission, femaleness, however, was not at all a condition that could be cast aside, even after proper medical intervention.

Asked during his civil trial in Ocaña how she could have married a woman if she was, as claimed, a neuter or hermaphrodite, Eleno replied that a surgeon had made it all possible:

Y que la causa de aberse casado siendo neutro fue que en Sanlúcar de Varrameda un licenciado Tapia, siendo este confesante de edad de diez e ocho años, le curó y cortó un pellejo e pedazo de carne que tenía pegado al cuerpo en la parte de su natura y le dexó natura de onbre formada e asy comenzó usar de onbre y se casó y sentó con muger.

[The reason why she was married having been neuter was that in Sanlúcar de Barrameda a certain licentiate Tapia, when this person confessing was eighteen years old, cured him and cut off a piece of loose skin that was stuck to his body over his sex, which left him with male genitals fully formed. And that was how he began to act as a man, and he was married and settled down with his wife.]

The masculine gender role, understood as comprising corporeal, sexual, and social elements, necessitates possession of the phallus. According to

this portion of Eleno's trial in Ocaña, having had the surgical procedure that left him with a fully working male member, Eleno's femaleness became a moot point. But in later testimony in front of the tribunal of the Inquisition in Toledo, we learn that the surgical procedure did nothing to diminish her femaleness and, in fact, fully rendered him *neutro* for the first and only time, bringing with it a great deal of carnal pleasure. In the narrative of Eleno's life, which he formally presented to the Toledo inquisitors, this unique, openly *neutro* affair emerged as a privileged moment in his erotic awakening.

Both the Ocaña and Toledo tribunals ordered physical exams to determine Eleno's true sex, and all the experts—physicians, surgeons, and midwives—declared unanimously that Eleno was female and bore no signs of ever having been what she said. Eleno related how she had lost her male genitalia—member and testicles—all the while insisting that scars and signs were still visible where the member had once hung. The expert witnesses who had previously assured the court of the archbishop of Toledo that Eleno was a man and not a hermaphrodite, and could therefore marry without impediment María del Caño, now accused Eleno of deception and traffic with the devil. Eleno held her ground, admitting only that she had concealed her female sex when, to marry María, she had to assuage the suspicions of the vicar of Madrid that Eleno was a “capon” [*capón*], as vicar Juan Baptista Neroni called Eleno when he noticed his lack of facial hair. Regardless of the specifics implied in the vicar's colorful interpellation of *capón*—castrated or sexually incapacitated male, hermaphrodite, or just perfectly “queer”—these conditions were incompatible with marriage. Moreover, Eleno's gender ambiguity, coupled with his brown skin and the brand of slavery burned into his face in early childhood, produced a “signature” of unremitting marginality. According to the dominant code of sexed bodies woven into in the rising discourse of hegemonic “Spanishness,” Eleno as *capón* upset the exclusive contrariety of masculine and feminine that sustained the ruling ideology of the household.

Eleno's short-lived pleasures as a *neutro* occurred when he had his first sexual encounter with a woman. In this touching account, we perceive not the vicar's abject *capón* but a Tiresias figure who seduces his boss's pretty wife with his own narrative of transfiguration. Eleno's complex roles in the love triangle—“other” man, “other” woman—enrich his gender crossings

and render his hermaphroditic body a potent source of attraction. In fact, the surgical procedures that he underwent in Sanlúcar de Barrameda did not negate Eleno's femaleness, as one might infer from her testimony in Ocaña; rather, the procedure enhanced a maleness that existed side by side with her female organs. But this was a dangerous, intergendered line to tread, and as he explained to the Toledo inquisitors, he would never again reveal himself fully to anyone else, not even his own wife. María was under considerable pressure to incriminate her husband. No doubt to shield herself from accusations of complicity, she insisted that she had been duped. Despite certain suspicions stemming from Eleno's reluctance to be touched and some bloody shirts, María was never really certain that Eleno could be other than a man.

Coming out as *neutro* occurred in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where he worked as tailor and hose maker [*sastre* and *calcetero*]*—*or was it female *sastra* and *calcetera*? The trial transcript is ambiguous as to what sort of attire and style [*hábito*]*—*male, female, or "other"*—*Eleno had assumed at the time, but enough clues point to a mix-and-match approach to gender performance. Employed at the house of a linen merchant, Eleno was aroused by the beautiful and young Ana, the merchant's wife. In a moment of intimacy, while the husband was away on business, Eleno came out to Ana and revealed that she possessed a male member. Exposing her vulva and her penis, Eleno wooed Ana and promised to copulate with her as a man. She said she also spoke to Ana "half-disguised":

Y quando ésta estuvo en Sanlúcar de Barrameda, como tiene dicho, haçiendo una vez una obra de ofiçio de sastre como en tantas husaba, en casa de un mercader de lienços que se llama Hernando de Toledo, quedando a solas con su muger, que se llamava Ana de Albánchez, que hera moça y hermosa, a ésta le vino gana de vesarla, y sin deçille cosa alguna la vesó. Y espantándose de esto ella, ésta la dixo que podría tener con ella giunta como hombre, lo qual la dijo medio disfraçado por la vergüenza que ésta tenía de deçilla que tenía dos sexos.

[And when she was in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, as she has said, one day while working as he often had as a tailor at the home of the linen merchant, Hernando de Toledo, she came to be alone with the merchant's wife, who was called Ana de Albánchez; she was young and

pretty, and she felt like kissing her, and without saying anything, she kissed her. The merchant's wife was shocked by this, but she told her that she could couple with her as a man, which she told her half-disguised because she felt ashamed to tell her that she had two sexes.]

Eleno's *neutro* persona and physique so inflamed Ana's passion that it was she who took the initiative and an unusually shy Eleno to bed:

Y la dicha Ana de Albánchez llevó a ésta a la cama. Y aunque estava alterada y tenía aquella caveza salida como tiene dicho y se echó encima de ella, no la pudo haçer nada más de aquella demostraçión, y con esto ésta se lo mostró a la dicha Ana de Albánchez.

[Ana de Albánchez took her to bed. And even though she was excited and the head had come out, as she has said, and lay down on top of her, she couldn't do any more to her than that demonstration and then she showed it to said Ana de Albánchez.]

In order to remove the physical impediment that thwarted their passion, Eleno went to see surgeon Tapia, who cut off the unwanted layer of skin, thereby enabling Eleno and Ana to consummate their love. The lovers carried on their affair for several months, undeterred by Ana's cuckolded husband.

Y ésta quedó con abtitud de poder tener quenta con muger y bolvió a la dicha Ana de Albánchez, y con ella tubo muchas veçes quenta y actos como hombre, y estubo en su casa sin que su marido entendiese nada como quatro o çinco meses.

[And she remained with the wherewithal to have relations with women, and she returned to Ana de Albánchez and had sex with her many times as a man, and she was with her in her house for about four or five months without her husband noticing anything.]

Their liaison came to an end only when a more powerful man, the town magistrate [*corregidor*], who was also in love with Ana, interfered with the cozy arrangement and ran Eleno out of town. It is remarkable, I believe,

to find this unabashed expression of sexual desire between women—or, rather, between woman and “phallicized woman”⁹—in sixteenth-century Spain. In Eleno’s eyes, Ana de Albánchez was young and pretty. And, therefore, Eleno was aroused, “and she felt like kissing her, and without saying anything, she kissed her.”

Eleno’s life story illustrates the complex articulations of sexuality, mores, and the body that remained a powerful model of sexuality well into the early modern period. Eleno’s body is indeed the most important piece of evidence brought before the three tribunals that had something to say about his relations with women: the court of the archbishop of Toledo in Madrid, the provincial court [*audiencia*] in Ocaña, and the tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Toledo. The medical experts agreed with Eleno that it was possible—in theory, at least—for a female to be transformed into a hermaphrodite, and accounts of these metamorphoses were well-known, even though increasingly relegated to the realm of the preternatural, as in Pliny’s *Natural History*, Book 7, an often-cited source and one with a poignant connection to Eleno’s own story.¹⁰ But the challenge to the ideology of the household posed by Eleno’s marriage to a woman could not go unpunished—even if in Castile the Inquisition had no jurisdiction over “the unspeakable crime of sodomy” [*el delito nefando de sodomía*], which the Inquisition of Aragon did make it very much its business to prosecute. The inquisitors found Eleno guilty of bigamy, an elegant legal way out of the conundrum posed by Eleno’s articulations of sex, gender, and race. But even though sodomy stayed in the closet of their medico-legal elucubrations, the inquisitors staged an elaborate and exemplary punishment on Eleno, “the bigamist.” They released a text to be read publicly [*pregón*] to accompany the two hundred lashes Eleno received, one hundred in Toledo, where the trial occurred, and another hundred in Ciempozuelos, where Eleno and María were betrothed. The public text of the sentence was clearly meant to admonish women against the lure of other female tricksters [*burladoras*] who, like Eleno, might flout the gender norms of church and state and entice women into same-sex liaisons:

Esta es la justicia que manda hazer el Santo Officio de la Inquisición de Toledo a esta muger, porque siendo casanda engañó a otra muger y se casó con ella. So pena de su culpa la mandan açotar por ello y se reclusa

en un hospital por diez años para que sirva en él. Quien tal haze que así lo pague.

[This is the justice ordered by the Holy Office of the Inquisition of Toledo on this woman, because, being married, she fooled another woman and married her. For her guilt she is sentenced to be whipped and confined in a hospital for ten years so that she may serve there. As you sow so shall you reap.]

A more literal translation of the proverbial expression would read, “as you do, so shall you pay.” But was the punishment truly equivalent to Eleno’s crime? And what was, really, her crime? As we have seen, Eleno was found guilty only of bigamy, whereas the charges brought against her were much more broadly conceived and touched on all the major aspects of what Judith Butler has called “punishable phallicism” (*Bodies* 102): cross-dressing, dildo-assisted sex, and same-sex marriage.

The *pregón* plunges (re)feminized Elena in ritualized abjection. The text’s rhetorical force derives from its enunciation during exemplary and violent events: auto-da-fé in Toledo’s Zocodover (central market square), public reading of the sentence in front of the assembled parishioners in the church of Ciempozuelos, where the same-sex betrothal took place, and public lashings in the streets of both cities in the month of December 1588. A close reading of the *pregón* reveals that the equation so dramatically presented to edify the masses reiterates the abjecting strategy in prescribing—and policing—femininity: “[T]his woman, because, being married, she fooled another woman and married her.” Having rejected Eleno’s reading of his own anatomy as a phallicized body, the *pregón* interpellates woman: “*This* woman.” The act of naming asserts femininity against the grain of prior readings of Eleno as “somebody who had two sexes” (his reputation in the army) or as *capón* (according to the vicar of Madrid).

The theatricals of abjuration and punishment reterritorialize Eleno’s body.¹¹ “This woman” is the locus of punishment; “this woman” is, indeed, a woman. And here we can reformulate Montesquieu’s famous question about—and challenge to—the troping of otherness: “How can one be Persian?”¹² We modify the question and ask, how can “one” be woman? Or rather, how might a phallicized woman (Eleno) be further transformed so

that she can be a woman? Is a "return" possible? Does the flesh admit erasure? The Inquisition's formulaic "reconciliation" conjures up past misdeeds and exacts penance from Eleno, who performs the ritual abjuration of one convicted of "minor" [*de levi*] heretical offenses that are now indelibly entered into the public transcript—hence the bloody spectacle, the public shaming of the offending body whose masculine fiction will be violently corrected by yet another fiction. "This woman, because being married," no matter that the husband left her after three months and died soon afterward. This is a woman. This is a married woman—that is, married to a man. Femininity "is the forcible citation of a norm," writes Butler (*Bodies* 232). A married woman is the phallus, and the husband has the phallus. Eleno is, therefore, a married woman. But Eleno disavowed being the phallus and insisted that she had it—the loss of her penis and testicles notwithstanding, or, indeed, because of that castration. "She fooled another woman and married her." A woman can be fooled by another woman—a man, conversely, cannot be fooled.

This is the most obtuse aspect of the inquisitors' phantasmic restoration of hegemonic phallicism, because the dossier amply documents Eleno's rhetorical and morphological authoritativeness over many powerful male officials, including the vicar of Madrid, the parish priest of Ciempozuelos, and the physicians and surgeons who made the wedding possible by certifying that Eleno was a man and *not* a hermaphrodite. The restoration of phallic authority requires the iteration of the norm—gender (the sexed position) is assumed through the abjection of homosexuality (Butler, *Bodies* 111). A woman—Eleno's wife, María—was duped by another and married her. Feminine abjection finds a value equal to itself in the exemplary punishment. Eleno will be shown back to her true gender as the executioner rips her flesh apart two hundred times on the streets of Toledo and Ciempozuelos, to the amusement—and perhaps the horror—of the spectators, themselves vulnerable (or so the inquisitors say) to such female doubleness. But the system can be contested. The law produces the occasion for such challenges. So women can and do have sex with other women, and marry each other, and can live successfully as men and become soldiers and surgeons? Exemplary punishment maps out the limits of the law of dimorphic sex and gender, as well as the way to challenge those norms (Butler, *Bodies* 109).

In February 1589, less than two months into Eleno's ten-year sentence

of confinement—and return to servitude—in King’s Hospital [*Hospital del Rey*] in Toledo, caring for the sick and injured, Eleno again found her/himself the center of controversy. The hospital administrator wrote to the inquisitors, begging them to relocate Eleno to another institution; s/he was too much to handle.

Que es grande el estorbo y enbaraço que a causado la entrada de la dicha Elena de Céspedes por la mucha gente que acude a verla y a curarse con ella.

[The presence of Elena de Céspedes has caused great annoyance and embarrassment from the beginning, since many people come to see and be healed by her.]

The return of the phallicized woman. The sick and injured of Toledo preferred to be cured by Eleno—to the consternation of the male physicians. The lines of Eleno’s protean selves converged in this latest embodiment, a surgeon by inquisitional decree, but popularly, still, transgendered, her/his powers have been glorified by auto-da-fé, *pregón*, scourges, manumission, and, presumably, the gender-bending sight of a surgeon “properly” attired in skirts.

Notes

- 1 Eleno’s life story is contained in the hitherto unpublished dossier of her/his trial, beginning in July 1587, at the Toledo court of the Inquisition, which also gathered the documents from two other legal venues: his initial prosecution by the provincial court in Ocaña some months earlier and the documents filed in 1584 to 1586 at the court of the archbishop of Toledo in Madrid, where Eleno successfully challenged the impediments raised in regard to his application for a license to marry a woman, María del Caño, on account of his intergendered appearance. The dossier contains summaries of the court sessions, depositions by expert and lay witnesses regarding Eleno’s genital conformation, and testimonies by his wife, casual sexual partners, friends, neighbors, associates in his practice of surgery, and all those who had anything relevant to say about Eleno’s mode of dress, sexual habits, anatomy, medical practice, and suspected demonic affiliations. The hitherto unpublished dossier gathered by the Inquisition is of considerable heft, more than 150 folios,