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Adventurer, Saint, Celebrity: The Chevalière Deon's Transgender Selves

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ABSTRACT

No other trans individual has left us as large a corpus of autobiographical writings as the French diplomat, spy and author the Chevalière Deon (1728–1810), who narrated her transition using a variety of genres: confession, sermon, epistolary exchange, dialogue and memoir. Unfortunately these writings have only recently begun to be studied by historians, and the vast majority remain unpublished. This essay explores how Deon has been represented by clinicians and historians, before exploring her presentation as adventurer, saint, and celebrity. It argues that rather than sifting Deon's archive for a single, enduring, 'authentic self', Deon can help us approach trans lives in less restrictive ways.

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In the summer of 1777, a few months before she was formally presented to King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette at the court of Versailles, the journalist Simon-Nicolas Linguet published an article in his *Annales politiques* about the Chevalière Deon.¹ Born in the small Burgundian town of Tonnerre in 1728, Charles Deon de Beaumont had been assigned male at birth. She studied law in Paris and toyed with a career in the church before entering the French secret service and diplomatic corps. After a few years in St Petersburg and a brief period fighting as a dragoon captain on the German front in the Seven Years War, Deon travelled to London, as secretary to the French ambassador. Alongside her official duties she carried covert orders to organise a reconnaissance of the south coast of England for a future French invasion.

Disputes with her superiors over pay and conditions led her to perform the eighteenth-century equivalent of Wikileaks: publishing private diplomatic papers in book form (Deon de Beaumont 1764). King Louis XV gave orders for her to be picked up in London, carried back across the Channel and thrown in the Bastille for this betrayal. Thanks to her close ties to the political opposition in London, however, Deon was able to resist kidnap. Soon the spymasters in Versailles decided to let her remain in London, apparently in disgrace, even as she continued to provide secret reports on the emerging crisis between Britain and her North American colonies. It was in the midst of this activity, in 1770, that

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rumours (probably started by Deon herself) began doing the rounds that Deon was a woman disguised as a man. In the City of London bets on her sex took the form of life insurance policies (Clark 1999, 40–44; Gosling [Forthcoming](#)).

‘Curiosity sharpened by financial interest became so lively and pressing that the object of so much turmoil felt it necessary to disappear for a time,’ Linguet noted (1777, 384). Now, he reported, the case of ‘the modern *Joan of Arc*’ had landed in the courts, before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield and a jury (386). Mansfield stated that he would have preferred to dismiss the case, but conceded that there was nothing illegal about the wager. The case proceeded and the jury found for the party that had wagered that Deon was female. This disgusted Linguet: it was unjust, dangerous and pointless to force Deon’s doctors and friends to testify under oath, when the only admissable evidence lay at hand, also in London: ‘the body of the Chevalier D’Eon’ (391).

Deon did not wish to provide that evidence, Linguet noted, and could not be forced to do so simply

because it amused a few nosy people to unwisely venture their money on the discovery of a secret that was not theirs; and hence that they could demand that this Being, whose silence or disguise could be motivated by any one of a thousand reasons which he [*sic*] might wish to keep to himself, discuss in public that which he does not wish to show, and endeavour to profit by confidences made out of friendship or necessity ... abandoning him to an insulting curiosity, and a painful metamorphosis. These are things that decency forbids, I dare say, which no civilized nation could legally permit. (392–3)

So far, so (sadly) familiar: the trans subject as mute victim of socio-legal abuse, one we might place alongside Eleanor Rykener, a trans woman sex worker hauled before another London court in 1394. Historians of trans lives have had to become adept at reading legal and medical sources for trans history against the grain (De Souza 2021; Devun 2021). On those rare occasions where subjects are not mute, their testimony is constructed using tools not of their own choice, at a time and in a genre not of their choice. Historians have sometimes picked up where contemporaries left off. Rykener was discussed as a ‘male transvestite prostitute’ in 1995, while in 2014 Jeremy Goldberg denied Rykener any embodiment, arguing that she was a literary figure, a cipher for London’s supposed depravity (Bychowski 2021).

Deon certainly experienced legal and medical violence: as well as the court cases that resulted from gambling on her sex (discussed below), immediately after her death in 1810 her corpse was ‘inspected & dissected’. An artist, Charles Turner, made a drawing of her genitalia. This drawing was reproduced in a stipple engraving that curious Londoners received as proof that ‘the Male Organs [were] in every respect, perfectly formed’ (Turner 1810). Deon differs from Rykener and other trans subjects in that, alongside her court appearance (or rather, non-appearance), she commissioned portrait prints of herself, fed stories to newspapers and wrote pamphlets and books. Published in 1773, *Les Loisirs du Chevalier D’Eon* is a baggy collection of texts on politics, finance, geography and religion that runs to thirteen volumes. Deon was far from mute during her lifetime. Mary Wollstonecraft was just one of the many contemporaries who agreed with Linguet that this was the ‘most singular’ of ‘all the women who have made a reputation for themselves by borrowing the appearance of the other sex’ (Linguet 1777, 383; Wollstonecraft 1993, 149). At her death Deon left us hundreds of pages of autobiography,

written in a variety of genres: confession, dialogue, sermons, epistolary exchanges, hagiographies, memoirs and curated collections of 'original documents'.

Although Gary Kates' *Monsieur D'Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* (1995a) was by no means the first Deon biography, Kates was the first to consult Deon's life writings, some of which have since (Deon de Beaumont 2001) been made available in English translation. Kates (1995b) recognised that it was no longer useful to discuss Deon as a transvestite, as Marjorie Garber had done in her *Vested Interests* (Gerber 1992, 3). Deon was a 'gender theorist' (Kates 1991, 185), but not transgender. In part this was because transgender individuals (according to Kates) adopted 'an exaggerated and stereotypical female role' (189), whereas Deon's post-transition habitus indicated that she was uninterested in passing as female. Kates' biography led other historians to use Deon to explore eighteenth-century self-fashioning. Those historians could nonetheless accuse Deon's narratives of being 'disingenuous', on account of not being written from 'his biological vantage as a man pretending to be a woman pretending to be a man' (Cody 2001, 383–4).

The role played by faith in Deon's transition narratives appeared to be an obstacle to identifying her as transgender: Deon's Roman Catholic faith did not come out well in Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors* (1996), the first self-described history of transgender people. Transphobia and the Roman Catholic faith emerge in tandem in Feinberg's account, presented as a shift from 'joyous, pro-sexual, cross-gendered religious rites to the gloom and doom of medieval Catholicism' (Feinberg 1996, 70). Feinberg was nonetheless the first to refer to Deon as trans, specifically as 'a famous male-to-female trans person' (88).

Neither Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* (2008) nor the *Transgender Studies Reader* nor the recent compendium *When Monsters Speak* mention Deon. Stryker and Deon may share a love of fencing, but otherwise their lived experiences are very different. Unlike Deon, Stryker could not recall a time when she did not wish to be referred to as 'she' (2024, 66). Unlike Feinberg, however, Stryker's experience of writing a doctorate on the history of the Mormon church enabled her to grasp 'a transformative potential for being-in-the-world, available to people through so-called religious experience, or ecstatic experience.' Such experiences could be 'a way of re-worlding' (177). Where Deon and Stryker complement one another is in the enthusiasm with which they switch between genres, including journals and historical writings. In the spirit of Sandy Stone's *Posttranssexual Manifesto*, both were interested in exploring the 'polyvocalities' (Stone 1991, 11) associated with 'the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body' (13).

This essay begins by briefly outlining how Deon's transition has been understood prior to Kates and Feinberg, as well as how Deon herself narrated it. As Scott Larson has noted (2021, 361), gender movement is not always a revelation of a stable identity maintained across a lifetime. Indeed, far from being universal, the idea of a self only emerged during Deon's lifetime, 'a Romantic blossom of the earlier theological concept of the soul' (Lyons 1978, 22). Here I consider three of the selves Deon employed: the adventurer, the saint and the celebrity. I close by discussing how the relationship between these selves and their associated genres might be understood – less as a shell game in which we are charged with identifying a single 'authentic self' and more as autofictions that reject neat categorisation along gender or genre lines. It seems felicitous that in Deon's

language (French), a single word (*genre*) does double duty, denoting both gender and genre.

Historiography

As early as the 1780s, several decades before her death, Deon had been seen as a figment of the decadence of Louis XV's court (Mouffle d'Angerville 1781, 3: 225). *Ancien régime* nostalgia appealed to her biographers, but until the 1990s historians wondered if it was worth paying scholarly attention to Deon's 'squalid' story (Pollard 1896, 802). Instead her story was pathologized: the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld included Deon in his 1910 treatise on what he termed 'transvestitism', defined as 'an erotic urge for disguise' (Hirschfeld 1912, 438–451). His British colleague Henry Havelock Ellis (1901–28, 27) insisted that not all such cases cross-dressed, and coined the term 'Eonism', to denote a 'Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion' that supposedly originated in hormonal imbalance. Though 'Eonism' did not catch on, such investigations in turn influenced Deon's biographers: she still served to illustrate an eighteenth century 'so rich in whimsy' (Pinseau 1945, 13–4), but by World War II there was a desire to explore 'psychological aspects, so often misunderstood or ignored'(173).

In diagnosing Deon Hirschfeld leaned on autobiographical episodes invented by one of Deon's earliest biographers, Frédéric Gaillardet. In the introduction to the first (1836) edition of his biography Gaillardet assured his readers that his work stood on firm archival evidence: 'every stone of the edifice carries its seal of authenticity' (Gaillardet 1836, 1: xi). In the introduction to the second edition Gaillardet confessed that his biography had been 'part authentic and part romance' (Gaillardet 1886, v). He had invented the amorous adventures he felt Deon ought to have had. It was too late: Gaillardet's first edition has been cited ever since, and continues to fuel conspiracy theorists (D'Eon 2010) who claim (among other things), that Deon had dalliances with Louis XV of France and Queen Charlotte of Great Britain (making Deon King Charles III's great-great-great-great-great-uncle). Anna Clark's recent study of Deon also draws unwittingly on Gaillardet's forgeries to support her claim that Deon was physically 'a slight person', perceived as insufficiently virile to fill the military and diplomatic posts that were then the preserve of men.² In fact, Deon's friends from college days recalled (in 1771, a few months after speculation around Deon's sex began) that 'his figure had always been masculine enough', even if they could not recall any instance of 'him joining them in their pursuit of girls' or keeping a mistress – activities then viewed as normal behaviour for a young man of a noble family (*Mémoires secrets* 5:322 [23 September 1771]).

Gaillardet's inventions included a quotation from a supposed Deon memoir, in which 'Deon' describes her visceral response to wearing female-coded dress. This account itself borrows from a scene from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise*. Unaware of Gaillardet's 'Statement of Contrition', Hirschfeld (1912, 440) quoted this forged quotation in his own chapter on Deon. Nothing, perhaps, better captures the difficulty in drawing a bright line between medical and literary accounts of gender nonconformity. As Linton (2022) has shown, this was equally true of nineteenth-century France. In Deon's case Hirschfeld's medical treatise (published in 1910), Gaillardet's biography (1836) and Rousseau's epistolary novel (1761) fused.

Unaware of the flimsiness of his source base, Hirschfeld was confident that ‘the riddle that puzzled contemporaries and many latter-day psychologists and historians is, in the current state of the field, no longer difficult to solve.’ As Deon’s body (as described by Gail-lardet) exhibited features ‘approximating female morphology’, so Deon fell into the bisexual species of ‘transvestitism’, as opposed to the heterosexual, homosexual, narcissistic or asexual varieties (Hirschfeld 1912, 440). Those who claimed that Deon’s cross-dressing was just part of the task she had been assigned were mistaken. ‘The same holds in many other cases where someone adopts the other sex as a disguise, ostensibly in the performance of a specific task, when their intention in fact derives (albeit usually unconsciously) from the psychological peculiarity’ (450–1).

Hirschfeld’s ‘discovery’ of transvestitism cast a long shadow. Although the distinct ‘official disorder’ of transsexualism entered the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1980, Deon continued to be interpreted as a transvestite (Gerber 1992, 3). That began to change in 1996, with Feinberg’s *Transgender Warriors*. Other historians (including the present writer) were slow to adopt the term trans, or to use she/her pronouns (Conlin 2005). While Rose (2016) has urged the use of ze, hir, and hirself for Deon, Clark (2022) prefers to switch from using he/him pre-transition and she/her after. This is a practice that Deon herself practiced in the only autobiography she allowed to be published during her lifetime (Deon de Beaumont 1779), a text Rose does not consider.³ In this essay I use she/her throughout, as this is the practice Deon follows in the majority of her unpublished autobiographical fragments, held in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds. Studying trans lives lived across linguistic divides (in this case, between French and English) is salutary: it encourages us to avoid the positionality that stalks much scholarly discussion around pronouns, much of it quaintly (to say no worse) inattentive to how languages other than English gender language.

After the 1777 court case over her sex Deon spent eight years in France. To her great disappointment, Louis XVI’s ministers refused her request to re-assume her dragoon uniform and join the French expeditionary force that would help the rebel colonists in North America achieve independence. Deon reassumed her uniform anyway and was arrested, released from a fortress in Dijon only after promising to wear female-coded dress. In 1785 she returned to England, where she lived until her death in 1810.

In 1779 Deon’s first and only published autobiography had explained that she had been born anatomically female (which, as the aforementioned Turner print indicates, was untrue), and put into boy’s clothing by her parents (true, but Deon’s parents considered her to be male). She put off (Deon de Beaumont 1779, 3–4) any explanation of her parents’ motivations. This backstory was one Deon developed in collaboration with the French foreign minister and the chief of the French secret service: as all sides openly conceded, once recognised as a woman, a number of long-standing political problems vanished. As a woman, Deon was safe from the vengeance of the men she had humiliated (presenting as a man) in her *Lettres, Mémoires et Negociations*. Any further data-dumps she performed would carry less weight if published by a woman.

The French Revolution ended Deon’s French royal pension, forcing her to sell her precious library and criss-cross the country giving fencing displays, sometimes in a black dress, sometimes in her old dragoon uniform. That same revolution saw Olympe de Gouges, Louise-Félicité de Kéralio-Robert and other French women writers (friends of Wollstonecraft, who travelled to Paris in 1792) demand the same civil status as men,

without questioning gender binaries or disputing that a woman's place was in the home (Bergès 2023; Hesse 2001). The profile they enjoyed was short-lived, squashed by the Terror (de Gouges was guillotined in 1793). Deon did not support them directly, but de Gouges did write of how 'Mademoiselle Déon has transmitted to me her intrepidity' (de Gouges 2025), and Deon did make a public appeal to the Legislative Assembly in Paris that she be permitted to return to France to lead a legion of male dragoons against France's enemies. Though Deon was hailed by one Paris newspaper as having proved 'that the line of demarcation between the two sexes, in both civil and political life, is drawn by prejudice and convention alone' (*Le Patriote Francois* 1038 [13 June 1792]), her petition went nowhere.⁴

In 1796 an injury received during a performance in Southampton put an end to her career as celebrity fencer. Over the following fourteen years Deon wrote hundreds of pages of autobiographical drafts, many of them dialogues or letters backdated to the 1770s and 1780s. Back then, as Linguet had noted, Deon had refused to have anything to do with court cases about her sex. Now, twenty years later, she fashioned Mansfield's judgment into one of a series of stations on a Christian *via dolorosa* leading from one gender expression to another. Whereas Mansfield and his jury were not in fact charged with establishing Deon's sex one way or the other, that is not how Deon chose to present it. Mansfield's judgment was construed by her as official validation of her female sex.

In Deon's narratives this legal stamp of approval was accompanied by similar declarations from royal and ecclesiastical authorities in France: Deon claimed to have been subjected to a virginity test on the orders of Louis XVI (attesting that Deon was a *filles*, which in the usage of the period denoted a woman virgin of any age), and to have been instructed to join a convent by the archbishop of Paris and Louise de France, a daughter of Louis XV who had entered a convent. A fourth act in this transition drama consisted of Deon's encounter with Rose Bertin, Marie Antoinette's famed *modiste* (fashion designer). In this surprisingly *galant* episode Bertin and her 'aides de camp' strip Deon of her dragoon uniform as well as her 'dragon skin' (the French word *dragon* can signify both 'dragon' and 'dragoon'). A new 'velvet skin' emerges from this bath (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 57), one that Bertin proceeds to clothe in women's costume, appropriate for her presentation at court.

Deon's diary records no such encounter with Bertin, who would certainly not have bathed a client or subjected her to the *double-entendres* that afford such a contrast to the otherwise *dévo*t (pious) nun heroine. Deon never entered a convent, nor did she ever meet the archbishop or Madame Louise. Indeed, when she asked permission via an intermediary to dedicate one of her books to Louise the latter ridiculed the proposal, assuming it was a *poisson d'avril*, or April Fool.⁵ Had Deon written and published these narratives in the 1780s, the discrepancies in her accounts would have been noted. By 1796 the Revolution had swept away the French monarchy, as well as the convents.

There are several other, equally fictional episodes to which Deon returned again and again in her final years. Some of these episodes are apparent accidents (revealed to be God's will), others are overt instances of individuals or institutions doing things to Deon or proclaiming things about her. Her narratives are spoken, written or otherwise addressed to these legal, ecclesiastical, royal and fashion authorities. In each case Deon adopts a matching genre, voice, tone and register. Of course, scholars of trans history

are familiar with this, in the context of the narratives that pre-operative trans people have to present in order to satisfy the cis male clinicians who stand as gatekeepers between them and the treatments they seek. This means that every trans person is an autobiographer, whether published or not (Prosser 1998, 101). Mid twentieth-century transsexual autobiographies were often published with prefaces by clinicians, vouching for their 'authenticity' (126).

Deon was not subject to such requirements: there were no royal doctors or archbishops poking her genitalia or shriving her soul. For the story Deon had to tell, however, these missing gatekeepers were, it seems, figures central to her attempt to make her pre- and post-transition selves cohere.

Adventurer

In Deon's narratives she is both the self that is being revealed and, at the same time, a fellow spectator of that self's revealing. But what kind of self was this, and how easily can it be captured using terms Deon would have recognised (adventurer, saint) and those she would not have recognised (celebrity, transgender)? Is it helpful to speak of *a* self, rather than selves? During her transition many observers (amused as well as unnerved) cut short their speculations with a sigh of resignation: Deon was 'Chevalier [male] or Chevalière [female], as you wish'.⁶ This was intended to denigrate Deon as not worth the sustained attention supposedly required to settle the question. In some of the texts Deon wrote and in some of the portraits she commissioned in the 1770s Deon presented as a pair of selves, sometimes as a brother-and-sister pairing (Bradel 1779; Deon de Beaumont 2001, 72). If opponents refused to duel the Chevalière, the Chevalier would spring in 'to defend her honour'. Deon was Chevalier or Chevalière as *she* wished.⁷ And yet at other times in her life Deon did not present in this way, making it seem inappropriate to use they/them pronouns. Indeed, she told her transition in starkly binary and often starkly moralising terms, as one from 'bad boy' to 'good girl' (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 74).

Deon lived well over a century before the term 'gender' acquired its familiar meaning. The earliest citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from a 1945 contribution to the *American Journal of Psychology*. As that indicates, the usage emerged within psychology, before being repurposed twenty years later by Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble* (1990) presented gender as the product of repeated acts of performance: a matter of expression rather than fixed truth (Eder 2022; Germon 2009). As Prosser notes (1998, 43), Butler's concept of gender was deployed in ways that discouraged consideration of 'the bodiliness of gendered crossing' (5). The body was thinned down to a veneer or surface, something to be seen, but not touched or inhabited.

To Butler's own alarm, *Gender Trouble* canonised a 'theory of transgender performativity' (24), and 'transgendered subjectivity as archetypically queer and subversive' (29). Trans historians became increasingly frustrated (or simply weary) of the intellectual burdens imposed on trans figures, valued 'by how we disturb other people's theories and histories' (Bychowski 2021b, 261) – in accounts of dysphoria, rather than euphoria. For Stryker (2024, 113), this expectation that the transgender subject star as Butlerian trick pony, endlessly called upon to perform performativity, even as the 'T' of LGBT became a 'containment mechanism for "gender trouble" of various sorts' formed part

of a broader homonormativity. Meanwhile, as Mo Moulton (2023, 6) notes, gender itself became a 'timeless category', one that operated 'too smoothly as a category of analysis that moves across time and space' (21).

Although Stryker may not have applied the term 'adventurer' to herself or others, Sandy Stone (1991, 7) employed the term in her *Posttranssexual Manifesto*. Deon lived through the golden age of the adventurer, a role that emerged from sixteenth – and seventeenth-century tales of knights errant and the picaresque, evolving in response to greater mobility of people and capital. In Deon's day the French term *aventurier* was pejorative, if not quite as pejorative as the much rarer female form *aventurière*. In England 'adventurers' were more respectable. Those investing in overseas trade or lottery tickets were referred to as 'merchant adventurers' and 'lottery adventurers'. The latter included many women and churchmen, who saw themselves as both patriotic and pious (Harris 2022, 212 and 278).

Aventuriers were a small European coterie of vagabonds and risk-takers, numbering fewer than thirty (Roth 1980; Simiand 2016; Stroev 1997). All except Deon presented as male throughout their lives. All were college-educated, with shared experience of travel, debt, espionage, forgery, incarceration and exile. Deon's desire to enter a convent might be read as linked to her transition, but several other *aventuriers* either spent time in a convent/monastery or toyed with doing so (Roth 1980, 1: 167–74). *Aventuriers* made names for themselves by humiliating the wealthy and powerful in print. All had the gift of the gab, peddling trendy Enlightenment projects (canals, lotteries), conspiracy theories, and occult mysteries (1: 202). They sparkled in company, something not always evident from Deon's writings. But as one mutual friend put it to Voltaire, Deon combined extraordinary talents, learning and genius with 'a gaiety of heart which leads everyone to seek him [*sic*] out.'⁸

Deon's tendency to switch playfully and self-consciously among genres in her life writings is typical of *aventuriers*, something that might give us pause in proposing that genre play is the sole preserve of transgender autobiography. Just three years older than Deon, Casanova began compiling his memoirs at around the same time, and his were also published posthumously. Casanova's tone was 'suited to a general confession, though in the style of my narratives you will find neither a show of repentance nor the constraint of one who blushes to confess his escapades.' Casanova disliked the term 'confession', feeling (as Deon did) that Jean-Jacques Rousseau's self-important and overly intimate *Confessions* (published posthumously in 1782) had sullied the term (Simiand 2016, 373–7).

On arrival in London in 1763 one of Casanova's first concerns had been to discover where the 'prettiest and choicest girls in London were to be found' (Casanova 1997, 9: 189). When he chanced upon fellow *aventurier* Ange Goudar, the latter 'talked to me at some length about gaming and girls' (9: 197). Deon was uninterested in either pursuit. There are no traces of any romantic, intimate or physical relationship in Deon's vast archive. But the fictional account she gave of her own undressing, bathing and re-dressing at the hands of Rose Bertin (discussed earlier in this essay) was spiced by gallantry.

'French gallantry has given women a universal power,' Rousseau wrote in *Julie, or the New Heloise* (Rousseau [1761] 1823, 2: 27–8). Long-standing French debates over the 'woman question' focused on this female influence and its proper limits. Deon's library included encyclopedias of 'illustrious' or 'celebrated' women published after 1760. In time Deon herself entered the pantheon of great women celebrated in such

encyclopedias. Her ‘talents, her genius, her military exploits, her probity and her constant love for her fatherland assured her a distinguished place in the annals of the eighteenth century,’ noted the *Dictionnaire biographique des Françaises* (Bernier 1804, 36).

For the female author of this compendium, however, Deon’s presenting as a man prior to 1777 was a mystery to be passed over quickly (35). As Davis (1976, 83) noted in a seminal essay, this ‘tradition of Women Worthies said little about the significance of sex roles in social life and historical change’. Across the Channel in Britain, theatrical cross-dressing as well as the gender-bending fashions popular in the 1770s were increasingly approached with incredulity and disgust. Such phenomena had lost their ‘cultural intelligibility’ (Wahrman 2004, 50). In his *Complete History of the English Stage* Charles Dibdin (Dibdin 1797-1800, 5: 94) described the actor Charlotte Charke as ‘a sort of English D’Eon’, ‘who was at different times an actress, a grocer, an alehouse keeper, a valet de chambre, a sausage seller, and a puppet shew woman, one day in affluence, the next in indigence’. While Charke’s adventurer autobiography had gone down well when first published in 1746 (Straub 1992, 127–50), half a century later Dibdin considered her ‘one of those disgraces to the community that ought not to be admitted into society’. The were limits, therefore, to the appeal of the *aventurier*. Could the saint offer Deon something more robust?

Saint

Deon’s adventurer self stood at odds with her presentation as a Christian virgin, the latter-day equivalent of the saints and holy women whose lives were gathered together in her unpublished *Pious Metamorphoses* – lives she refers to as ‘so many mirrors reflecting my own image’ (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 141). Deon was the first person to collect the lives of trans saints. Only in the 1950s did scholars begin to attend to these individuals. Since 2000 scholarship in Byzantine and medieval studies has swelled the number of trans saints from Deon’s fourteen to more than thirty-four (Davis 2002; Grayson 2009; Maillet 2020, 62–64; Spencer-Hall and Gutt 2021). It is important to recognise that, unlike latter-day trans hagiographers, Deon did not have the opportunity to delve into unpublished manuscripts from monastic libraries: she had to fillet printed collections of saints’ lives.⁹ It is also worth noting that all these stories were about women ascetics passing as men, there were no accounts of ascetic men passing as women (Macculloch 2024, 155).

It is striking that Jehanne (Joan of Arc, canonised in 1920), was not included in Deon’s biographical collection.¹⁰ Deon was referred to by contemporaries (including, as we have seen, Linguet) as the *La Pucelle de Tonnerre* or Maid of Tonnerre, a play on Jehanne’s moniker, *La Pucelle d’Orléans* or Maid of Orleans. In the 1770s some of the portrait prints Deon commissioned of herself (Bradel 1779) leant into this association.

By the time Deon set about writing the *Pious Metamorphoses* around 1800 *Papesse Jeanne* (Pope Joan) had pushed Jehanne (Joan of Arc) out of the spotlight. In her preface Deon explains that she is leaving ‘the Semiramises [i.e. queens such as the legendary Assyrian Semiramis], the Joans of Arc, and other well-known heroines’ to other writers, that is to ‘general history’ (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 141). Jehanne did not fit among the holy women of the *Pious Metamorphoses* because she had not changed her name and been disguised. Another difficulty lay in the fact that Jehanne had enjoyed considerable public recognition in her own lifetime. Deon could not include her in *the history of the*

women who disguised their sex in order to consecrate themselves to God and to adopt the monastic life (to quote the *Metamorphoses*' subtitle). Denied public recognition, the fourteen women celebrated in Deon's compendium had had to find their strength 'from within or, if you will, from the force of grace' (142).

And yet the metaphors Deon employed when writing of her fictional life in various convents could be surprisingly military. She referred to the convent of the Daughters of Holy Mary (which she claimed, falsely, to have entered) as the 'camp' of an 'elite unit', 'entrenched and enclosed' and defended by the canons of the Gallican Church (95–6). In French *canon* can refer to both doctrinal canons and artillery cannons (Deon never could resist a pun). The transition from military unit to religious order is described in conflicting ways within a single autobiographical text. Sometimes this change of career and sex is presented in starkly moralising terms, as a clean break and conversion: risk-seeking, violence and activity ('bad boy') are left behind and disavowed, replaced by reflection, resignation and rest ('good girl'). Some of these tropes are familiar from Paul/Saul's conversion in the Book of Acts and from seventeenth-century Evangelical conversion narratives (Nussbaum 1995, 154–77). While Deon was certainly very familiar with the former (she came up with her own version of Paul's Damascene conversion, set on Westminster Bridge), her limited English and the catalogue of her library sale (Deon de Beaumont 1791) suggest little if any contact with the latter.

Like Deon, Pope Joan (as presented in Deon's own narrative) spends time in England, studies in Paris and is renowned for her erudition. Unlike Deon, Joan's life ends violently, shortly after her female sex becomes known against her will. Of the fourteen holy women in the *Pious Metamorphoses*, nine maintained their disguise until death, in most cases after lives of extreme self-mortification. Several endured additional privations after being falsely accused of impregnating women. Deon's authorial stance in the *Pious Metamorphoses* shifts between historian and hagiographer. The improbable and miraculous sometimes pass without comment, while at other points Deon sifts conflicting accounts, attentive to the ways in which Protestant authors' accounts might be expected to differ from those by Roman Catholics.

That is certainly a concern in the case of Pope Joan, a figure that most savants of Deon's day considered legendary. Noting how much 'this extraordinary episode disturbs' Roman Catholic authors, Deon observes that.

Rationalizations and consternation do not obliterate a fact. Despréaux¹¹ said it well: 'What is true is sometimes not plausible.' I would add that in these kinds of situations in which the implausible is not pushed to the point of absurdity, it is perhaps an additional proof of historic truth. First, the bizarre is not invented; one recounts it because it happened. Next, scandal is always fabricated by one's enemies ... In fact, in any discussion about this matter no one now believes that the truth or falsity of this episode has anything to do with the honor of the Holy See. Accepting or not accepting that Joan was pope is therefore simply one of those unimportant opinions that each individual is free to hold as he wishes. (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 142)

Deon intended to bring the *Pious Metamorphoses* to a close with an account of monastic disguise she recognised was fictional, lifted from Claudine de Tencin's much imitated 1735 novel the *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* (Baculard D'Arnaud 1775).¹² The plot of Tencin's tale of star-crossed heterosexual lovers (one a man, the other a woman) ending up in the same Trappist monastery is certainly improbable, yet Deon considered

it as true as the much older hagiographies she carefully sifted, illuminating ‘the subtle contrast between divine love and human love’ (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 143).

Deon knew her scripture inside out, and her autobiographical writings are larded with quotes and marginalia giving chapter and verse. Yet there is little here that anticipates recent explorations of transgender or ‘omnigender’ sexuality in the Old and New Testaments, such as verses from Genesis (37:3) describing how Jacob dressed his son Joseph in female-coded dress (Mollenkott 2007, 112). On some drafts Deon noted that angels are without sex, and cites the many verses in which God is described as indifferent to ‘persons’ (as in, to rank or gender), and where Paul states that in Jesus ‘there is neither male nor female’ (Gal. 3:28). But elsewhere she wrote that ‘God created man and woman, the one for doing bad, the other for doing good’. Here her exegesis was crudely literal. While various Bible verses state that no *man* is without sin, Deon blazed a trail all her own in suggesting that it might be different for women.¹³

Deon wrote that in compiling the lives of these saints ‘I thought that I was working on my own memoirs, so much do the same positions produce the same situation and arouse the same emotions!’ (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 141). And yet there are two big differences. Deon was writing her own story, during her own lifetime. This story was not being dragged out of her by persecution, nor did Deon present it in the expectation that she would die immediately afterwards. It was written with the intention that ‘my Christian philosophy’ might elevate the souls of ‘my readers who are animated by the same divine sentiments’ (134). Secondly Deon’s transition occurred in the public eye. Like Jehanne, she had enjoyed the esteem that came with celebrity.

Placing herself on a level with the saints was a move that contemporaries would have found wanting in the humility proper to a Christian. In one version of her encounter with Rose Bertin the latter predicts that Deon will be beatified after her transition (65). Deon’s open identification with these holy women stood in sharp contrast to the authors of the medieval hagiographies on which she drew, all men. Rather than seeking the intercession of her saintly subjects, Deon was using them to understand her own self and provide herself with a virtual community, of the kind she could not enjoy in her own time and place. Within a few decades Deon herself would (along with the Abbé Choisy, discussed below) come to constitute such a virtual community for gender nonconforming individuals in France (Mesch 2024, 114). This is not to say that Deon’s own age did not afford genderqueer subcultures (Courouve 1993; Rey 1987). Deon’s transition coincided neatly with the decade (c. 1775–85) in which macaroni and molly subcultures came to prominence (Norton 1992). But Deon did not identify with any of these subcultures, nor did her contemporaries seek to place her within them. Nor was it easy for contemporaries to associate her with women who entered the armed forces disguised as men. Those women were plebeian (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, 99 and 101; Easton 2003; Steinberg 2001, 247–9; Wheelwright 1989). Deon was an aristocrat, and that counted for more than any shared gender movement.

Celebrity

From her first scandalous publication, observers were anxiously aware that they could not simply ignore Deon. When she promised a sequel to her *Lettres, Mémoires et Negociations*, they confessed as much: ‘I hear he [*sic*] persists in saying he will print on,’ wrote Anna,

Countess Temple, 'and if he does I must read, though I do not approve of the man' (Smith 1852–3, 2: 299). It was unsettling to recognise just how gripped one was by Deon. The connoisseur Horace Walpole was obsessed. 'I could write pages to you upon this subject,' he wrote to one friend, 'for I am full of it' (Lewis 1932–84, 38: 356).

Walpole was full of Deon not because she was a candidate for glory, nor was he concerned with her reputation as a soldier or diplomat. As Lilti (2017) has observed, glory was something that could only be claimed by the dead, while reputation was a collective judgment that emerged from a discussion closed to the general public. Only fellow officers and fellow diplomats could judge Deon's military or diplomatic reputation. While these colleagues judged Deon, she judged them in turn – reputation is not only based on personal knowledge, it is reflexive.

Walpole was 'full of it' because D'Eon was a celebrity. This was distinct from the 'sacred celebrity' of saints, a form of celebrity that, like glory, could only be enjoyed posthumously (Kleinberg 2011). Celebrities attracted public interest, rather than judgment; they elicited wonder, not admiration; emotion rather than the calm reason usually associated with an emergent public sphere. Fans of Rousseau – often identified as the first celebrity, as well as 'the most assiduous hunter of himself' (Lyons 1978, 97) – felt that they knew him intimately, yet this relationship was one-way and often exploitative, rather than two-way and reflexive. Celebrity emerged in tandem with a concept of privacy: how could there be 'secrets' without privacy? Celebrity relied on secrets being made known, by new print technologies and by new genres such as the 'scandalous memoir' of the 1770s (Maza 1993; Merrick 1990), known to a large audience of strangers who would never meet the individual concerned, yet nonetheless felt a certain attachment to that individual.¹⁴

As 'the wonder of her sex' (*Times*, 1 September 1796), Deon certainly fits this model of celebrity. Her transition took place in London in the 1770s, against the backdrop of a 'new consumerism' that Fred Inglis (2010, 9) identifies as one of the 'underlying forces which composed celebrity'. These new consumers created the market for Deon as 'a distributed, multimedia phenomenon': an assemblage of portrait engravings, visual satires, newspaper puffs, pamphlets, books and fencing displays that was never fully under her control (Mole 2009, 200). These consumers were not above hypocritically blaming Deon for supposedly falling victim to 'the fury of singularising herself'. As one French periodical put it, Deon was:

One of the most singular personages of the century, who, martyr to the love of celebrity, a passion to which she has never ceased to sacrifice the charms of a quiet and tranquil life, charms to which that same passion has rendered her insensible. (*Correspondance secrète* 7:384 [17 April 1779])

Here the word *célébrité* is used in the sense of the quality of being famous, not to refer to someone famous for being famous, to a celebrity. But the word was already being used in French when discussing 'a person who is well known for their well-knownness', to borrow Daniel Boorstin's phrase (1962, 57). Discomfort and destructiveness are certainly familiar elements of celebrity culture. But it would be foolish to present Deon, Charke and other eighteenth-century celebrities as mere victims (Fawcett 2016, 13).

Celebrity culture can engender quasi-autonomous avatars that threaten to break free from the individual concerned. The anti-heroine of the English novel *The Corinna of England* (1809) is presented as a deluded woman convinced she is 'Corinne', the

English manifestation of Corinna, heroine of Germaine de Staël's much more successful 1807 novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (Kiek 2021). Although both Corinne and Corinna are fictional, in 1777 Deon had spawned real-life doubles. After her presentation at court Deon was overcome by the number of people gawping at her and chose to retreat from society for a time. As Linguet noted, she had done the same in London several years before, in order to escape speculation surrounding her sex.

Linguet claimed that Deon's retreat caused the speculation around her to subside. That was far from the truth. Instead her absence (Linguet 1777, 384 uses the French verb *s'éclipser*, to 'self-eclipse') led to panic that she had been kidnapped by a party of speculators intent on discovering her sex. The underwriters of the life insurance policies concerned were in such a panic, one newspaper noted, 'that almost their own Manhood might be doubted' (*St James' Chronicle*, 23–25 January 1776). Two years later, on the other side of the Channel, Deon's second eclipse (after her presentation at the French court) produced a more dramatic result: Deon impersonators began doing the rounds of the salons of Versailles and Paris, filling the vacuum Deon created.

Not for the first time, Deon felt herself obliged to respond in print (although it is important to recognise that this stance of being 'forced' into print was a well-worn trope). In her *Appel à mes contemporaines* (i.e. female contemporaries) Deon linked these impersonators with her earlier quarrel with the French playwright Beaumarchais, who had been sent to London by the French king Louis XVI to negotiate a settlement with her. Beaumarchais and Deon thrashed out the so-called 'Transaction' setting out the terms under which Deon would be rehabilitated and permitted to return with honour to France, safe from the Bastille and with a royal pension. Deon promised to 'resume' the dress 'proper to her sex', although she was permitted to continue wearing the military cross awarded to her by the King's grandfather (Louis XV) for prior service. Unfortunately Beaumarchais sought to use the Transaction to make a quick profit, provoking a new round of gambling on Deon's sex, planning to use the Transaction to force payment. Beaumarchais also composed a series of songs and letters in which he claimed that Deon was madly in love with him.

In her *Appel* Deon presented as the victim of unchivalrous abuse from a jumped-up nobody, of a kind no lady could endure:

After having been all my life an honest man [*honnête homme*], a zealous citizen [*citoyen*, male] and a brave soldier, I exult to be a woman, and go down to posterity as one among many women who have proved that the qualities and the virtues of which men are so proud are not beyond my sex. Just because I have put up my sword, does that mean I have to put up my self-respect? In my new clothes, in the middle of Paris, at the foot of the throne, I am abused by a ham actor who did not dare look the Chevalier d'Eon in the face, a pleb who was fiddling with clocks [Beaumarchais had been a clockmaker] when all Europe resounded to my military and diplomatic exploits: how could I not meet his audacity with the only weapons that remain to me? (Deon de Beaumont n.d., n.p)

The aforementioned Deon impersonators had been seen in the best houses of Paris, Deon conceded, but any hay Beaumarchais might make with such 'buffoons' would quickly pass, 'because they are not me.' Deon had been recognised across France long before Beaumarchais appeared on the scene, and would be remembered long after he was forgotten.¹⁵

Conclusion

'Since my beginning was not normal, there was no normal order in what followed. I write as I have lived', Deon de Beaumont (2001, 133) wrote in her unpublished 'Special Request' to 'Readers, Authors, and the Members of the Universal Republic of Letters'. As Deon wrote and rewrote her life in so many different genres, it would be equally true to state that Deon lived as she wrote. And wrote. And wrote. Experience as a spy in the service of a decadent and doomed *ancien régime* would have been catnip to British readers in the 1790s and 1800s, lending added allure to that 'dialectic of revelation and concealment' (Mole 2009, 187) we recognise as characteristic of the celebrity. And yet Deon did not publish any of her writings, even when her poverty led to a period of incarceration in a south London debtor's prison.

'Caught between the desire to display herself at the centre of attention and the desire to retreat from public scrutiny, [she] was continually searching in her writing for paradoxical ways to do both at once' (201). Those words were written, not of Deon, but of Mary Robinson, a celebrity cis actor, dramatist and novelist whose memoirs appeared in 1801. Again, we need to be careful of assuming that Deon's celebrity was an exclusively trans celebrity.

Long before her transition, Deon recognised (*aventurier* as she was) that in court politics, in the literary and diplomatic worlds a poor Burgundian clinging to noble status could write herself into a more appealing status. But such re-fashioning carried serious risks to one's freedom and even one's life, particularly for those adventurers of humbler station who lacked a college education or any patronage (Graham 2000). Deon's post-transition writings built on this foundation, testing genres in the process. As McKenzie Wark notes in an interview with Stryker, 'putting pressure on forms is exactly what a transition is' (Stryker 2024, 170).

The importance of class and environment in enabling gender antinormativity is evident from the contrasting experiences of the Abbé Choisy and Miss Rosete (Pierre-Aymond Dumoret), who died a few years before Deon was born, in 1724 and 1725 respectively. Choisy came from a noble family with strong ties to the French court. He lived in Paris, where family and friends accepted his short-lived (less than two years) presentation as 'Madame de Sancy' – a presentation best understood as cross-dressing.¹⁶ Miss Rosete's father was a provincial magistrate: non-noble, but otherwise not very different from Deon's father. Like Choisy, Miss Rosete believed that 'people will get accustomed to seeing me dressed as a woman, without even being aware it is happening' (Pitaval 1738–48, 18: 225).¹⁷ Unlike Choisy, her family and neighbours in the much smaller city of Toulouse refused to accept her. Unlike Choisy, who wrote his own *Mémoires de l'abbé de Choisy habillé en femme*, the only source we have for Miss Rosete is from a collection of *causes célèbres* (or noteworthy court cases) that considers her case one of 'a man whose brain is made differently from others' (213). According to the scandalised editor of this account of 'a man who believed he was a woman', Rosete died from the iron corset she wore to reshape her body: 'the expression [*figure*] of one sex destroyed the reality of the other' (229). Alongside class and environment we might also note the importance of age: Rosete was in her twenties, Choisy and Deon in their forties when they made their gender moves. Alongside race, McKenzie Wark's introduction to *When Monsters Speak* notes (Stryker 2024, 3) how important education and the community offered by cities

(such as 'Trans SanFrisco') remain. Had Deon aspired to the sex-positive 'bohemian life' Stryker lives in her 'Perfect Day' (and it seems unlikely), that life would have been more easily and safely lived in London than in the small Burgundian town of her birth (79).

On that 'Perfect Day' in 1980 Stryker 'cared nothing about passing, everything about being seen for what I was' (79). Unlike Deon, Stryker 'had trans feelings my whole life, even as a small child'. By around ten years of age 'I knew that living your authentic life was an option if you could navigate the process' of 'surgery and hormones and name changes'. Such narratives are familiar from the narratives addressed by Prosser. Much less common was Stryker's move to address 'this historical question of whether somebody like me, but who lived before hormones and surgery, might be a thing', to consider 'even deeper metahistorical questions' about 'the historicity of identity, about the contingency of oneself in the context within which one becomes a self' (166).

Unlike Stryker's unitary self, the precise nature of the self or selves at the heart of Deon's narratives remains unclear. Her relationship with Rousseau – romantic, natural, unitary self *par excellence* – suggests that she was, at very least, pulled both ways. Either that, or, as Anna Clark (2022, 32), has suggested, Deon was subjecting Rousseau to a queer reading, 'taking up his idea of the unique self and rejecting his rigid gender proscriptions'. At times Deon wanted to be a Rousseau-style genuine one-off, a unique self. At others she embraced the self-conscious masquerade that Dror Wahrman has associated with an *ancien régime* of selfhood. According to Wahrman (2004, 128) this *régime* collapsed during Deon's lifetime (around 1784), owing to 'the shift from mutability to essence, from imaginable fluidity to fixity, from the potential for individual deviation from general identity categories to an individual identity stamped indelibly on each and every person'.¹⁸

Deon was certainly 'gender-creative' in Rachel Mesch's (2022, 8) terms: one of a group of figures found 'producing immense volumes of writing over a lifetime through which they work through, explicitly and implicitly, their sense of self'. Though the term only gained currency in the 2010s, Deon's narratives could be seen as forms of autofiction, a term coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, a term that Stryker (2024, 170) has used to describe some of the writings collected in *When Monsters Speak*. A (fictional) religious text such as the sermon by which a male priest welcomes Deon's (fictional) entry into a convent might be understood as one of a series of 'imagined records' deployed by Deon in a 'smooth amalgamation of actual events and imaginary supplements' characteristic of autofiction. As a historian of the trans community (above all in the *Pious Metamorphoses*), Deon was, like latter-day archivists and historians, well aware of 'the absent or unattainable, hence silent, archive' (Cho 2020, 271). One is reminded here of the insights Stryker gained through her engagement with the archive of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California (now the GLBT Historical Society), beginning in the early 1990s (Stryker 2024, 114).

Deon's life story has been understood in a variety of ways since that time. For Kates (1995b) Deon's story was one of religious conversion, in which Deon sees her 'vicissitudes' as the working out of Providence. For Anna Clark (2022, 33), it was one of an individual caught between two models of political manhood: 'the courtly diplomat and the manly citizen'. In an earlier essay the present writer (Conlin 2005) argued that Deon's story is one of national (as in French) anxieties unleashed by the attempt of a monarchical regime to recover from spectacular defeat in the Seven Years War and reform itself by

emulating its British rival. Gender and sexuality are implicated in all three. But is this really a shell game in which Deon is teasing us to spot the authentic self, the key to her transition? To paraphrase Hil Malatino (addressing the work of photographer Claude Cahun, not Deon), isn't it rather boring to indulge in 'speculation about the intent of [Deon's] work and what it might say about their gender identity', rather than view her as 'engaging in what we now understand as a trans aesthetic practice' (Malatino 2020, 51)?

Rather than being separate circuits, Deon's adventurer, saint and celebrity selves are cross-wired, in ways that deliver the reader regular shocks – as when Deon (in a pious letter ostensibly written to a duchess) refers to 'packing up my sack and skittles' (a slang term for male genitalia) prior to entering the convent (Deon de Beaumont 2001, 101). Her transness does not constitute a fourth transgendered avatar in itself, such as we might place alongside the adventurer, saint and celebrity. It is rather this very refusal to remain within the confines of genre and register, this insistence on writing and living in defiance of such proprieties. Her hundreds of pages of unpublished memoir are not sand to be sifted in hopes of extracting a crystalline, hard jewel, but aggregate we can use to construct a new form of trans history.

And perhaps more, for the impact of professional psychologists such as Hirschfeld was not limited to that community we know today as trans. As Nikolas Rose (1996, 225) notes, 'the kinds of person we are able to be' are all shaped by these 'specialists of psy'. Perhaps Deon can help us defy 'the "psy" interior that has been hollowed out within us as our truth', to recognise that we are all "'assembled" selves', and that the 'psychological interiority' underlying so much discourse of an 'authentic self' (226) is not part of our nature, but a cultural artefact, a set of subjectifying practices. Approached in this manner, Deon's archive, like 'so many other archival traces of trans, intersex, and gender nonconforming lives – feels like a gift that I'm still figuring out how to use' (Malatino 2020, 54). That 'I' can be all of us, however we identify.

Notes

1. Deon spelled her name in several different ways during her lifetime, including 'Deon', 'Déon', 'd'Eon', 'D'Eon', and 'D'Éon'. This variety is not unusual for the period. In keeping with her family's practice, which she followed for much of her life, I use 'Deon' throughout.
2. The letter cited by A. Clark 2022, 39 is a forgery.
3. The frontis of Deon de Beaumont 1779 carries the name of La Fortelle, the editor of the larger biographical compendium from which it was extracted, but the text was written by Deon herself.
4. See also *Courrier Francais* 165 (13 June 1792); *Gazette Universelle* 3.165 (13 June 1792). For Théroigne de Méricourt's similar attempt to form a legion (of women), see Steinberg 2001, 249.
5. Mother Eleonor to Macdermott, 8 April 1777. Papers of Charles Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont, University of Leeds, Brotherton Collection [hereafter ULBC] 95.
6. Mother Eleonor to Macdermott, 8 April 1777. ULBC 95.
7. Deon de Beaumont to Theveneau de Morande, 3 August 1776. The National Archives, London. KB 1/20/6.
8. In this letter Keate changes from he/him to she/her pronouns in referring to Deon. George Keate to Voltaire, 15 August 1777. Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence. Letter D20765. Accessed 1 August 2025.

9. The catalogue of Deon's library prepared in 1791 (Deon de Beaumont 1791) includes a 1775 edition of Robert Arnauld d'Andilly's *Les vies des saints pères des déserts et de quelques saintes* (9) and a 1761 edition of Michel-Ange Marin's *Les vies des pères des déserts d'Orient: avec leur doctrine spirituelle et leur discipline monastique* (28).
10. Deon did not have access to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century narratives of 'filles-chevaliers' such as *Tristan de Nanteuil*, *Yde et Olive* and the *Roman de Silence*. The heroines of the first two pray successfully for God to alter their bodies: Balanchine-Balanchin is miraculously deprived of male genitalia, while Yde-Ydé acquires them. Maillet 2020, 66.
11. Nicolas Boileau Despréaux (1616–1711), poet and translator.
12. Although the title and year of publication vary slightly, Baculard D'Arnaud 1775 is probably the edition Deon lists in her 1791 library sale catalogue. Deon de Beaumont 1791, 9.
13. ULBC 48, f. 408. In the original Deon has God creating man to do good and women to do harm, but it is clear from the context that she got the words the wrong way around.
14. This paragraph summarizes the argument Lilti 2017. For a contrasting view of the origin and nature of celebrity, see Cowan 2019; Postle 2005; Rosenthal 2006.
15. Deon de Beaumont to Beaumarchais, Feast of the Purification [February] 1778. Archives de le Comédie Française, Paris. Ms Res 027 (1).
16. Choisy's memoir was not published until the twentieth century (Mongrédien 1966), and hence inaccessible to Deon. See also Van der Cruysse 1995.
17. Deon's library sale catalogue (1791, 15) includes Pitaval's compendium. Dumoret's chosen name (according to Pitaval) was 'Rosete', but unfortunately this was silently changed to 'Rosette' in Chevrier 2007.
18. Although Wahrman's work built on Terry Castle's earlier work on the masquerade as 'one of the defining topoi of eighteenth-century cultural rhetoric' (Castle 1987, 156), Wahrman did not pathologize this 'culture of travesty' (157) as the 'revelation of hidden needs' and 'flight from the "natural"' (172). Unlike Castle, Wahrman did not see Deon as 'hapless' (175).

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Jonathan Conlin is author of a forthcoming biography of the Chevalière Deon, as well as co-editor (with Simon Burrows, Russell Goulbourne and Valerie Mainz) of a 2011 volume dedicated to Deon. Instagram: deontraces

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