
« *Mars respire ici sous l'habit de Vénus* »
Transvestism and Transformation in Jean Rotrou's
Agésilan de Colchos (1635)

TABITHA SPAGNOLO
UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE

. . . un Roy qui paroist au Théâtre, doit estre si
courageux qu'il n'apprehende aucun danger, & ne treuve rien
d'impossible à la force de ses armes légitimémēt occupées.
Il doit estre si prudent, qu'il n'ait jamais aucun sujet de
rétracter ses jugemens, ni d'en condamner les succès.
(La Mesnardière 120)

Female-to-male cross-dressing in seventeenth-century French comic theatre was common. Rarer was the inverse staging of male-to-female transvestism and only a small number of playwrights applied either one to the distinctly ambiguous form of tragicomedy (Forestier 133).¹ Fewer still dared make a king the primary cross-dressed character in order to produce a work of significant social and literary interest.² Jean Rotrou (1609-1650) was the most prominent playwright to merge all three of these conditions while skillfully skirting controversy with *Agésilan de Colchos*, first performed in 1635, amid an intellectual struggle to define the limitations of all theatrical forms.³

To critics, tragicomedy was perhaps the most vexing of these forms and Rotrou's now overlooked contribution to its particularly chaotic and innovative phase during the first half of the century may have arguably paralleled that of Corneille during much of the same period.⁴ His *Agésilan de Colchos* showed that, even for a king, an evolving transvestite experience need not offend rules of decorum. More importantly, he explored how a disguised monarch could transcend a cloak of choice to mediate a profoundly transformative and enriching experience of character development.⁵ In the context of recent studies of gender and transvestism, Katherine Crawford and Joseph Harris have both highlighted how Judith Butler's concept of "gender performance as constitutive of identity" (Crawford 9) is particularly relevant as we re-evaluate early modern forays into all manner of gender-bending artistic endeavor.

In Rotrou's hands, an intricate performance of cross-dressing ultimately serves to constitute the identity of a wayward young man who develops into an heroic and authoritative monarch possessed of the most recognizable markers of early modern masculinity tempered by a humanistic sense of compassion and justice.⁶ Though the social and intellectual outcomes for *Agésilan* are important, the greatest significance lies in the unorthodox transvestite process he undertakes to reach a socially acceptable conclusion. This process invites the modern reader/interpreter to examine how Rotrou navigated the problematic of masculinity with particular reference to the protagonist's exalted position and gender-altering stratagem.

Although literary theorists of the day were primarily preoccupied with the intricacies of tragic theatre, described by Hippolyte de la Mesnardière (1610-1663) as "le chef-d'œuvre des Poètes, & le dernier effort des Muses," (discours) tragicomedy was not beyond the scope of their attention and increasingly rigid aesthetic requirements. Although La Mesnardière abhorred simplistic plots that relied upon the improbable acceptance of flimsy and transparent disguise by other characters (264-65), he was willing to accept the abnormality of effective disguise if

it remained relevant to the internal cohesion of the plot and, above all, if the alternate identity did not tax what François d'Aubignac (1604-1676) described as the discerning "intelligence des Spectateurs" (48). Nothing, however, prevented the psychological and developmental by-products from leaving an indelible mark on either the character or the audience in attendance. By the 1650s, d'Aubignac would agree with his predecessor while extending the scope of the controversial variables in any disguise to the more contentious characterization of monarchy, explaining, "Quand un Roy parle sur la Scène, il faut qu'il parle en Roi, & c'est la circonstance de la dignité contre laquelle il ne peut rien faire qui soit vray-semblable, s'il n'y avoit quelque autre raison qui dispensast de cette premiere circonstance, comme s'il étoit déguisé" (95). The spirit of this assertion is in keeping with La Mesnardière's 1639 formulation (summarized in the epigraph) regarding the obligatory apotheosis of royal decorum for "un roy qui paroist au Théâtre," but d'Aubignac opens the way for an exemption to the rule by applying it to the historically problematic classification of a monarch in any state of disguise. Georges Forestier summarized how for La Mesnardière, d'Aubignac, and Jean Chapelain (1595-1674), tragicomedy was ultimately viewed as a "genre sérieux et justiciable des mêmes critères de jugement que la tragédie" (81) and, therefore, was subject to all the immanent aesthetic strictures that govern tragedy.⁷

Such, therefore, was the evolving theoretical and critical framework within which Rotrou formulated his play. In it, Agésilan, King of Colchos, cross-dresses to gain access to Diane, the daughter of Queen Sidonie, whose mere portrait has captivated him. Rotrou thus foregoes one of d'Aubignac's primary conditions – that dignified comportment prevail in all things royal – but avails himself of the temporary freedoms afforded by a secondary provision – that justifiable disguise be permitted. The exposition reveals that on Sidonie's order, portraits of Diane have been dispatched far and wide to marshal a maximum number of suitors, but Diane's hand comes at a Corneillian price: the victor must behead Diane's father, Florisel, Emperor of Greece, who had seduced and abandoned Sidonie in her youth:

Et Sidonie enfin, suivant sa passion,
Use pour se venger de cette invention:
Diane, en une tour par ses soins retenue,
Et de qui le soleil à peine obtient la vue,
Par édit qu'elle a fait, doit être un instrument
Pour immoler ce traître à son ressentiment:
Elle est par cet édit promise pour conquête
A qui de Florisel lui portera la tête. (Rotrou, 1637, 1.2)

Diane, cruelly condemned to marry her father's executioner, is first introduced on a painter's canvas as a two-dimensional sexualized siren (Morel 33), intended to incite men to violence. Sidonie, clearly a victim herself, is presented as the embodiment of irresponsible monarchy, content to achieve vengeance by exploiting her progeny and heir. Rotrou has no qualms in portraying a royal female in this manner and frames her injudicious behavior as the crux of the tragic element in this tragicomedy. At the same time, she vacates the standard image of virtuous woman (*honnête femme*) and selfless motherhood to serve as an extreme model of femininity against which the audience may measure and temper Agésilan's sense of responsible masculinity as it develops throughout the play. By contrast, Florisel, excluded from Diane's life, is allowed to mature into a paragon of compassion and paternalistic rectitude.

Initially, when Agésilan sees Diane's portrait, the enchanting effect upon him, though

transmitted by artistic proxy, is immediate. His senses are assailed and his language speaks of spontaneous desire and infatuation:

Je me sens consumer d'une invisible ardeur,
Qui tout d'un coup attaque et consume mon cœur.
Parcille ne fut pas à ce feu qui me tue
L'amour de l'artisan qui servit sa statue, . . .
De quel effort, ô dieux! Est mon âme agitée?
Par quel sort est sitôt ma raison enchantée? (1.2)

Given such a visceral and heterosexual response, one expects Agésilan to take up his sword, pursue Florisel, and relieve him of his head to satisfy Sidonie's pernicious condition and claim his prize. Instead, in a key passage, Rotrou has him take the advice of his servant, Darinel, to adopt an oblique and doubly deceptive approach to courtship that depends on both the anonymity and ambiguity offered by cross-dressing:

Déguisez votre sexe, et sous de faux habits,
Comme on dit que les dieux en ont usé jadis,
Usez des privautés qu'un autre habit vous nie:
Allez servir Diane et tromper Sidonie. (1.2)

The choice of transvestite disguise in response to Sidonie's violent summons calls into question Agésilan's courage and virility which is crucial in influencing the audience's first impression of him as a somewhat frivolous man and indifferent monarch. Had he immediately taken up arms at this early stage, the archetypal image of uni-dimensional masculinity would be clear. Instead, he opts to forego rank, responsibility, and privilege to assume a wholly subservient role (in sex and station) so as to gain access to Diane who lives cloistered, at the behest of her mother, in the exclusive company of women.

At this juncture, Agésilan seems as self-serving as Sidonie, betraying a cavalier attitude toward position, women, and life with no apparent socially acceptable end-game for his alter-ego, a minstrel named Daraïde. As yet, nothing points to the prescience expected of a king and sympathetic hero with the wisdom to understand that *raisons d'État* must take precedence over the draw of sentimental seduction. Only as the play takes shape do we fully appreciate the transformation and redeeming of its hero. This process begins with the transcendent dismantling of the panoply of monarchy and masculinity so he may ultimately emerge fully reformed by a transvestite experience; even if initiated by some dubious advice: "Au lieu de vous offrir faites qu'on vous désire" (2.3).

This suggestion echoes Florisel's scandalous seduction and abandonment of Sidonie. Now, however, the circumstances are significantly different in that Agésilan's transvestism acts as a temporary safeguard against Diane's similar disgrace. Furthermore, Rotrou introduces the example of Florisel's life, revealed as an essential counterpoint to Agésilan's rapidly unfolding experiences, both public and private. Florisel's maturity was achieved at Sidonie's expense, while Rotrou invests Agésilan with a distinct advantage precisely because of his controversial disguise. Indeed "[c]e seul habit" (2.4) serves as a protective cocoon within which Rotrou expedites the process of character development. The transvestite Agésilan is positioned to undergo, in a matter of days rather than years, a transformation that is essentially analogous to that of Florisel.

A disguised Agésilan enjoys a fresh state of innocence as the basis for personal development. With childlike naivety, he revels in an idyllic episode within the confines of Diane's

female enclave that unfolds like a brief secondary play (Morello 66), during which Rotrou momentarily caters to the enduring taste of the viewing public for a pastoral interlude. When Joseph Morello insists that this foray constitutes an implausible rupture in a tragically oriented continuum (Morello 66-67), he sets aside its key constructive contribution to Agésilan's formation in matters of love, responsibility, and the very essence of his adult identity. Without exploring the game of seduction (represented as a flirtatious linguistic exercise, rather than a suggestive physical one), made all the more delightfully ambiguous and challenging by Agésilan's transvestite state, the young king would lack the chance to develop a legitimate justification for reacting to Diane's portrait with such impetuosity. Agésilan, as Daraïde, develops a real relationship with Diane during this period that manifests as a veritable *inclination*, allowing Agésilan to begin shedding his aimless youth and to find, in genuine and profound affection, the justification for his subsequent actions. Their relationship and interaction also bestow upon Diane a well-rounded, multi-dimensional aspect that her mother had effectively suppressed.

During a formative second act, Rotrou acknowledges lessons learned from his literary predecessor, Honoré d'Urfé in *L'Astrée*, as he carefully steers his transvestite hero clear of farcical pitfalls that could easily have compromised the integrity of Agésilan's disguise in this serious and nuanced tragicomedy. While Celadon's transvestism in *L'Astrée* prompted a profound philosophical reverie on the quality and character of identity, such an excursion is an apposite byproduct of his initial motivation and was not allowed to detract from his preeminent and socially accepted "desire for heterosexual union" (Zuerner 33). This was a rule governing the depiction of transvestism in the pastoral tradition and served the dual purpose of eventually absolving the cross-dressed individual of any behavior that could be construed as deviant, while also ensuring that the character's image be protected from ridicule.⁸

Rotrou legitimized Agésilan's behavior by clearly attributing to Diane's agency the more provocative aspects of what passes for love scenes between herself and Daraïde, appealing to her social and sexual innocence to excuse them. He allows her to be enchanted by Daraïde's song, just as Agésilan had responded to her portrait:

Jamais de si douce harmonie
Mes sens ne furent enchantés.
Outre la voix, sa grâce est infinie,
Et son visage a d'extrêmes beautés. (2.4)

For his part, Agésilan does not stray far from theatrically acceptable behavior when he utilizes his successful disguise to advantage in emphasizing his boyish beauty⁹ (Darinel notes his "doux attrait" (2.3) and Diane observes that, "son visage a d'extrêmes beautés" (2.4)) and his subtle, though manifestly feminine, affinity for music and the pleasures of random *divertissements*.¹⁰ Even his intoxicating voice ("belle voix," "voix sans pareille" (2.3)) becomes a particularly important instrument in rendering his disguise wholly convincing while adding a dimension of femininity that surpasses the traditionally visual aspect of transvestism. Like d'Urfé, whose Celadon seeks his Astrée, Rotrou has Agésilan use all means at his disposal to penetrate Diane's protected sanctuary, made sinister by Sidonie's troublesome commitment to relinquish her daughter to the champion of her revenge. In this context, therefore, it seems quite acceptable for Rotrou to paint a princess, starved for new company and unconsciously drawn to Daraïde's unique allure. It is equally justifiable to accord Diane the role of aggressive seductress who responds with uncommon passion to Daraïde's rather banal flattery. Rotrou,

however, remains mindful of all the rules of the social game prompting a companion of Diane to question Daraïde's unusual focus on pleasing her mistress: "Jamais un serviteur a-t-il pour une dame / Témoigné plus de zèle et montré plus de flamme?" (3.1) Ultimately, it is Diane, herself, who demonstrates piercing insight and poses the most germane question: "Mais quel seroit le fruit de cette passion?" (3.1) With this query, Rotrou demonstrates awareness of the dangerous social implications of a biologically unproductive lesbian relationship and a readiness to dispel them. Consequently, Diane is shown to understand that her flirtatious dalliance must remain momentarily ascribable to her current isolation. In this way, her conduct reassures the audience and readers who are complicit in the layers of meaning surrounding the false quality of a lesbian intrigue. Rotrou maintains control of the provocative undercurrent in their delicate and ambiguous interaction until such time as the protective shield of Agésilan's identity as Daraïde begins to peel away, for Diane, then for Florisel, and finally for Sidonie. Each revelation will ultimately signal an important step in Agésilan's metamorphosis from unremarkable youth to worthy king and consequently assign special meaning to the indispensable transvestite experience. Agésilan, however, becomes aware that his disguise somewhat restricts his behavior when the idyllic interlude is violently disrupted. Witnessing an insult to Diane's honor, Daraïde instinctively seizes a sword and publicly engages the offender despite the shock that such a display predictably incites. Metaphorically, in resuming the sword, he takes the first step in a progressive re-appropriation of the coded accoutrement that constitutes the outward display of masculinity – a step he was loath to take at the outset. More immediately, however, until he can fully reveal his identity, his transvestite disguise takes on the new and more complicating dimension of *amazone* or female warrior, putting his assumed identity at risk. He attempts to explain how it is possible for a maiden, schooled in music, to best an offending prince with steel:

Ce différent me touche autant qu'il vous regarde;
Si mon sexe est suspect, mon honneur se hasarde ...
Ailleurs que sur un luth ma main s'est occupée.
Et, fille, je sais l'art de régir une épée. (3.6)

More importantly, when Agésilan attempts to justify Daraïde's unanticipated and traditionally masculine action, he articulates an appreciation of both the female gender he has appropriated and a universal code of ethics that he cannot ignore: "Si mon sexe est suspect, mon honneur se hasarde". With this, Rotrou exposes a fascinating reversal of gender expectations that disrupts the typical notion that only a man's honor is at risk if his sexuality/virility is questioned. Agésilan argues vigorously against a similar insult to the female sex, suggesting that the highly developed and masculine notion of honor be extended to a woman. A sense of duty and honor must prevail regardless of gender. From another angle, Daraïde further bolsters an appreciation of female capabilities, if only temporarily, as 'she' projects a heroic image that harkens back to the ancient world and the abilities normally attributed to Diane's mythological namesake.

In keeping with a move toward gradual clarity and redemption, the violent incident which Daraïde ably handles finally prompts Agésilan to independently evaluate the wisdom and ramifications of his disguise.

O reine du désordre, inconstante Fortune,
Mon repos vient de naître et déjà t'importune ...
Le ciel jusques ici m'était si favorable!

O triste Agésilan! ô Diane adorable! (4.2)

Rotrou couches the manner of Agésilan's introspection in verse reminiscent of Maurice Scève, an intertextual acknowledgement of the purest form of the pastoral eclogue that lends a tone of sincerity to Agésilan's voice as he agonizes over the dilemma before him. When his monologue is overheard, his identity is revealed to Diane who laments the loss of her trusted female companion and, of necessity, rejects the man outright.

Suddenly, the subservient position held by Daraïde and guaranteed by the transvestite disguise gives way to Agésilan's more enviable station. Yet, his still incomplete masculine identity seems inadequate to retain Diane's affections, let alone secure her hand in marriage: "Si la représentation peinte de Diane a été à même de faire naître la passion amoureuse chez Agésilan et si la beauté de la jeune fille s'est montrée en mesure de se substituer favorablement à la fiction du portrait, il reste à savoir si Agésilan parviendra à faire agréer à Diane une réalité capable d'effacer Daraïde . . ." (Vuillemin 259). Although Diane eventually relents and admits that her true feelings lie with the individual rather than the dress, her declaration of love must still trigger the final step in Agésilan's overall development. The only legitimate way for him to secure her hand and his own happiness remains by way of Sidonie's funereal task. Though less poetic and rather less poignant, the situation is not unlike that faced by Corneille's Rodrigue as he contemplates the horror of killing Chimène's father in *Le Cid*.¹¹

To solve his problem, Agésilan must find Florisel while maintaining his disguise. When the two monarchs finally meet, Florisel is preoccupied as he laments his ill-spent youth and prepares himself for the capital punishment that awaits. Significantly, Florisel's greeting conveys his immediate recognition of Agésilan in Daraïde both as his friend and, more importantly, his equal:

Oh! L'heureuse rencontre, incroyable merveille!
Je vois Agésilan s'il est vrai que je veuille;
Ce visage a des traits à mes yeux trop connus,
Et Mars respire ici sous l'habit de Vénus. (4.6)

For the young king to be acknowledged as such, beyond Sidonie's court and despite his appearance, helps him cast off the remaining artifice. That Florisel goes so far as to fuse the very best of Agésilan's two complex identities in acclaiming him "Mars . . . sous l'habit de Vénus" renders this a defining and authoritative moment when he is finally recognized as an imposing leader, while the lessons learned from the edifying experience of the feminine condition are legitimized.¹²

Agésilan's faculties appear now fully vested with the judgment and authority of an exemplary king who can clearly see what is required of him to avert a tragedy. He conceals Florisel and forces Sidonie to contemplate her feelings by making her believe he is dead, prompting her to repent and prepare for suicide. As tragedy turns again to tragicomedy, Daraïde reveals Florisel to be alive, ready to marry, and right the wrongs of his youth. In validating the royal union of Sidonie and Florisel, Agésilan is validating both his own wisdom as a monarch and the experience he gained as Daraïde.

Just before Agésilan is ready to shed the last vestiges of Daraïde and claim the human prize for delivering Florisel to a changed Sidonie, she queries:

Oui, ce prix vous est dû; mais, ô belle guerrière,
Que peut-elle pour vous? . . .
Et que servent les biens dont on ne peut user? (5.5)

Sidonie's questions echo Diane's earlier inquiry, "Mais quel seroit le fruit de cette passion?" (3.1) Now, answered by the revelation of Agésilan's true gender, Rotrou restores all to order as per contemporaneous expectations of *bienséance*, if not entirely respecting those of *vraisemblance*.

Forestier and more recently Harris have indicated that despite the dearth of plays showcasing male-to-female transvestism of a prince, those that were produced, including *Agésilan*, were received without incident, proving that in tragicomedy, "le changement de sexe n'était pas jugé incompatible avec ce type de personnage, ou du moins que les effets permis par la dialectique virilité-féminité pouvaient le justifier" (Forestier 133). However, our understanding of this particular application of the tragicomic form should not rest there. We must also fully engage with the contemporaneous debate surrounding the essential character of tragicomedy and the sometimes problematic reception it received during those years when this form of theatre developed new configurations and challenged, by its very flexibility, prevailing and increasingly intractable theatrical doctrine.

If little is known about the reception of *Agésilan de Colchos* beyond the favorable notices Rotrou generally enjoyed, the absence of evidence to the contrary suggests that he escaped the sort of invective directed, for instance, at Corneille's *Le Cid*, two years later. While Corneille's tragicomedy had no transvestism and was more palpably steeped in tragedy, the polemic surrounding its performance, quite apart from an invidious political undercurrent, was indicative of a stark clash between theory and practice, formula and creativity. The famous accusations levelled at Corneille were numerous. They touched on nearly every aspect of his creation that could be construed as offending the increasingly doctrinaire attitudes of the critics; from his purloining of Spanish source material, to his disregard of the unities and *vraisemblance*, from the flouting of internal cohesion with the inclusion of a secondary, unnecessary story line, all the way to the neglect of *bienséance* with, among other things, the inappropriate depiction of duels on stage.

In short, the quarrel invoked a laundry list of offences, most of which could have been levelled at Rotrou's work as well, but apparently were not. The dramatic unities of time and place in *Agésilan de Colchos* are spectacularly absent, the unity of action is somewhat tenuous if Morello's criticism of an imposed and secondary plotline is given some weight, verisimilitude is certainly stretched, there are a number of staged duels, and the source material lies in a Spanish sequel to *Amadis de Gaule*.

The point, here, is not to compare Corneille's masterpiece with Rotrou's *Agésilan de Colchos*, but rather to underline the uniquely creative atmosphere that prevailed during tragicomedy's most formative years when reactions were seemingly dictated by the behavior of its arbiters. Though not yet at the zenith of his dramaturgical acumen, Rotrou was certainly approaching the height of his popularity when this play was first presented. Given his influence and the power of his benefactors including Cardinal Richelieu,¹³ Rotrou and his work would necessarily have come under scrutiny at this time. Yet a play that challenged theoretical doctrine and even theological stricture¹⁴ and legal precedent¹⁵ with a seriously sustained act of male cross-dressing, seems to have escaped criticism on any scale, much less that with which Corneille was so famously assailed.

We are left to speculate in a more general sense on where Rotrou's specialized depiction of transvestism in high tragicomedy should be situated within the emerging debate on this form of theatre. It is conceivable that monarchy interleaved with male transvestism, where the hero is redeemed and returned to appropriate glory, was implicitly and sufficiently acceptable to

forestall criticism arising from the fundamental impropriety of the transvestite state. As for the other contraventions of form and function, they were perhaps obscured by the very high profile of the transvestite intrigue. Alternatively, it could be argued that *Agésilan de Colchos*, more than *Le Cid*, shows evidence of Rotrou's ability, possibly at the expense of his long-term legacy, to mediate the crucial transition at this juncture in the history of French theatre between the staid and comfortable pastoral tradition, the vibrant excesses of the baroque, and the grand formality that was to mark the so-called "classical" period.

Rotrou was clearly experimenting in *Agésilan de Colchos* with a new and exuberant form of tragicomedy, but in bringing together the somewhat disparate styles of pastoral, romance, and tragedy, it is more than likely that the play was received in the spirit of his earlier tragicomedies that were much more oriented to the comic and lacked the *gravitas* of a tragic element. The very fact that *Agésilan* follows in the footsteps of d'Urfé's *Celadon* perhaps guaranteed acceptance, if only because it confirmed a revered and familiar topos. I suggest, however, that the figure of *Agésilan* ought not be dismissed as simply referential.

In retrospect, as we become attuned to the gendered aspects of the human condition, we can better appreciate Rotrou's guidance of *Agésilan* through a process of maturation that both coincides with and is attributable to his time as *Daraïde*. The result of his transvestite adventure far exceeds the original aim of simple conquest. In this rare staging of male cross-dressing, the author presents a figure who gains an introspective advantage from his transvestite experience. By way of his female persona, *Agésilan* is enveloped in a prescriptive shroud that permits a previously aimless sense of masculinity to be replaced with one that engages in the difficult process of learning to develop and to reconcile the private sense of self and the public sense of duty that ultimately make the man a King.

Notes

¹Among the hundreds of productions that fall within the hundred-and-thirty year purview of Forestier's study, he identifies only sixteen rare works, regardless of *genre*, that feature male-to-female transvestism. Most were produced between 1629 and 1640 as a direct result of the *Astréfactor* discussed later in this article.

²Forestier identifies only six plays that fall into this rarefied category: Du Ryer's *Argénis et Poliarque* (1629), Rampalle's *La Bélinde* (1630), Gougenot's *La Fidèle Tromperie* (1633), Desfontaines' *Eurimédon* (1635), Rotrou's *Agésilan de Colchos* (1635), and Mareschal's *La Cour bergère* (1640). A much longer article encompassing the significance of all six of these plays awaits further research.

³The full scope of the debate includes many of the challenging questions raised by multiple depictions of gender-altering disguise, though their inclusion was subordinated to a lengthy discourse on the greater codification of poetic and theatrical doctrine undertaken by La Mesnardière, d'Aubignac, and Jean Chapelain, among others.

⁴Rotrou is frequently cited just after Corneille, Racine, and Molière as the fourth great playwright of the French seventeenth century. However, Vuillemin recently suggested that he is better described as "le plus éminent des moins éminents dramaturges du Grand Siè-

cle” (*Célébrations nationales 2009* 84). Rotrou favored the form of tragicomedy throughout his tenure as *poète à gages* at the Hôtel de Bourgogne between 1629 and 1636.

⁵Seifert dedicated a chapter to the famously transvestite Abbé de Choisy who wrote both fiction and non-fiction inspired by his transvestism. He presents Choisy as an example of transvestism as experience rather than artificial performance. Though well before Choisy, Rotrou demonstrates a prescient understanding that what begins as transvestite *performance* may become transvestite and even cross-gendered *experience*.

⁶The elusive definition of *masculinity* during any age has recently figured as a major question in gender and men’s studies. Along with Seifert’s work which points to the mutability of masculinity during the French seventeenth century, there are some notable recent works on the subject including David Laguardia, *Intertextual Masculinity in French Renaissance Literature: Rabelais, Brantôme and the ‘Cent nouvelles nouvelles’* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), and Stefan Dudink, ed., *Representing Masculinity: Male Citizenship in Modern Western culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

⁷For contemporaneous definitions of tragicomedy see: Pierre Richelet *Dictionnaire François contenant les mots et les choses*, Antoine Furetière *Le Dictionnaire Universel*, and the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 1ère édition.

⁸Note an important discussion of *L’Astrée’s* influence on transvestism as a topos in general and those rare occurrences of male-to-female cross-dressing, in particular, in Harris 113-25.

⁹In emphasizing this characteristic, Rotrou closely echoes the sixteenth-century text, books eleven and twelve of Silva’s *Amadis de Gaule*, that furnished the plot and atmosphere of the play as evidenced here, for example: “Nous sommes tous deux encore sans poil au menton: nous nous acoustrerons en Damoyelles, & en cet habit irons presenter nostre service à la Royné Sidonie pour nous donner à sa fille, de qui dirons que la renomee nous aura là amenee” XI.xv.

¹⁰See Brooks for an extensive discussion of the complex relationship between gender, identity, and music with particular reference to the *Amadis de Gaule* story.

¹¹This parallel has been mentioned before with reference to *Agésilan de Colchos*, by Morello, Harris, and Baby-Litot, among others.

¹²Included among other examples of seventeenth-century plays in which a sustained transvestite experience (frequently female-to-male) is an enriching one are: Rotrou’s *La Célémène* (1633), Philippe Quinault’s *Le Feint Alcibiade* (1658), and Antoine de Montfleury’s *La Femme juge et partie* (1669).

¹³Rotrou was already part of the *Cinq Auteurs* overseen by Richelieu at the time and in the Epître preceding *Agésilan de Colchos*, he dedicates the work to Richelieu’s niece, Marie de Vignerot du Pont-de-Courlay, Marquise de Combalet et Duchesse d’Aiguillon, a powerful benefactor in her own right, known for her patronage of some of Corneille’s more controversial work. *Le Cid* was also dedicated to her.

¹⁴Early seventeenth-century mindset in this regard was informed by the unequivocal biblical proscription of cross-dressing as ascribed to Moses in the book of Deuteronomy 22.5: “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God”

¹⁵Steinberg undertakes a lengthy discussion of the legal and moralist attitude to trans-vestism, noting its illegality but concluding that real acts of male-to-female cross-dressing were judged far more severely (“pratiques infâmes”) than infractions perpetrated by women (16-17), potentially making the decision to cross-dress by Agésilan (both man and king) even more susceptible to controversy.

Works Cited

- Aubignac, François-Hédelin (l’abbé de). *La Pratique du théâtre: Oeuvre très-nécessaire à tous ceux qui veulent s’appliquer à la composition des poèmes dramatiques*. Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1657. Print.
- Brooks, Jeanice. “Music as Erotic Magic in a Renaissance Romance.” *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 1207-56. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Cornelle, Pierre. *Le Cid*. Paris: A. Courbé, 1637. Print.
- Crawford, Katherine. *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2004. Print.
- Forestier, Georges. *Esthétique de L’identité dans le Théâtre Français, 1550-1680: Le Déguisement et ses avatars*. Genève: Droz, 1988. Print.
- Harris, Joseph. *Hidden Agendas: Cross-Dressing in 17th-Century France*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2005. Print.
- La Mesnardière, Hippolyte Jules Pilet de. *La Poétique*. Paris: 1640. Geneva: Slatkine, 1972. Print.
- Morel, Jacques. *Jean Rotrou: Dramaturge de l’ambiguïté*. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968. Print.
- Morello, Joseph. *Jean Rotrou*. Boston: Twayne, 1980. Print.
- Rotrou, Jean. *Agésilan de Colchos*. Paris: Sommaville, 1637. Print.
- . *Agésilan de Colchos: Tragi-comédie en cinq actes*. Préf. Hélène Baby-Litot. Paris: Cicéro, 1992. Print.
- Seifert, Lewis. *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2009. Print.
- Silva, Feliciano de. *Amadis de Gaule*. Trans. Jacques Gohory. Paris: Jean Longis, 1554. Print.
- Urfé, Honoré d’. *L’Astrée*, ed. Hugues Vaganay. Tome IV. 1607-1625; Paris: Masson, 1926; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1966. Print.
- Vuillemin, Jean-Claude. *Baroquisme et théâtralité: Le théâtre de Jean Rotrou*. Paris, Seattle, Tübingen: Biblio 17, 1994. Print.
- . “Jean de Rotrou (1609-1650).” *Célébrations nationales 2009*. Ed. Martine de Boisdeffre. Paris: Direction des Archives de France, 2009. Print.
- Zuerner, Adrienne. “(Re)constructing Gender: Cross-dressing in Seventeenth-century French Literature.” Diss. U of Michigan, 1993. Print.