
H-France Review Vol. 2 (November 2002), No. 125

Charles d'Eon de Beaumont, *The Maiden of Tonnerre: The Vicissitudes of the Chevalier and the Chevalière d'Eon*. Eds. and trans. Roland A. Champagne, Nina Ekstein, and Gary Kates. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. xxiv + 207 pp. Photos, notes, biographical glossary, and index. \$44.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8018-6687-1.

Review by Christine Adams, St. Mary's College of Maryland.

In 1995, Gary Kates published his *tour de force* biography of the extraordinary life of the Chevalier d'Eon.^[1] Now, along with Roland A. Champagne and Nina Ekstein, Kates has translated and edited some of the writings of the prolific Chevalier d'Eon, including his autobiography, some autobiographical writings and fragments, selected letters and other documents, as well as d'Eon's "Pious Metamorphoses," or descriptions of women who dressed as men, most notably the Pope^[ess] Joan and various saints.

Certainly the story of the Chevalier d'Eon is a fascinating one. Born into an eminent French noble family in the Burgundian town of Tonnerre in 1728, d'Eon enjoyed an illustrious career as military officer, diplomat, and spy. He served at various times as a royal censor, a secretary to the ambassador of the Russian court of the Empress Elizabeth, a captain of the dragoons under the Maréchal de Broglie during the Seven Years' War (as well as a member of the negotiating team helping to draw up the treaty to end that war), and a plenipotentiary minister to England in its aftermath. Louis XV awarded him the Cross of Saint Louis for his efforts. However, the Chevalier is much better known as one of the most famous transvestites in history. After living the first forty-nine years of his life as a man, he spent the next thirty-two years as a woman. It was only at the time of his death, in May of 1810, that d'Eon's friend Mrs. Cole discovered that her housemate of over ten years was, in fact, a man.^[2]

Gary Kates's monograph is not the only treatment of the life of the Chevalier d'Eon. In his introduction to this edited work, Kates notes that others have written twenty or more biographies of d'Eon, along with several historical novels, plays, a film, and an opera (p. ix). Because they lacked easy access to d'Eon's autobiography, however, biographers have tended to ignore it. The autobiography has been accessible only since the 1930s and then only to those willing to read the manuscript pages in the archives of the University of Leeds library (which also houses the other documents translated for this volume). Kates argues in the introduction that "without these memoirs we cannot hope to fully understand the Chevalier/Chevalière's decision to live nearly half his life as a woman" (p. ix), justifying their translation and publication.

D'Eon's autobiography, or "The Great Historical Epistle by the Chevalière d'Eon, Written in 1785 To Madame the Duchess of Montmorenci-Bouteville" is the most interesting of the documents translated here. And yet, despite Kates's assertion that the autobiography gives us insight to the Chevalier's decision to become a woman for the second half of his life, that insight is largely obscured by the "double game" d'Eon was playing. As Kates admits, d'Eon "was writing for a contemporary public that thought that the gendered story of his life was in fact the opposite of the truth...Therefore, d'Eon's autobiography is certainly the story of a transgendered person; but it narrates the journey of a supposed female-to-male transvestite, when the actual situation involved a male-to-female transgendered life" (p.

x). Kates stresses d'Eon's ambivalence about his gender identity, male or female: "This tension throughout his writing indicates his entrapment in the duality of genders; that is, as d'Eon revealed an affiliation with one gender, then the self's alliance with the other gender was both concealed and implied in the same affirmation, and vice versa" (p. xxiv).

The other letters and autobiographical writings, short, with little context, and heavy on religious musings, are rather less interesting. They include a record of "Mademoiselle d'Eon's Second Visit to our Holy Christophe de Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, in 1777" and selected correspondence with his mother and the Duchesse of Montmorenci-Bouteville. The Chevalier's recording of "Historical Precedents"--that is, stories of heroic and holy women such as the Popess Joan, Saint Eugenia, and Saint Pelagia, who supposedly dressed as men--are fascinating in light of the Chevalier's double life, despite the fact that there is some question as to d'Eon's authorship of these vignettes. Kates is undoubtedly correct to suggest that "d'Eon did not simply want to be known by his public as a woman; he wanted to be known as a certain kind of woman: Amazonian, pious, virtuous, patriotic; a woman in the mode of the Maid of Orléans, Joan of Arc" (p. xvi). D'Eon's composition or compilation of these texts suggests a search for parallels with his own life.

Kates is also correct to foreground, in his introduction, the importance of Christianity and d'Eon's Christian identity in all of the written works in this volume. Apparently, d'Eon wrote little about religion before becoming a woman, and Kates suggests that "d'Eon's Christianity became an armor to protect and justify his new gender identity" (p. xii). Certainly, an emphasis on Christian virtue permeates d'Eon's personal writings and seems to serve as justification and comfort for the choices he made in his life. Whether this religious conversion preceded or post-dated his decision to live as a woman is rather less clear. Kates sees the two decisions as developing in tandem (p. xii).

While the translation of these documents provides a useful service, I wish that Kates's introduction had provided more contextualization. The Chevalier's extraordinary life has been well-documented in both *Monsieur d'Eon is a Woman* and in the introduction to this edition. In fact, d'Eon's writings are perhaps best read as a companion to Kates's monograph. However, I found myself wondering what to make of both the Chevalier and his writings, and how to assess their historical importance. Was he simply a historical oddity, a man who chose to become a woman in the second half of his life for reasons that, despite erudite speculation on Kates's part, ultimately remain obscure? Or do d'Eon's actions reveal something more profound about the nature of gender roles and their construction that is historically specific to the eighteenth century? Why are this man's speculations on gender important to us, as historians, to understand? Kates makes the argument that d'Eon's autobiography constitutes "an exploration into early-modern ideas about gender" (p. x), and he reflects in a compelling way on the manifold implications of d'Eon's vault across the gender line (p. xx). But where do these musings fit in to the larger debates taking place? Other historians have suggested that the eighteenth century was a time when constructions of gender and its boundaries were less rigid, more in play, but that by the end of the century gender lines had hardened considerably, rendering "deviance" less tolerated.^[3] Does the Chevalier's story contribute anything to our larger understanding of gender identity and its construction in modern times? A more solid footing in the secondary literature might have provided a context for making better use of d'Eon's personal writings.

On a technical note, in a primary source text this complex and ambiguous, the press should have provided footnotes rather than endnotes. I found myself constantly flipping to the back of the book for clarification. Kates's introduction usefully deconstructs what he calls the "four major myths" of d'Eon's life that appear in the autobiography (pp. xvi-xvii), but the explanatory endnotes are essential to understanding the texts and, in particular, d'Eon's obfuscation.

NOTES

[1] Gary Kates, *Monsieur d'Eon Is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

[2] Kates, *Monsieur d'Eon is a Woman*, xii.

[3] See for example Dror Wahrman, "On Queen Bees and Being Queens: A Late-Eighteenth-Century 'Cultural Revolution'?" in *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750-1820*. Eds. Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), 251-80; and Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. Chaps. 4 and 5.

Christine Adams
St. Mary's College of Maryland
cmadams@smcm.edu

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