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**The Androgynous Ideal in Twentieth-
Century Feminist Literature:
Woolf, Carter, Winterson and Harpman**

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This work has not previously been submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from other work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

'The Androgynous Ideal in Twentieth-Century Feminist Literature:

Woolf, Carter, Winterson and Harpman'

This thesis is an investigation of the concepts of androgyny used in the work, both theory and fiction, of Virginia Woolf, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and Jacqueline Harpman. Androgyny is an idea which is thousands of years old, and an overview of its presence in religion, mythology and psychology is included as background to its representation in the work of these writers. The basic concept of androgyny in this context, is one in which the psychological aspects of 'masculine' and 'feminine', as generally understood by Western society, are synthesised into a harmonious and balanced whole within each individual. Within a feminist epistemology, it offers an opportunity to escape the power structures and value systems of patriarchy, and to attain individual fulfilment in both writing and identity. Virginia Woolf introduces the idea of androgyny into feminist literary theory in A Room of One's Own and into feminist ontology through the androgynous protagonist of Orlando, although the binary distinction between theory and fiction is deliberately blurred. Angela Carter continues the examination of androgyny with regard to women and writing in The Sadeian Woman and 'Notes from the Front Line', and explores androgyny fictionally in The Passion of New Eve. Jeanette Winterson returns to Woolf's ideas and develops them in Art Objects and creates the ultimate androgynous character in Written on the Body. Jacqueline Harpman revisits and recreates Woolf's

fiction from a contemporary perspective in Orlanda. Differences are identified in the style and approach of these writers, resulting from their respective historical contexts, starting points, and intentions. However, the commonalities are examined in greater detail, including analogous ideas and tropes, as well as references to and interrelations with each other. The connection between Woolf's work and that of Winterson and Harpman is identified as particularly strong. Through the examination of their work, the four writers are found to have similar feminist beliefs and concerns: there is a common interest in the emancipation of women from the constraints of patriarchy, implemented through a deconstruction of gender essentialism and artificial gendering processes. Furthermore, a utopian concern is identified, in all four writers, with the creation of a new space which exists beyond the confines of patriarchy in which the woman writer is able to create freely, and the woman subject is able to develop freely. Although the writers are dealt with chronologically, the cyclical aspect of their work is emphasised, as well as their cyclical relationship to one another, through their common androgynous vision. The continuing presence of the androgynous ideal is taken as indicative of its strength. The conclusion is drawn that, although the concept of androgyny tends to be highly idealised in the work of these writers, it is a viable option for the transformation of both society and the individual. These writers are creating the awareness of the artificial nature of gender, which is required for the transformation to begin.

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*Chapter illustrations from Introducing Jung (Hyde & McGuiness, 1992)

For my family

One

Introduction



'The Mercurial Fountain'

The concept of androgyny is one that has permeated Western culture in a variety of epistemological and mythological contexts, occupying an assortment of forms and value positions. It manifested itself primarily within the domains of religion, both occultic and orthodox, until the twentieth century, when certain feminists and psychoanalysts adopted it. Both groupings employed androgyny as an expedient in ontological development, recognising its potential to overcome divisions and oppositions within the individual, in interpersonal relationships, in society and in culture. The four writers - Woolf, Carter, Winterson and Harpman - examined in this thesis all utilise positive androgynous tropes in their work, in theory and in fiction, and all operate within feminist paradigms. My intention is to trace the course of the androgynous ideal through their work, and their consequent relationship to each other.

The writers are dealt with in chronological order, starting with Woolf and concluding with Harpman, in an effort to reflect the external influence of historical context on their work. However, in relation to each other, they reflect the cyclical unity that is a feature of the androgynous ideal, which they portray in their work. The stages of the chronological sequence, which charts the shifting perspectives of these writers, reflect the mystical process of the alchemical marriage, from its idealistic beginning, through the shadowy stages of the middle phase, to the concluding attainment of utopian immortality through the incarnation of the androgynous ideal. The chapters are consequently arranged in conjunction with these ten stages, including the introduction and conclusion, and the second chapter, which offers a historicist overview of the mythological and psychoanalytic origins of androgyny. The introduction reflects the first stage of the alchemical process – the mercurial fountain. It establishes the parameters within which the process will occur and introduces the basic components,

which are as yet unredeemed. The requisite elements and authors are separated out from the amorphous amalgamation of cultural discourses of gender and literature.

The four authors whom I analyse in this thesis were chosen primarily for their engagement with the idea of androgyny, but also for their feminist principles. This does not necessarily imply ideological homogeneity, although many of their ideas and beliefs do overlap. My definition of feminism, in this specific context, is a concern with questions of gender difference and its cultural construction within a patriarchal society. It includes a deconstructive approach to the essentialist equation of biological sex and gender, which involves a transgression of the boundaries of phallocentrism and heterosexism. Lastly it entails an interest in the transformation of both society and individual ontology to reflect balance and plurality. In the context of this thesis, feminism is not that which advocates separatism or a universal model of 'Woman', as epitomised by the 1960s and 1970s radical feminism of Rich, Bunch and Daly (Humm, 1995: 256). In *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Carter satirises the radical separatist form of feminism, emphasising the necessity of the male component in society and the importance of heterogeneous female paradigms, as do Woolf, Winterson and Harpman.

Although the writers studied do not always use them in the same way, for the purposes of clarity I have defined the terms relating to gender as follows. (These definitions are primarily based on those of contemporary feminism and psychoanalysis: Butler 1990, Curti 1998 and Burr 1998.) Sex refers to the biological characteristics of male or female, relating to chromosomes, hormones and external genitalia. Gender refers to the personality traits and behaviours that are traditionally

defined as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. It is important to note that these terms tend to reflect social stereotypes not the individual realities of men and women, and will be used in inverted commas where this is the case. The stereotypical understanding of 'femininity' includes the traits of passivity, sensitivity, nurturance, emotion, intuition and an interest in reproduction; 'masculinity' is understood to include strength, assertiveness/aggression, logic, deductive skills, and an interest in production. It is against these culturally constructed stereotypes that the four featured writers tend to rebel: against the attachment of these characteristics to a specific gender. The underlying idea is that these are common characteristics that all humans are capable of evincing, and that a balanced combination of all of them is the ontological ideal.

This ideal is that of ontological androgyny. It is fundamentally important to distinguish between hermaphroditism, a biological condition in which the two sexes coexist in a single individual, and androgyny, which relates to synthesised balance within the metaphysical aspects of the individual. Nor is androgyny a synonym for transvestism (which relates to alterable aspects of external appearance), asexualism (the eunuch in which sex has been removed) or bisexuality (which relates to interpersonal relations, not intra-psychic ones). However, bisexuality is often associated with androgyny as its logical manifestation in interpersonal interaction, and because of its analogous rejection of phallogentric monovalency.

Androgyny is often misconstrued because of its allotropic nature as monstrous hybridity. The variety of forms that it has assumed through time are discussed further in Chapter Two, but most simply defined, androgyny refers to the balanced synthesis of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in a given individual. The unified elements are all

complete in themselves but are contained and balanced within the androgynous entity. As Mary Daly points out, androgyny is often misinterpreted as “John Wayne and Brigitte Bardot scotch-taped together” (1993: 160). O’Flaherty identifies three modes of androgyny: firstly ‘splitting’, in which a single entity is differentiated into its male and female components in order to procreate; secondly ‘fusing’, in which previously separate elements are synthesised into a balanced whole; and thirdly ‘two-in-one’, in which two individuals join in divine hierogamy (1980: 292). The definition that I am utilising is that of ‘fusion’, although hierogamy does appear in the novels of Woolf, Carter and Winterson.

The dual presentation of one work of ‘theory’ and one of ‘fiction’ for Woolf, Carter and Winterson is not intended as a dichotomization of their work, but as an analysis that extends beyond pure fiction. All three writers deliberately transgress genre boundaries and theory and fiction tend to merge in their writing; the theory is significant in terms of the often subliminal influence that it exerts on their narratives, and all of them incorporate fictional elements in their theoretical discourses. Ideas regarding gender, society, writing, sexuality and immortality are easily transposed from theory to fiction and vice versa.

There is a common concern among the writers with the creation a new space in which the female subject can be reconstituted, and the journey to that space. All four writers imbue it with a utopian character, which reflects the desired transformation of the individual and her environment, and of the language in which she is constituted. They all bear marked similarities to the theories of the French feminists, particularly Cixous’s essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ and Kristeva’s ‘Women’s Time’ (both in

Warhol & Herndl, 1991). Each writer develops a version of 'écriture féminine' that is contiguous to her own conceptualisation of androgyny.

Woolf's introduces the theory of androgyny in A Room of One's Own (1929) and portrays it in Orlando (1928), in which the protagonist undergoes a miraculous sex change that is convergent with his/her androgynous personality. Carter continues the idea in The Sadeian Woman (1979) and 'Notes from the Front Line' (1983), and The Passion of New Eve (1977), whose protagonist achieves psychological androgyny only after an enforced surgical sex change. Winterson develops the concept further in Art Objects (1995) and Written on the Body (1992), whose central character already has an androgynous personality, and whose ambiguous sex is deliberately concealed. Harpman completes the cycle by revisiting Woolf's theory from a current perspective in Orlanda (1996).

The conceptualisations that these writers offer are all intended to transform the bifurcated nature of society by demolishing the idea of constructed gender. However to achieve a discussion without using the traditional terms is virtually impossible. They all to some extent employ ideas of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' to elucidate their ideas, but androgyny by definition contains the seeds of its own destruction since once the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' have ceased to have meaning, so to will androgyny. When androgyny is achieved, the concept ceases to exist.

Two

Background



'The Sinister Union'

The images and significations of androgyny that pervade Western mythology and religion, both orthodox and occultic, can be traced back thousands of years.¹ The occurrence and development of the androgyne within these domains has moulded contemporary perceptions and applications of the androgynous concept. From various cosmogonies through to alchemy, the enduring androgynous principle or entity performs a crucial role; it is representative of the wholeness and balance that existed as the primordial condition. It is also the modality that is revered as the epitome of existential perfection. These cultural and religious traditions represent the various forms that the King and Queen, the alchemical representations of 'masculine' and 'feminine', have taken through history. In the second alchemical stage, the sinister union, these two basic components converge in a symbolic marriage, in the same way that various cultural and religious discourses have combined to create a hegemonic gender paradigm.

The world is a composite of positive and negative, light and dark, male and female, birth and death. The Sun is the Lord of Day and Heaven; the Moon is the Lady of Night and subconscious. United in the Mystical Marriage, they form the Child, the human race, the inheritor of both qualities. The union of Mars and Venus produces Harmony. Beauty cannot exist without contraries. Opposites produce concord. (Wasserman, 1993: 75)

The androgynous principle is present in Greek, Egyptian and Judaeo-Christian cosmogony, in all four of the manifestations O'Flaherty identifies: fusing, splitting, bilateral, and twins. It also exists in many Asian and African religions, but these are less likely to have influenced Western conceptions of androgyny (O'Flaherty, 1980). Gnosticism and the Kabbalah prominently feature androgynous ideals, as do the more secular occultic practices of alchemy and astrology. Certain versions of androgyny are

¹ Heilbrun, Singer, O'Flaherty and Badinter have all undertaken extensive feminist-oriented studies of androgyny, and it is unnecessary to replicate their work. A brief

accepted in mainstream religious orthodoxy, while others are dismissed as heretical. Judaeo-Christian representations of androgyny are seldom questioned in contemporary society, while alchemical or Kabbalistic depictions continue to be stigmatised as threatening and unnatural.

The most influential creation mythologies are probably the Greek and the Judaeo-Christian, both of which are saturated with oppositional and complementary dualisms. In Greek mythology, the majority of the binaries are analogous or reducible to a central male/female dichotomy; in Judaeo-Christianity the dualisms reflect the essential opposition of good and evil. The commonality in these cosmogonies, as in many others, is the primitive Chaos (formless void or watery abyss) from which the dualities originally emerge (Comte, 1991: 5). Greek myths fail to offer a causative explanation for the emergence of the first deity from the Chaos, but Judaeo-Christian cosmogony is predicated on the a priori existence of a divine being by whose supreme will the Chaos is transformed. In containing the essence of all existence, Chaos necessarily incorporates both male and female, and is therefore generally perceived of as androgynous.

Hellenic myths chronicle the division of the Chaos into male and female deities, who representatively encompass all aspects of the universe. In some versions of Greek theogony, Chaos is the original male deity, whose consort is Nyx (Night); together they rule the formless void. Their son Erebus (Darkness) dethrones Chaos, and mates with his mother to produce Light and Day, who then seize power (Guerber, 1994: 4). In the Pelasgian cosmogony, Eurynome (the Goddess of All Things) rises from chaos

overview of the predominating concepts should suffice.

and fashions the serpent Ophion out of the north wind. They then mate to produce the Universal Egg (Graves, 1960: 27). In every version, the deities and their offspring have a consort of the opposite sex, which enables them to reproduce further. Both male and female components are understood to be indispensable to the creation and functioning of the universe, but are generally portrayed as split yet co-dependent entities in a hierogamous relationship, rather than as a fused androgynous being.

The deities of the Greek cosmogony reflect a primordial androgynous essence that is analogously represented in anthropogenetic myth. In terms of androgyny, Aristophanes's myth of the splitting of the original humans, which is found in Plato's Symposium, has enjoyed the most sustained interest:

In the ancient times there were three kinds of beings, each with four legs and four arms: male, female and androgynous. They grew too powerful and conspired against the gods, and so Zeus sliced them in two. The parts derived from the whole males are the ancestors of those men who tend to homosexuality... from the whole females are the ancestors of women who incline to be lesbians. The androgynes, who are nowadays regarded with scorn, gave rise to men who are woman-lovers... and to women who are man-lovers. (In O'Flaherty, 1980: 295)

This myth portrays relationships within and between the sexes as being founded on mutual need, associating androgyny with heterosexuality, but portraying homosexuality in a more positive light. This ancient scorn for the androgynes survives in modern-day pejorative perceptions, yet the attitude towards sexuality has been reversed. Ironically, Aristophanes offers no explanation for bisexuality, with which androgyny is now commonly connected and often mistakenly equated. The myth nevertheless emphasises the importance of sexual desire as intrinsic to the human quest for concord. Wasserman asserts that "Sex is the mirror of divine unity manifested as polarity – duality seeking its counterpart on earth, 'divided for love's sake, for the chance of union.' Lust is the key to the universe" (1993: 75).

The preponderance of androgyny tropes in Greek myth and literature gave rise to a series of dualities, which are connotatively related to the basic male/female dyad. These connotative oppositions have largely continued into current ideology, as abstracts rather than deistic personifications. The male components, which have become aligned with 'masculinity', include the sun, day, the heavens, war, knowledge and production. The 'feminine' elements encompass the moon, night, earth, love, wisdom, the home and reproduction. These archaic dichotomies have formed the foundation of modern patriarchal doctrine. Cixous claims that with the demise of this type of phallocentrism and the development of multiplicity,

[w]hat today appears to be 'masculine' or 'feminine' would no longer amount to the same thing. No longer would the common logic of difference be organized with the opposition that remains dominant. Difference would be a bunch of new differences... But we are still floundering – with few exceptions – in Ancient History. (In Curti, 1998: 89)

Heilbrun identifies the Victorian era as the apotheosis of this patriarchal trend, and argues that the ideas that underpin this remain, for the most part unquestioned as part of cultural inheritance (1973: xiii-xiv).

The part that Judaeo-Christianity plays is perhaps greater than that of Graeco-Roman discourse, but no less insidious; the received concepts of the orthodox canon have extensively permeated secular thought, and are widely and unquestioningly accepted. Their authenticity remains integral, despite their antiquated origins; the influence exerted by the Judeo-Christian religion has, in fact, been amplified by its long-standing history. The Judaeo-Christian god is generally perceived as 'masculine', although the cosmogony indicates an androgynous being.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis, 1: 26-27)

For both male and female to be a reflection of the creator, that deity necessarily combines both elements. This detail is evident, yet simultaneously obscured by the phallogocentric language. The Judaeo-Christian anthropogenesis has a similar androgynous nuance:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam... and he took one of his ribs... And the rib made he a woman... And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. Therefore shall a man... cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Ibid. 2)

This implies a fusion of the two sexes into a single entity. This androgynous essence is mutely acknowledged, but subsumed within the patriarchal construct, through the linguistic bias of masculine pronouns, and the precedence afforded to Adam.

In the mystic practices, such as Kabbalism and Gnosticism, the androgynous nature of God is accentuated and the sexual nature of the universe is acknowledged. The duality of spirit and flesh is one of the central noumenons of Gnosticism, and part of the Gnostics' search for self-knowledge. They sought 'gnosis' (knowledge) of their true selves and their divine origins in order to attain the 'pleroma' (fullness/plurality) that would ensure salvation (Browning, 1996: 151-2). Gnosticism imbued all aspects of creation with duality and androgyny, and thus necessitated a consciousness of the opposites within each individual, and a practical system of unification (Singer, 1977: 134).

Kabbalistic doctrine includes a cosmogony that describes the ten successive steps from nothingness to existence, represented in the Tree of Life (Wasserman, 1993: 26). Each of the points on the tree is assigned a sexual character: the Crown is masculine, the base feminine. The points (branches) on the left, Intelligence, Judgement/Power and Honour, are feminine; those on the right, Wisdom, Mercy/Love and Victory are

masculine. Notably, the gendering of the lateral points is the reverse of most other doctrines. The middle points of Beauty and the Foundation (Sense of Being) are both androgynous (Singer, 1977: 160 – 165). The ten points of the Tree of Life represent an androgynous whole comprised of independent but inseparable components. When all these aspects of creation are perfectly balanced, an androgynous harmony exists within the cosmos, and hence within the individual. This harmony is the objective of Kabbalistic and Gnostic practices.

Alchemy, related to Gnosticism and Kabbalism through its origins in hermetic philosophy, epitomises the theory of androgynous fusion and cosmic duality. The aspiration of the alchemists was to assist God in redeeming humanity by “liberating the individual from false concepts and preprogrammed ideas, and to redeem God from matter” (Singer, 1977: 141). The matter/spirit binary is essential to this idea, as is the male/female dichotomy and the opposites of birth and death. The search for immortality through salvation, for the Philosopher’s Stone in primary matter, was always performed by a male adept with a female assistant. The Three Principles represented by Sulphur (male), Mercury (female) and Salt (neutral child) are central to the alchemical process (Wasserman, 1993: 93). The seven gendered planets and corresponding minerals are also invoked in the attempt to establish harmony in the universe.

The attempt to distil primary matter, purify and reconstitute it, to create gold from lead, has certain analogies to the production of literature. The transmutation takes place in a container (athanor), which also symbolises the human body; it is a place where undisturbed contemplation is possible. The process involves three powers: the

generative powers of the fire beneath the container; the mastered passions of the concentrated mind, which is the even heat of the sand in which the vessel rests; and the vital force, which is the latent heat of the chemical reaction (ibid.). This bears a notable similarity to Woolf's ideas in A Room of One's Own on the prerequisite conditions for writing – "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (1929: 4). The athanor represents this 'room of one's own' in which the woman writer is free to concentrate and create, to be a great artist if in possession of an androgynous mind.

The primal matter with which the alchemist works is signified by the hermaphrodite: the opposites are present but not yet differentiated. The matter is broken back down, thus creating 'nigredo', a state of chaos and despair. Purification then occurs and the elements recombine in an androgynous form. The analysis/distillation process is 'masculine', and the synthesis is 'feminine' (Singer, 1977: 142). The fusion of these 'masculine' and 'feminine' energies – the Chymical Marriage – creates the desired esoteric state. Although these energies are sometimes represented by men and women, they are not the exact equivalents, but rather symbolise the contrary aspects that exist in all matter, and within each person. This symbolic nature of alchemy enabled its adoption by Jung as an analogue of the psychoanalytic process.

The alchemical androgyne embodies fusion and wholeness, deictic of the Self's reaching its full potential – a balanced unity of body, mind and spirit. The attainment of this state in alchemy produces the Philosopher's Stone, which contains an equal balance of 'masculine' and 'feminine' properties in their perfected states. In addition this stone possesses the power to transmute other matter, in a multiplicative cycle of

renewal. The cyclic aspects of alchemic philosophy are represented by Ouroboros, the dragon biting its own tail – day follows night, spring succeeds winter (Warlick, 1997: 72-76).

The perception of time, history and experience as cyclical is common among postmodernist writers. Hutcheon, in her exploration of postmodernism, identifies a challenging of the

Cultural and social assumptions that also condition our notions of both theory and art today: our beliefs in origins and ends, unity, and totalization, logic and reason, consciousness and human nature, progress and fate, representation and truth, not to mention the notions of causality and temporal homogeneity, linearity and continuity. (1988: 87)

Feminist authors, in particular, often oppose the patriarchal construction of time as linear (Kristeva in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 445). Winterson, for example, in the epigraph of *Sexing the Cherry*, problematizes the nature of time: “The Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future. The division does not exist. What does this say about the nature of time?” (1989). Later in the novel, Winterson presents a list of lies regarding time and reality. “*Lies 2* : Time is a straight line... *Lies 6* : Reality as something which can be agreed upon... *Lies 7* : Reality as truth” (ibid. 83).

North American mythologies, such as the Hopi cosmogony, are also laden with androgynous images (Ions, 1997: 31). Of particular interest, especially in the light of Freud’s castration theory, is the North American Trickster described by O’Flaherty:

He is primarily a “he,” but he not only masquerades as a female, but actually gives birth to children. He normally keeps his detached phallus in a box and is thus self-castrating: in order to have sexual intercourse, he removes it from the box and sends it to the woman. What his character represents... is a coincidence of opposites... it is primeval chaos. (1980: 286)

The image of the phallus in the box is clearly reminiscent of the scene towards the end of The Passion of New Eve where Leilah, now Lilith, offers Eve her surgically removed male genitals that are lying in a box on a bed of dry ice (Carter, 1977: 245). O'Flaherty also relates the myth of the Navajo 'nadle', whom she considers to be pseudo-androgynes, who acts as mediators in conflicts between men and women, acting as "sexual strike-breakers" (1980: 285).

The feminist writers explored in this thesis tend to employ the notion of androgyny as a means of mediating sexual conflict, and in its mytho-religious manifestation as the embodiment of holism and harmony. They are simultaneously endeavouring to deconstruct the patriarchal legacy of those same belief systems. Phallogocentric hermeneutic practices have produced biased interpretations of theology and cosmogony, giving rise to chauvinistic misrepresentations of the symbol and ideation of divine androgynous unity. These perversions have contributed to the construction of the patriarchal institutions and discourses that feminist writers seek to deconstruct.

These writers were presented with serious obstacles, and simultaneously with invaluable assistance, by the advent of psychology as an epistemology. The works of Freud and Jung have been particularly influential in this regard, and women continue to be negatively affected by some of the myths, which these two male theorists introduced into culture. Freud's theories relating to the phallus, sexuality and femininity, such as the Oedipus complex and the castration complex, which also draw on a Western cultural heritage, have transversed the boundary between the academic and the popular, to become familiar 'facts'.

Jung was responsible for the creation of myths that Carter describes as merely creating constraints for women:

In this most insulting mythic redefinition of myself, that of occult priestess, I am indeed allowed to speak but only of things that male society does not take seriously. I can hint at dreams, I can even personify the imagination; but that is only because I am not rational enough to cope with reality. (1979b: 5)

In spite of Jung's pejorative influence on the cultural perceptions of women, his psychoanalytic theories embrace the idea of androgyny. The concept of the animus and the anima as vital components of psychic completeness revalidated the androgynous ideal in Western culture (Hyde & McGuiness, 1992). Although his animus/anima theory is replete with patriarchal assumptions regarding the inferior position of women, it is nonetheless a far more positive view of androgyny than that offered by Freud. Freud conflated bisexuality and androgyny, regarding both as perversions that prohibited healthy mental functioning. He proclaimed the necessity of splitting the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' before creation was possible, reinforcing the social gender divisions and devaluing the androgynous principle (Mitchell, 1974).

In the 1970s androgyny began to enjoy a renewed interest among psychologists, social scientists and feminists. Although the subject of a substantial amount of debate, it continues to attract interest. The works of Heilbrun (1973), Singer (1977) and O'Flaherty (1980) have contributed to the refamiliarisation of the concept. Psychologists such as Vetterling-Braggin (1982), Cook (1985) and Burr (1998) employ the concept of androgyny as an integral part of mental health and social functioning. This revalidation of androgyny is evident in the works of Winterson and Harpman, while Woolf is still struggling to convince readers of androgyny's value. Carter stands on the point of transition between these conflicting epistemologies.

Three

Virginia Woolf:
A Room of One's Own



The theory of androgyny, which Virginia Woolf proposed in A Room of One's Own in 1929, has been the cause of considerable debate among literary theorists and feminists in particular. Some have welcomed it as a positive vision for the future, and others have condemned it as reactionary and disjointed. Nonetheless, the concept has enjoyed sustained interest during the intervening seventy years, and even its vehement detractors cannot entirely cast off its influence. Woolf's crucial essay has been continually re-evaluated by successive generations of feminists, each seeking to appropriate Woolf through a variety of approaches. The reappraisal continues within contemporary critical feminist epistemology. Many cultural transfigurations have occurred since the publication of A Room of One's Own; gender politics have undergone vast shifts, as has Woolf's role within them. Marcus called Woolf "a guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt" (1981: 1), and her visionary political ideas regarding androgyny and women writers have ensured her a continuing place in current gender debates. Woolf presents the naked truth, the third stage of the alchemical process, in which the symbolic elements of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are confronted without their conventional disguises. She offers a view of these concepts that progresses beyond the fictions and illusions with which society has obscured them.

A Room of One's Own is a political treatise, a socialist feminist critique of culture, but Woolf's style is an unusual amalgamation of theory and fiction. First-wave feminism had achieved suffrage for women by the time Woolf wrote A Room, but political equality did not ensure corresponding material and intellectual liberation, prerequisites for artistic freedom, according to Woolf. In A Room Woolf is advocating these complementary liberties, but the text extends beyond being a simple

feminist manifesto, arguing for £500 and a room of one's own. The style tends to the parodic, as Woolf uses fictional anecdotes to illustrate her argument. Showalter describes the book as, "teasing, sly, elusive... Woolf plays with her audience, refusing to be entirely serious" (1977: 283). Showalter utilises these adjectives pejoratively, but others, such as Moi (1985: 9-11) and Winterson (1995: 63, 67, 131), consider Woolf's style in a more positive light.

Woolf makes use of a variety of fictitious narrators in the elucidation of her theories.

"Woolf identifies herself as a writer of fiction, a 'liar'; she invents Oxbridge and Fernham, rejects 'I' as unreal, and claims anonymity through the three Marys" (Jay & Glasgow, 1992: 169). This polyphonic quality enables her to offer a number of perspectives, rather than monologically insisting on one indisputable truth, which Woolf considers typical of male writers (1929: 93). Her narrator in Chapter One declares,

At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial – and any question about sex is that – one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. (Ibid. 4)

Woolf is conveying her opinions, but evades a personal diatribe through the use of these narrators, corresponding to her multiplicitous themes. Humm refers to Woolf's technique as: "A free-ranging self-reflexivity appropriate to a political world where feminism can no longer focus on single issues like the vote" (1991: 21). Conversely, Showalter finds A Room "an extremely impersonal and defensive book" (1977: 282), but such negative interpretation has been re-evaluated with the development of the postmodernist quest for multiplicity. As if anticipating this ontological shift, Woolf favours a philosophical style that can accommodate a variety of subject positions. Her

refusal to constrain herself to one categorical position has proved to be one of A Room's greatest strengths.

Postmodernism has done much to dispel our desire for 'The Truth', for a single answer. Woolf's feminist approach offers a collection of perceptions through the experiences of her narrators. Her peroration is in her own words only an opinion (1929: 104), rather than a single indisputable truth. Moi praises Woolf's mobile pluralist point of view, for "radically undermin[ing] the notion of the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism and one crucial to Showalter's feminism" (1985: 7). Perhaps Woolf understood the concept of the multivalency of differing experiences – "The river reflected whatever it chose of sky and bridge and burning tree" (1929: 5). Her diffuse subject position has allowed feminists to reflect what they choose from the scenes Woolf presents.

In Chapter Two, Woolf suggests, in a sort of pre-Lacanian argument, that women have served as magic mirrors in which men identify their potency (ibid. 33). This facilitated the validation of the male ego, thereby enabling men to achieve their historical advances. The role of mirrors in existential development is one that has attained enormous significance in twentieth-century psychology, and features in all of the novels analysed in this thesis. For Woolf it is representative of women's role in history, which she offers as a preface to her study of the history of women's fiction. As she points out, "She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history" (ibid. 41). In A Room, Woolf's study of women's position in history acts mostly as an explanatory introduction to their position in literature, although her historical analysis is far more detailed in Three Guineas. She examines the

psychological and physical effects of history, which she first suggests in A Room as the causative factors for the historical position of women writers.

Woolf begins her historical analysis with the fictitious Judith Shakespeare, then examines Lady Winchilsea, whose writing displays an overpowering animosity towards men; Aphra Benn serves to illustrate Woolf's materialist claims. She then proceeds to an analysis of Jane Austen and the Brontës. Austen is conceived of as the paragon of women writers, "writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching," while Brontë is criticised for her emotionality:

One sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly... She will write of herself when she should write of her characters" (ibid. 63-65).

Woolf holds up these literary predecessors as an example to women in her audience who would be writers, not only as a stylistic guide, but because she believes that, "We think back through our mothers if we are women" (ibid. 70). Austen, Brontë and the others are the literary mothers of the modern woman writer. Woolf analyses this inherited tradition and isolates the flaws in their writing, such as overcompensation for previous frivolity in women's writing, but she also identifies their strengths.

For Woolf, one of Austen's greatest fortes is her use of language. Rather than accept the man-made language that dominated literature at the time, she developed her own discursive style, removed from the pervading masculinity of language and structure. Woolf argues that "There was no common sentence ready for her use... Jane Austen... devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use" (ibid. 71). Throughout A Room, Woolf is advocating a departure from the constraints of patriarchal culture, most importantly in materialist and linguistic terms.

Although she appears to be arguing for the development of a separate feminine style, she is actually advancing an approach that moves beyond gender, without disregarding the particular quality of female experience. “The rediscovery of a female literary tradition need not mean a return to specifically ‘female’ (that is, potentially confining) domains” (Belsey & Moore, 1989: 61).

In Chapter Four, Woolf proposes that “The book has somehow to be adapted to the body” (1929: 72), and perhaps she already succeeds in A Room. Marcus points out:

Woolf’s analysis of Mary Carmichael’s new novel is also couched in sexual terms. “I tried a sentence or two on my tongue” is also extremely suggestive. If Cixous wanted an example of “writing with the body” it is to be found here. (Jay & Glasgow, 1991: 168)

Although Woolf is referring to the physical rigours of writing, of rejecting outmoded patriarchal schedules, this subliminal implication is perceptible. She wishes to recognise women’s bodies as an integral part of the creative process, although her methods are extremely subtle. The connection between bodies and language, which Woolf establishes, is a fundamental aspect of subsequent feminist theories: bodies are sites of signification, and the linguistic inscription of the female body plays an intrinsic role in patriarchal constructs. However, Woolf’s overt proposition is valuable in its recognition of the physical constraints imposed on women – childbearing, and the responsibility for child rearing. Without the transformation of the social division of labour, women’s literary potential remains closely circumscribed.

In the build-up to her theory of androgyny, Woolf examines the socially prescribed roles for men and women, the culturally constructed roles of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. She is moving beyond the purely political to personal sexual politics, to an

exploration of male and female psychology. "Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Woolf... [was] capturing and resignifying masculinity and femininity in psychoanalytic terms" (Humm, 1991: 17). Clearly psychology interested Woolf; in Three Guineas, she engages in a detailed critique of some of Freud's theories, for example the Oedipus complex, the castration complex, and the idea of woman as 'man manqué' (1938: 248ff). She admits her own status as an amateur, but declares that, "if common men and women are to be free they must learn to speak freely, we cannot leave the psychology of the sexes to the charge of specialists" (ibid. 252). In her assessment of various male writers in terms of androgynous balance, Woolf identifies certain characteristics as 'masculine'. Some are the positive effects of male material and political advantages, such as freedom and confidence, while others are the negative results of their corruptive power – self-conscious virility, egotism, and lack of emotional expression. She draws a parallel between the "self-assertive virility" of certain male writers, and the Fascist movement in Europe, which she accuses of "unmitigated masculinity" (1929: 96). Consequently the Fascist poem will be, in her opinion, "a horrid little abortion" (ibid.).

Woolf continues the connection between men and war in Three Guineas, in which she advises women to utilise their different position to create a "Society of Outsiders" whose aims would be "freedom, equality, peace" (1938: 234). She points to differences in sex, tradition and education as having instilled these alternative values in women, arguing that 'masculine'/'feminine' differentiations exist to create divisions, to justify the exclusion of women from particular spheres of society. While Woolf objects to many of these exclusions, she embraces women's distance from the masculine bellicosity. "For though many instincts are held more or less in common by

both sexes, to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental" (ibid. 113).

If Fascism is the epitome of masculinity, then femininity is represented by the Angel in the House, a debilitating and constrictive personification of the feminine 'values' imposed by patriarchy that Woolf described in 'Professions for Women'.

It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her... You may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House... She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily... In short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own... Above all – I need not say it – she was pure... Had I not killed her she would have killed me. (in Barrett, 1979: 59)

Woolf posited that the practice of charming self-effacement was a means of maintaining male dominance, as the Angel is a male-created 'phallacy'. Nevertheless, Woolf shrewdly uses the Angel's evasive tactics to convey her message without incurring the censure of the establishment, with the result that "Truths which would never have passed the Angel's lips are slipped in under cover of playful anecdote and parody" (Lee, 1984: xi). Woolf clearly disapproves of both excessive 'masculinity' and 'femininity', which compels her to look for a middle ground.

If Woolf had held essentialist beliefs regarding gender, a middle ground may not have been possible, but she is clearly a social determinist, which allows for the possibility of alternative social constructions. If existing gender roles have been constructed or determined by patriarchal conventions, then, by extrapolation, the possibility exists to reconstruct gender through the utilisation of an alternative social paradigm. Western culture has long assigned certain human characteristics to a particular gender, and vice versa; they are metaphysical distinctions that have become thoroughly entrenched in

society through internalisation. However they are arbitrary distinctions, and characteristics such as logic and reason, traditionally 'masculine', are as likely to exist in women as emotion and intuition are to exist in men. Society has emphasised certain traits in men and repressed others, as it has in women. Woolf asserts that to sustain this unnatural division requires an increasingly strenuous effort:

But some of these states of mind seem, even if adopted spontaneously, to be less comfortable than others. In order to keep oneself continuing in them one is unconsciously holding something back, and gradually the repression becomes an effort. But there may be some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back. (1929: 91)

Once freed from the confinement of traditional gender constructions, women would be able to develop innovative values for themselves, without automatically resulting in a reactionary move to an oppressively 'feminine' sphere of influence. Woolf believed that either extreme – 'masculine' or 'feminine' – was equally dangerous. To privilege one set of characteristics to the exclusion of the other could only be to the detriment of society. By rejecting the 'feminine' parts of the psyche, men prove themselves to be barbarians, no matter how civilised and accomplished they appear. As Woolf argues in Three Guineas, men have created modern society, with its evils of war, dictatorships, avarice and rivalry, through an excess of virility. Thus pacifists are fighting the same enemy – tyranny - that feminists are fighting, "that our mothers and grandmothers fought" (1938: 222).

Woolf refers to culture as an "amorphous bundle, swaddled... in insincerity, emitting half-truths" (ibid. 218). Patriarchal culture is buttressed by science, which asserts an indisputable correlation between sex and gender:

Nature was called in; Nature it was claimed who is not only omniscient but unchanging, had made the brain of women the wrong shape or size... Science, it would seem, is not sexless; she is a man, a father and infected too... Still Nature held out. The brain that could pass examinations was not the creative

brain... It was a practical brain... fitted for routine work under the command of a superior... But are not brain and body affected by training. Does not the wild rabbit differ from the rabbit in the hutch? And must we not, and do we not change this unalterable nature? (Ibid. 263)

Woolf tends to be particular about differentiating between masculinity and maleness – the latter is physical and the former metaphysical. Men are not necessarily ‘masculine’ although they are apt to have a predominance of ‘masculine’ traits, probably because of their social indoctrination. For Woolf this indicates that she can pursue a visionary society where men and women are no longer at cross-purposes. In a world where patriarchal conditioning has ceased, ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ can co-exist as equals, and therefore androgyny becomes feasible.

Before this possibility can be realised however, broad social restructuring needs to occur. Traditional stereotypes and phallogocentric value systems require transformation before individual development can be fully realised. Woolf identifies the destruction caused to literature by this signified patriarchal valency:

Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are ‘important’; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes ‘trivial’. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction... A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop – everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists. (1929: 69)

Early women writers “were made to alter [their] clear vision in deference to an external authority” and later writers marred their work with anger and bitterness, resulting in decay at their centre (ibid.). For writers such as Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, Woolf argues that it required immense integrity to resist the patriarchal pressure to conform. “They wrote as women write, not as men write” (ibid. 69). Yet Woolf also foresees a future where divisions will result from individuality rather than as an enforced consequence of gender.

Woolf's utilisation of multiple subject positions allows for individual experience, as part of a movement away from a hegemonic patriarchal paradigm founded in Western humanist philosophy with its adherence to a belief in the phallus, a unitary and deliberately male self-contained source of power (Moi, 1985: 8). Diversity of experience precludes a single homogenous subject position for all women. The stranglehold that patriarchy has exerted over Western culture has led to a privileging of characteristics traditionally considered 'masculine'. Since the Enlightenment, logic and reason have been exalted, often at the expense of emotional traits, and logic was decreed the entitlement of men. Whether logic has been decreed 'masculine' because it is admired, or admired because it has been perceived as 'masculine', it has remained a male prerogative. Woolf believes women to be equally capable of logical thought, although later writers, such as Angela Carter (1977), favour an intuitive or emotional discourse, which Cixous refers to as an "anti-Logos" philosophy (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 338).

In her advocacy of women's capabilities, Woolf is making a vital contribution to the development of an androgynous literary domain, but she is contravening one of her own critical arguments: that art and politics should be separated. This is only possible, however when the need for political sermonising has been transcended. Marder points out with regard to Woolf that "Her desire to play the moralist was in conflict with her artistic conscience, and the conflict can be detected in almost everything she wrote" (1968: 2). The implication is that her moralising diminished her art in some way, yet she employs this duality of art and morals with success in A Room by creating a fusion of fiction and criticism. This type of creative dualism, a kind of stylistic

androgyny, can also be interpreted as a merging of the logical and the emotional, traditionally 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Woolf herself stated:

If we use art to propagate political opinions, we must force the artist to clip and cabin his gift to do us a cheap and passing service. Literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered; and there will be no more horses. (1938: 212)

However, she has perhaps achieved the opposite, and turned politics into art by moving beyond the accepted stylistic boundaries.

Woolf makes use of this manner of regulation contravention in a variety of ways, by disrupting accepted dichotomies such as theory/fiction, and most significantly 'masculine'/'feminine'. Her objective is to create an awareness that differences can be detrimental if utilised hierarchically to justify oppression, but that differences can be beneficial if instead they reflect multivalency. Woolf employs distinctions when necessary, such as the mind/body distinction, but without attaching a pejorative connotation to either. The distinction between biology and psychology is crucial to an escape from gender oppression; biological sex is an important part of identity, but Woolf envisages an intellectual domain where gender is no longer the hegemonic determinative.

Showalter objects to this vision, arguing that, "Androgyny was the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (1977: 264). Showalter alleges that Woolf's social environment precluded any possibility of androgyny. However the fundamental flaws in Showalter's criticism lie in her failure to recognise the distinction that Woolf makes between biology and psychology, and her insistence on biographical

responsibility. Heilbrun had assumed an almost prophetic position in defence of Woolf a few years earlier:

Has any important writer... been the object of so much cruel and mindless vituperation? Some reasons can be found – apart from the threat posed by her androgynous character – for the need to flay her in public... Partly it is that she not only united in her work the feminine and masculine vision, [but] that she portrayed... her knowledge of “how it felt to be alone, unique, isolated.” (1973: 131)

Woolf's multiplicity posed a threat to Showalter's homogeneously oriented second-wave feminism, because it denied the existence of 'Woman' as a unified entity. It is impossible for a writer not to be influenced by personal experience, but this does not denote that that the writer can only respond directly to that experience, consciously or sub-consciously.

Woolf purposefully distances herself from the arguments contained in A Room through the use of fictional characters, a technique Showalter refers to as “extremely impersonal and defensive” (1977: 282). However Showalter's critique is conducted on a personal level, with her focus predominantly on Woolf's history of mental illness, rather than on the content of A Room where, as a feminist literary critic, she ought probably to be looking. Showalter falls into the seductive trap of analysing the writer instead of her work, doing somewhat of an injustice to Woolf's work. Ironically several writers have identified Woolf as the embodiment of intellectual androgyny. Vita Sackville-West said of Woolf, “She and Coleridge both seem to me to combine the unusually mixed ingredients of genius and intellect, the wild, fantastic intuitive genius one the one hand, and the cold, reasoning intellect on the other” (in Marder, 1968: 126). In A Room, Woolf is exploring the future of literature, not her own personal future. She may well have aspired to the serenity of the androgynous dream she portrayed, but it was in essence a utopian hope for artists in general.

She imagines a perfect language in which we could release ourselves whole and entire, incandescent as she says, melted down into a pure liquid fluent form. It is a strange and disconcerting leap that she takes, from the materialism of her analysis of writing as a woman to the mythology of the disembodied, fluent and androgynous soul. (Mephram, 1991: 138-139)

The leap is achieved via a short fictional preface, a recounting of an event experienced by Woolf's narrator. Once again, Woolf blurs the distinction between theory and fiction in order to familiarise us with the concept of androgyny before embarking on her detailed theoretical explanation. The narrator describes a scene she witnessed from her window:

A single leaf detached itself from the plane tree at the end of the street... Somehow it was like a signal falling, a signal pointing to a force in things which one had overlooked... It brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window; where the taxi stopped; and the girl and the young man stopped; and they got into the taxi; and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere. (1929: 90)

This anecdote represents, in fictional terms, Woolf's androgynous vision with deceptive simplicity. It is a moment of harmony to ease the conflict that characterises the preceding chapters. It leads Woolf to a resolution of the artistic dilemmas she has identified, and represents an avenue of escape from the stagnation of the patriarchal paradigm. The scene is deliberately mundane, so as to be easily identifiable, but simultaneously is the signifier for the implementation of harmony and co-operation between the sexes, which is the essence of Woolf's version of androgyny.

Woolf is unmistakably referring to an intellectual condition, to psychological sexes (or genders) corresponding to the physical ones. She identifies the discord produced by the division between these genders as an unnatural interference, analogous to a physical strain. When the rupture is mended, the tension is alleviated as the mind

returns to its natural state. "When I saw the couple get into the taxi-cab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to co-operate" (ibid. 91). The crucial term is "fusion," which signifies positive androgyny, a return to original creative unity that emphasises wholeness, not separateness. She is also clearly not referring to physical hermaphroditism. Woolf's conception of androgyny is unrelated to biological maleness or femaleness, only to her search for a new synthesis of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'.

Woolf envisages the two powers as engaged in a union represented as a metaphorical marriage, producing "complete satisfaction and happiness" (ibid.). Certain theorists have objected to the heterosexist imagery Woolf employs in this metaphor. Gallop describes Woolf's androgyny as "A move from biological to hedonistic heterosexism" (1988: 188). She is possibly referring to Woolf's assertion that, "One has the profound, if irrational, instinct in favour of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness" (1929: 91). This contention is necessarily heterosexist as Woolf is referring to the fallacious categories constructed by patriarchal culture, and to a symbolic act of procreation. It need not denote a homophobic attitude indicating a regression to a conservative paradigm, as it signifies an integrated individual identity, not an inter-personal practice of interaction. Any heterosexist implications in Woolf's approach are certainly countervailed by Mary Carmichael's unprecedented portrayal of the lesbian relationship between Chloe and Olivia (ibid. 76-78). When human beings can move beyond determinist categories, the heterosexist nature of the terminology will cease to apply. With the disintegration of heterosexist institutions, the coterminous

'masculine'/'feminine' dichotomy will expire. The characteristics to which they refer will adopt an independent teleological existence. Unfortunately that point has apparently not yet occurred, and we remain immured in the same conflict-ridden hegemonic discourse.

Woolf's metaphorical 'marriage' is extended to intercourse and procreation, which represent the process of artistic creation. She employs erotically charged sexual imagery to describe the mental collaboration that occurs.

Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness... The writer, I thought, once his experience is over, must lie back and let his mind celebrate its nuptials in darkness. (Ibid. 97)

This fusion produces the fertilisation necessary for creation; neither the 'masculine' nor the 'feminine' are able to accomplish this alone, as individually they are barren. This sort of writing then "explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas" (ibid. 95). These procreative metaphors are analogous to the physical act of reproduction, but not directly representative thereof; the biology/psychology differentiation continues to apply, although Woolf clearly appreciates the significance of sexuality.

The fertilisation that occurs in Woolf's description is the source not only for creative life, but for eternal life: "That is the only sort of writing of which one can say that it has the secret of perpetual life" (ibid. 95). Similarly to the alchemists, Woolf saw this as one of the most significant results of the androgynous process, a positive consequence of the marriage of opposites. Showalter misconstrues this "embrace of eternity...[as] inevitably an embrace of death", the cause of Woolf's suicide (1977:

280). For Showalter, in the impotent vacuum resulting from Woolf's lack of womanhood or manhood, the search for androgynous unity becomes equated with a personal act of despair, rather than one of artistic affirmation.

Although Woolf ideates androgyny as the natural psychological state of all individuals, she is employing it specifically with regard to the interpellation of artists. According to this noumenon, if the artist achieves authentic androgynous balance, the edifying results should be apparent in their creative endeavours. The artistic object becomes the sole focus; gender can have no distracting and debilitating effect on the attention of the artist. The work would then be disencumbered of the "awkward breaks" Woolf finds in Charlotte Brontë's writing, and possess all the "suggestive power" of Shakespeare (1929: 65, 94). Woolf envisages the salvation of art as positive androgyny: "The androgynous mind is resonant and porous... it transmits emotion without impediment... it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (ibid. 92). Woolf is indebted to Coleridge for the basic substance of this idea, and he is included in her list of androgynous writers from the past, a list headed by Shakespeare and including Sterne, Cowper and Lamb. Keats is designated sexless, while Milton, Jonson, Wordsworth and Tolstoi have "a dash too much of the male in them" (ibid. 97).

Perhaps the reason for Woolf's devising of this list is not merely for purposes of elucidation, but because "Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father" (ibid. 96). This is a reference to the existence of both the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' in the mind of the artist, but perhaps also to her predication that women think back through

their mothers. Woolf is seeking to “devise some entirely new combination... so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole” (ibid. 79). She believes the androgynous mind to be capable of thinking back through its mothers or fathers, producing a coalescence of multiple perceptions.

Jacobus points out however that, “Woolf never fails to remind us that the matter of inheritance is absolutely a matter of access to power, property and education, an experienced division forms part of that inheritance too” (in Belsey & Moore, 1989: 60-61). This disparity results in the *Society of Outsiders* that Woolf portrays in Three Guineas, which she articulates in A Room as a disconnection:

Again if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of civilisation, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives. (1929: 91)

Woolf clearly outlines the profitability of such exteriorisation in preventing war in Three Guineas, but there are further advantages to the disjunction between the traditional genders, providing they are intrapsychic. The aim of the androgynous vision is not homogeneity, but rather a fusion of separate components, which retain their individual characteristics, allowing for the multiplicity and tautness that she considers requisite in great art.

An interpretation of reality, as Woolf perceives it, cannot exist in the absence of either of the regulatory fictions, ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’. Reason without imagination will give us only half of reality, and vice versa, for to have only one results in art that

is at best “boring” and at worst “dead” (ibid. 94-95). Androgyny is the resolution, a synthesis based on the gender dialectic. Artistic wholeness exists not only in spite of gender differences but also because of them. Woolf saw integrated heterogeneity as the answer to the artistic crisis, because it allowed a movement away from a ‘masculine’/‘feminine’ dichotomy towards a complex harmony of human characteristics. It is an amalgamation of differing perceptions and experiences, which exists beyond the traditional gender categorisations. Thus it can incorporate differences between men and women, but also inevitable differences among women themselves. This is a harmonising gesture that Showalter misinterprets as “some psychological equivalent of lobotomy” (1977: 287), because she fails to appreciate the positivity of a reconstructed approach to consuetudinary gender conflict.

In moving beyond gender, Woolf envisages a writer capable of enjoying the benefits of multiplicitous subjectivity, while employing intrapsychic conflict for artistic advancement as a result of a shift away from the masculinist value system. A male writer, for example, will obtain, “something that their own sex was unable to supple; and it would not be rash, perhaps to define it further... as some stimulus, some renewal of creative power which is in the gift only of the opposite sex to bestow” (Woolf, 1929: 80). However this necessitates a departure from phallogocentric value systems, with their fictive categorical universality; it is an entropic resignification of the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression. Only when this has occurred will the risk of sermonising about sexual politics be eliminated, as Woolf feels it must be:

It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause... and fatal is no figure of speech; for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death. It ceases to be fertilised. (Ibid. 97)

Woolf is clearly thinking of her sex in A Room, but that it because her theories are comparable to Wittgenstein's ladder, which, once ascended, will cease to be necessary (1922: 189). Woolf was writing in a social environment of hierarchical gender oppression. Her own personal cluster of friends may have been an exception - Heilbrun designates the Bloomsbury group "not as the apotheosis of the androgynous spirit, but as the first actual example of such a way of life in practice" (1973: 115). However British society in general was still struggling to emerge from a tendentious Victorian patriarchal ethic, which was based on competitiveness and predominance:

All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority, belong to the private-school stage of human existence where there are 'sides', and it is necessary for one side to beat another side, and of the utmost importance to walk up to a platform and receive from the hands of the Headmaster himself a highly ornamental pot. As people mature they cease to believe in side or in Headmasters or in highly ornamental pots. (Woolf, 1929: 99)

Balancing the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' not only entails accepting both, but disposing of the hierarchy within which they have traditionally existed, and the conventional means of evaluating them. The standards for measuring the merit of creations that are used in the phallogocentric establishment can no longer apply. It is futile for women to attempt to measure themselves in this way, or for men to try and make women conform to their standards, a practice that Woolf claims would be "abject treachery" (ibid.).

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf suggests that “The profession of literature differs, it would seem, from all the other professions. There is no head of the profession... no official body with the power to lay down rules and enforce them” (1938: 207-208). The regulation of literature stems from a patriarchal value system, “some professor with a measuring rod up his sleeve” (Woolf, 1929: 99). She encourages a rebellion against this monovalency, invites women to establish an alternative discourse in all literary domains in order to achieve the disintegration of the phallic economy.

Jane Marcus argues that androgyny does not sufficiently escape these hegemonic standards: “I still believe that the androgynous ideal does not help women. It often extends the range of male sexuality into the feminine, but continues to regard the extension of female sexuality into the historical masculine as perverse” (1988: 251n). However such an incomplete manifestation is a distortion of authentic androgyny, in which such discrimination is entirely unfeasible. Showalter makes similar claims as to the impracticality of androgyny:

The androgynous mind is, finally, a utopian projection of the ideal artist: calm, stable, unimpeded by consciousness of sex. Woolf meant it to be a luminous and fulfilling idea; but, like other utopian projections, her vision is inhuman. Whatever else one may say of androgyny, it represents an escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness. (1977: 289)

Showalter fails to make the crucial distinction between sex and gender, confusing femaleness with ‘femininity’, perhaps as a result of Woolf’s indistinct use of terminology. Furthermore androgyny necessitates a confrontation with ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in order to dismantle the assumptions surrounding them. Woolf conceives of gender as a social construction, which can therefore be restructured; this would be a difficult task, but not impossible. Moi poses a counter argument in defence

of Woolf, making a favourable comparison with Kristeva's deconstructive style of feminism:

Woolf's crucial attempt at androgyny... is not, as Showalter argues, a flight from fixed gender identities, but a recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature. Far from fleeing such gender identities because she fears them, Woolf rejects them because she has seen them for what they are. She has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle must be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity. (1985: 13)

In a prolepsis of Kristeva's line of reasoning in her 1981 essay 'Women's Time', Woolf predicts a new generation of women liberated from material and ideological oppression, in which Judith Shakespeare may not only live, but flourish artistically. Kristeva's idea of a third generation represents "a signifying space, a both corporeal and desiring mental space" (in Warhol and Herndl, 1991: 458). For Woolf that possibility arises if "we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women" (1929: 107). This potentiality is embodied in the climax of Woolf's description of the taxi: "and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current *elsewhere*" (ibid. 90, emphasis mine). Thus, similarly to Kristeva, Woolf identifies her vision of creative emancipation in a spatial rather than a temporal dimension. The taxi symbolises the androgynous means of accessing that space.

Writing of Virginia Woolf in 1932, Winifred Holtby suggested that while the doctrine of androgyny was not peculiar to Virginia Woolf, "no one, perhaps, has dramatized it so effectively, nor explained it with such confidence"... Sharing, as she did in 1932, Woolf's pre-counterrevolutionary mind, she was able to see what the critics in the dark years were unable or unwilling to find. (Heilbrun, 1973: 151-152)

Although Heilbrun initially published Toward a Recognition of Androgyny in 1964, she managed to pre-empt the censure of critics such as Elaine Showalter. The feminist

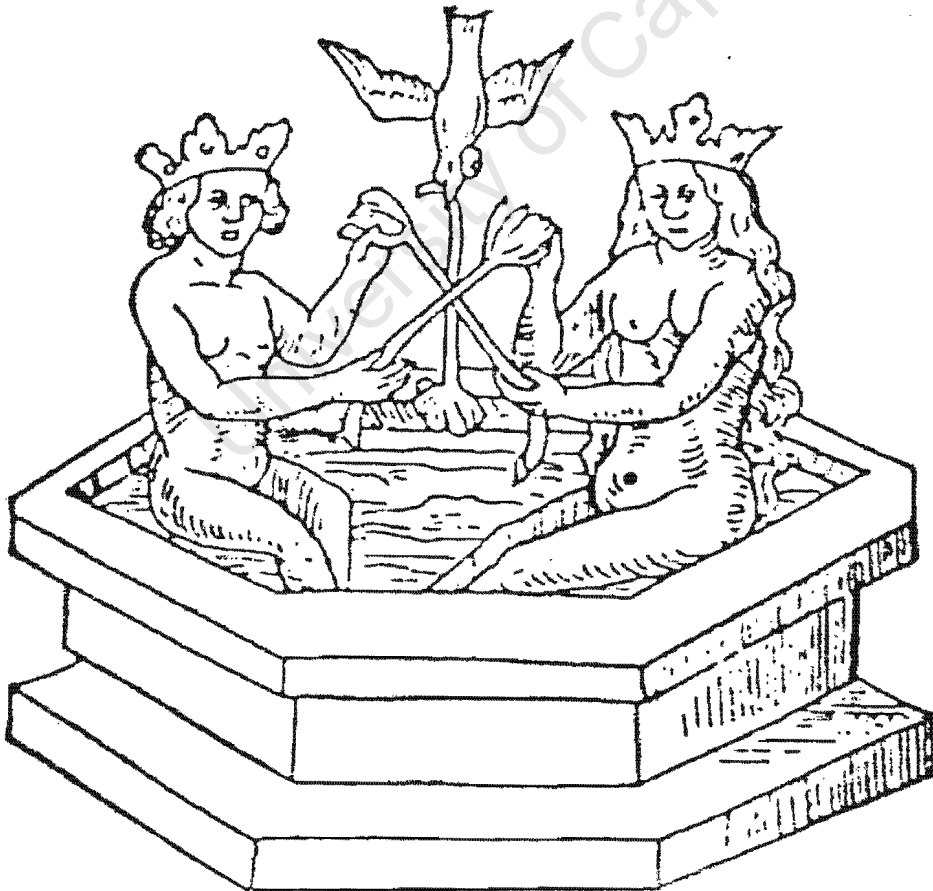
debate has raged back and forth for seventy years, with some theorists positing Woolf herself as the apotheosis of androgyny (Heilbrun, Richter), and others condemning her as a delusional madwoman (Showalter, Guiget). After Woolf's death, Vita Sackville-West, who probably had cause to know, described her as follows: "Tenuousness and purity were in her baptismal name, and a hint of the fang in the other" (in Dunn, 1994: 3). Regardless of her personal success, Woolf's androgynous vision has maintained a pre-occupancy in feminist ontology, perhaps because of the universal accessibility of her peroration:

When I rummage in my own mind I find no noble sentiments about being companions and equals and influencing the world to higher ends. I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else. (1929: 103)

Despite the presence of the peroration, on many levels, Woolf refuses closure. She looks to the future, to the hypothetical potential of literature, regarding the rebirth of Judith Shakespeare. This anticipation is contingent on a whole range of factors, primarily the development of material equality and artistic androgyny, thus denying a single truth in favour of an intimation of allotropic possibility.

Four

Virginia Woolf:
Orlando



'Immersion in the Bath'

Woolf presented a theoretical version of her androgynous vision in A Room of One's Own, the concept she originally represented in Orlando. As the fourth alchemical stage, immersion in the bath, Orlando represents not only the union of the King and Queen, but also their return to a primordial state. Woolf's fictive interpretation of androgyny displays a commitment to the process of transformation as an alchemical stage, rather than asserting a definite conclusion to that process. Orlando was androgyny in practice, a fictional character that represented the substance behind Woolf's theory of the co-existence of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' within each individual. Orlando was published less than three weeks before Woolf presented the lectures that formed the basis of A Room, and the correlation between the two is unmistakable (Bell, 1996: 144). The two works represent the duality that existed in Woolf's oeuvre: the balance and co-dependence of fiction and theory is most obvious between these two books. Assumptions regarding biological sex, gender and discourse are demolished. The creation of an ideal androgyne required a radical departure from narrative conventions, a phenomenal transfiguration intended to cause a complete re-evaluation of the assumptions and limitations of the novelistic tradition.

In A Room Woolf was promulgating the creation of an androgynous mind, in Orlando she fabricates an entire androgynous being, one who enjoys a form of physical androgyny in addition to psychological androgyny. Woolf remarks upon Mr B., "His mind seemed separated into different chambers; not a sound carried from to the other" (1929: 95). Of Orlando she declares, "Slowly there had opened within her something intricate and many-chambered, which one must take a torch to explore, in prose not verse" (1928: 80). Orlando's ontological development charts the gradual interconnection of these various fragmented selves into an androgynous apotheosis,

who exists beyond the traditional binary oppositions. This novel is a fictional partner to A Room's critical approach to gender, in which Woolf is free to evade boundaries and polarisation, largely abandoning reality in favour of a narrative landscape of parodic fantasy. Androgyny becomes an escape from the discursive performance of gender and sexuality, and a symbolic disruption of genre. "Written by a feminist (Virginia Woolf), for a bisexual (Vita Sackville-West), about an androgyne (Orlando), the novel Orlando would seem to be the quintessential feminist text" (Caughie, 1989: 41).

Another compelling correlation between Orlando and A Room lies in Orlando's passion and chosen profession – literature. Throughout her psychological development from a young man to a self-actualised woman, Orlando's quest for authorial fulfilment continues, and is finally attained. Thus the experience of the writer is central to the novel, and Orlando's experience as a woman writer is of particular significance as she undergoes the same difficulties that Woolf outlines in A Room. Orlando's material needs are more than adequately met; Beer claims that "Orlando, whose name combines, in throw-away style, gold and land, is the deathless aristocrat" (in Belsey & Moore, 1989: 78). Yet, as a woman, Orlando suffers the same discrimination and domestic interruptions as Austen in Woolf's account of her. The male writers whom Orlando encounters, some of them genuine historical persons such as Alexander Pope, enjoy the freedom to write as they choose. Woolf's fantastical scenario allows her to explore the relationship between gender and creativity in a different and more light-hearted format than the analytical critique of A Room.

The primary identifiable genre of Orlando is intentionally that of biography, although Woolf's satirical tone and fantastical style refuse the traditional rubric of the genre. When Orlando was originally conceived as 'The Jessamy Brides', Woolf declared her intentions: "Satire is to be the main note – satire and wildness... My own lyric vein is to be satirised. Everything mocked. And it is to end with three dots...so. For the truth is I feel the need of an escapade" (Bell, 1990: 228). Woolf succeeds in her aims, creating an unusual novel of unconventionality and exuberance. It largely lacks the moralising tone that is customary in satire, but the mockery is pervasive. Although few are likely to share her negativity, Showalter disapprovingly describes Orlando's satirical style as "tedious high camp" (1977: 291). All the social institutions to which people pay such great heed are lampooned – history, marriage, love, fame, art, and most importantly gender. They are familiar yet simultaneously distorted, allowing for the integration of the unfamiliar: the ideal of androgyny that inhabits Woolf's fantastical landscape.

The subtitle of Orlando – A Biography may suggest to unprepared readers that they are about to read an authentic historical documentary, when in fact it is the inauguration of a parody of the biographical form, a platform for Woolf's fantasy that defies conventional concepts of history and time. Since her father was the editor of the Dictionary of National Biography, this was a genre with which Woolf was likely associated in the mind of the public (Bell, 1990: 1). It is highly ironic that Leslie Stephen considered androgyny to be evil (Heilbrun, 1973: xvii), and would probably have been horrified by Woolf's combination of the biographical form with the content of androgynous promotion. Apart from possible personal reasons, Woolf likely had political motivation in her choice of genre. Women tended to be excluded from

biographical records. Furthermore, biography was a traditionally male area of scholarship, a possessive conceit that she deliberately endeavours to undermine by mocking masculine pretension. As John Graham indicates,

The absurdities of the biographer are the absurdities of the whole approach to things which she considered typically masculine: the pompous self-importance; the childish faith in facts, dates, documents, and "evidence"; the reduction of truth to the logic deducible from such evidence; and the reluctance to deal with such nebulous aspects of life as passion, dream, and imagination. (In Sprague, 1971: 107)

Woolf mocks this craving for documentary evidence by offering substantiation of her narrative with fabricated primary historical sources – letters and diaries.

Orlando's heterodiegetic narrator is a self-proclaimed biographer – "Happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one", who continually perpetrates narratorial intrusions (Woolf, 1928: 4). The narrator employs the personal pronoun "we" to avoid revealing his/her sex, mockingly elucidating on "the immunity of all biographers and historians from any sex whatever" (ibid. 101). This is a deliberately contrived ambiguity within the androgynous theme of the novel. The omniscience that the narrator displays with regard to Orlando's psyche extends beyond that of an authentic biographer, but the farcical persona of the biographer serves as an expedient reminder of the conventions that Woolf is satirising. This is most apparent during the events surrounding Orlando's sex change, after which the narrator's persona begins to alter as Orlando becomes more self-reflexive.

In order to extend her satirical assault to the fullest, Woolf traverses four hundred years of English history, particularly its literary history. Orlando is an analysis of the subject as historically constituted, an attempt to create an alternative historical

discourse counteracting the patriarchal canon. Woolf's method could be described as 'historiographic metafiction', defined by Onega as a striking combination of "the intensely parodic, realism-undermining self-reflexivity of metafiction, inherited from modernism, with... the historical element, suffused by the relish in storytelling... and realism-enhancing narrative techniques characteristic of classic realism" (1995: 1). Hutcheon identifies it as incorporating the three major domains of history, literature and theory, working "*within* conventions in order to subvert them" (1988: 5, emphasis mine). The term thus seems particularly apt with regard to Orlando. Woolf intersperses authentic historical figures with whom the fictional characters interact, for example, Elizabeth I, Pope and Dryden, in order to create identifiable touchstones and to lend validity to her androgynous invention.

Woolf confers a canonical authority on her central protagonist by assigning him/her a Shakespearean name. Having extolled Shakespeare's androgynous attributes in A Room, it seems logical that she would offer this nominal tribute, enhanced as it is by the Elizabethan milieu of the opening chapters. Orlando creates a link between Shakespeare and the present (or 1928 at any rate) through her capacity for immortality. The association with Shakespeare also reiterates the role of literature and writing in the cultural construction of gender, concomitant with historical circumstances and influences. Bowlby proposes that, on a semantic level, Orlando's name implicitly conveys the concepts of difference and commonality central to androgyny: "or/and (and/or) and/or" (1988: 50). She argues that this may be, "A manifesto for a new world in which the difference of the sexes is no longer the principal determinant of the lines along which human subjects make their way" (ibid.). Within the androgynous ideal, gender differences become arbitrary since

'masculinity' and 'femininity' exist in every individual, as in *Orlando*. The internal balance would overturn hierarchical gender constructs without eradicating multiplicity, as epitomised by the 'and/or' of the title:

Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above. (Woolf: 1928: 86)

This departure from a calibrated gender register is a refusal of phallogentric orthodoxy. This accounts for Woolf's choice of a male to female transformation rather than female to male. It represents a deliberate rebellion against the dominant value system. Woolf's 'shopping/football' analogy from *A Room* illustrates the dichotomy between 'masculine' and 'feminine' values, the primacy that patriarchy assigns to male-associated activities and achievements. However, as she observes in *Three Guineas*, "Male dominance... must not be confused with male superiority" (1938: 247). In *Orlando* Woolf overturns these conventional assumptions regarding qualitative superiority: she refers to fashion in the very first line, and to football in the second. This demolition of hierarchy sets the tone for the rest of the novel:

"Heavens!" she thought, "what fools they make of us – what fools we are!" And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being she seemed to vacillate... She pitted one sex against the other, and found each alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities, and was not sure to which she belonged. (Woolf, 1928: 72)

All of the factual examples of the androgynous mind that Woolf proposes in *A Room* resided in male bodies. To create a female androgyne Woolf had to resort to fiction. Patriarchal monopolies of material resources, including literature, have ensured that only male androgynes have succeeded. Woolf allocates the requisite financial

resources to Orlando, although she has enormous difficulty retaining ownership of them as a woman. As a consequence of her prior maleness, the female Orlando has access to opportunities other women were denied because of their physical sex and imposed gender.

In Orlando, Woolf calculatedly deconstructs the relationship between sex and gender: “Yet through all these changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same. She had the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons” (Woolf, 1928: 109). Gender is a disguise, comparable to clothes that can be invested or divested through conscious preference. De Beer forthrightly refers to Orlando as “a joke about the pompous exaggeration of difference within patriarchal society. What’s so distinguished about having a penis? Can we give or take a few genitalia and remain much the same? asks the work” (in Belsey and Moore, 1989: 72). Biological sex is supposed to be definitive and unchanging, yet Woolf demonstrates that the categories of male and female are not as rigid as they are assumed to be, that they cannot be taken for granted.

From the outset of the novel, Woolf makes it clear that she is departing from traditional sexual paradigms, by focusing the reader’s awareness on them. In the opening line of Orlando, the narrator declares: “He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the day did something to disguise it - was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor” (1928: 3). By bringing the reader’s attention to Orlando’s sex, Woolf immediately foregrounds it, yet ultimately she refuses to allow an unequivocal categorisation of her protagonist according to one of the most basic distinctions that people are inclined to make – that of sex. According to Freud, with

whose work Woolf was acquainted, "When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male or female?' and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty" (in Garber: 1). Woolf anticipates and pre-emptly this custom with her forthright commencement. She is endeavouring to break humans of the habit of making this initial differentiation, which affects all subsequent interaction, by creating an awareness of it. Woolf is interrogating that other tenet of Freud's philosophy, that "Anatomy is destiny" (Carter, 1979: 4). When anatomy is put into question, or disregarded, destiny becomes self-determined. Woolf admits the existence of differences between the sexes, but questions the determining role that these play in the construction of gender difference and phallogocentric values.

Orlando demonstrates that gender is manufactured performatively, as she consciously evaluates 'masculinity' and 'femininity', and the process of feminisation that is socially required of her as a female. On the return journey from Turkey, the newly female Orlando strives to establish her own ideas regarding 'feminine' behaviour and appearance, but her ideas are inextricably linked to her culturally determined preconceptions. Initially unperturbed by her sexual transformation, Orlando is dismayed to realise, "All I can do, once I set foot on English soil, is to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it" (1928: 72). Ironically this awareness effectively diminishes her opinion of "the other sex, the manly, to which it had once been her pride to belong" (ibid.). Gradually Orlando embraces 'femininity', albeit a dissimilar version from the stereotype of simpering passivity that is culturally expected of her.

As a consequence of his/her androgynous nature, Orlando has the benefit of the 'alien, critical consciousness' to which Woolf referred in *A Room* (1929: 91). S/he is capable

of deconstructing sexual difference and gender. The reader enjoys this advantage through a shared perspective with the protagonist, in both male and female incarnations. De Beer observes that, "The moment when Orlando changes sex, makes us have to notice how little embarrassment we ordinarily feel, as readers, in inhabiting the fictional persons of women and of men, how freely we move between them" (in Belsey & Moore, 1989: 80). In this particular novel, the reader is able to make that shift with a single character through Woolf's use of fantasy, exploring "a narrative landscape of contrasting climates" (Humm, 1991: 18). Sexual identity becomes directly implicated in language, explored through a double discourse of narrative and analysis. Gender is portrayed as an arbitrary signification of sex, in an analytical version similar to De Saussure's critique of language, in which he argues that "the link between signal and signification is arbitrary" (De Saussure, 1983: 67). Woolf is moving the gender debate from biological 'facts' to discursive signs. In a comparison of Woolf's metaphysical and formal oscillation with Wittgenstein's 'duck-rabbit' sketch, Caughie asserts that, "The double discourse of *Orlando* enables Woolf to set up exchanges between opposing positions, between different orders of discourse" (1989: 50).

In the discursive performance of gender that Woolf represents, the subject is constituted in language, and androgyny represents liberation from it. Garber argues that Orlando's "transformation from a man to a woman, as a transsexual procedure 'accomplished painlessly and effortlessly' without the necessity of surgical intervention... is in effect a pronoun transplant" (1992: 134). However, as Woolf points out, the use of gender-specific pronouns is a concession to convention, a further illustration of the entanglement of language and identity: "But in the future we

must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his', and 'she' for 'he'" (1928: 63). Such specification is unavoidable due to the nature of the English language. It can only be avoided through the use of the plural form – “The change of sex, though it altered *their* future, did nothing whatever to alter *their* identity” - or through the creation of a new, indefinite term (ibid. Emphasis mine). For example, in Woman on the Edge of Time, Piercy invents the general pronoun 'per', a shortening of 'person' (1976). Although the narrator is forced to establish Orlando's gender identity through language, Orlando is free to establish his/her identity through conscious practice and self-evaluation.

Orlando's initial recognition of her new sexual identity following the transformation is visual: “Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure” (Woolf, 1928: 62). Orlando acknowledges her external change of sex, but is able to avoid imprisoning herself exclusively within a specific gender by disguising her sex to suit her requirements. This ambiguity is achieved through calculated apparelling; Orlando is a transsexual, but also a transvestite. “Gubar finds that ‘cross-dressing [is]... a dream of prophecy and power’ for women like... Woolf's Orlando” (Garber, 1991: 9). Directly after the transformation, Orlando dons unisex Turkish trousers and later adopts the contemporary feminine fashions, but continues to avail herself of men's clothes. Gender is thus presented as a variable state of mind, of which clothes are only the external symbol. Attire may reflect the inner identity, but may also be assumed as part of a gender disguise. In her analysis of gender, Riviere suggests that, “Womanliness *is* mimicry, *is* masquerade” (Garber, 1991: 355). By extrapolation, manliness could also

be pretence, and Orlando employs clothing as costumes for her various chosen parts in the masquerade.

There appear to be four androgynous characters in the novel – Orlando, Sasha, the Archduchess Harriet, and Shel – but only Orlando and Shel are genuine androgynes, the other two are actually transvestites, pseudo-androgynes. On his initial sighting of Sasha, Orlando cannot discern her female sex due to her ambiguous attire, and he only discovers Harriet's true male sex after his own transformation. Both of these characters are a pointed reminder of the discrepancies between appearance and reality. However neither of them is psychologically androgynous, and both are thus unsuitable mates for Orlando.

Orlando's passion for Sasha survives his transformation into a female although it is by definition altered from a heterosexual to a homosexual love, an indication of the arbitrary nature of the labels assigned to interpersonal relations. The implication seems to be that all human beings, like Orlando, are inherently bisexual. Orlando enjoys several lovers of both sexes during the course of her lengthy existence, although the 'biographer' treats these sexual encounters with the utmost discretion.

Gilbert nevertheless asserts that,

Orlando is stylistically and formally as sexual as its subject matter... is often tantalizingly ambiguous... gratification is constantly deferred or denied. In *Orlando* Woolf allows herself to be revealed as a consummate tease. (1993: 194–195)

Categorisations of sexuality do not change the character of lust, or love. These two feelings represent one of the primeval dualities of human existence, an institutionalised dyad that represents another example of Woolf's belief in the heterogeneity of all existence. Woolf's binary portrayal of the correspondence

between love and lust is analogous to her concept of the relationship between male and female:

For Love... has two faces; one white, the other black; two bodies; one smooth, one hairy. It has two hands, two feet, two tails, two indeed of every member and each one is the exact opposite of the other. Yet, so strictly are they joined together that you cannot separate them... Lust the vulture... Love, the Bird of Paradise. (1928: 52)

Although Woolf seems to be assigning a pejorative connotation to Lust, which she does not assign to males, she makes quite clear its inseparable relation to Love: they are part of each other, just as males and females are.

This binary construction (but not opposition) that Woolf presents may account for Orlando's marriage to Shel. Both have androgynous minds and are therefore bisexual, but Orlando has a female body and Shel a male one, and thus their union seems logical within Woolf's premise of co-dependency. They both recognise the other's duality, although are amazed to have discovered such compatible mates:

‘Are you positive you aren't a man?’ he would ask anxiously and she would echo.

‘Can it be possible you're not a woman?’ and then they must put it to the proof without more ado. For each was so surprised at the quickness of the other's sympathy, and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman. (Woolf, 1928: 119)

The perfect syngamy, which occurs as a result of their androgyny, has a disturbingly heterosexist undertone to it. The relationship is farcically portrayed in a hyperbolic version of chivalric romance: “‘I am a woman,’ she thought, ‘a real woman, at last’” (ibid. 117). However this does not entirely obviate Woolf's choice of a male soul mate for the female Orlando.

Before the appearance of Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire, Orlando commits herself to a marriage with nature due to the absence of a suitable human companion.

She could not rise. But there she lay content... 'I have found my mate,' she murmured. 'It is the moor. I am nature's bride,' she whispered, giving herself in rapture to the cold embraces of the grass... I have known many men and many women,' she continued; 'none I have understood. It is better that I should lie at peace with only the sky above me.' (Woolf, 1928: 114)

There is a distinct sexual tone to this piece, a physical echo of the metaphysical coupling. Haug argues, "What is lamented is a distancing from nature, the destruction of an original unity... then sexuality may become again what perhaps it once was, a powerful feeling of *connectedness* with other human beings and with *nature*" (1983: 261). In this way Orlando's enduring relationship with nature is a signifier of her sustained search for psychic wholeness. Issues of identity become inextricably linked with nature and the nature of being. Beer comments that Woolf raises "questions about the identification of woman with nature, as well as about the 'nature of woman' argument" (in Belsey & Moore, 1989: 72-3).

Orlando's epic poetic work, "The Oak Tree" is one of the few constants in his/her life, and reflects his/her ontological process. The oak tree itself is an important symbol in the novel: it is Orlando's favourite location for self-reflection, the focal point of her bond with her ancestral land and nature in general. It is a physical counterpart to her metaphysical spine: "She felt the bones of the tree running out like ribs from a spine this way and that beneath her" (Woolf, 1928: 150). The many branches of her personality are joined in the Key Self of the trunk. Orlando's roots remain in the land that is her history. It is the primary nature metaphor of the novel; one which Defromont claims is "phallic" (in Bowlby, 1992: 67). Finally, however, the oak tree is

a backbone rather than a phallus, it cannot offer the practical contribution to reproduction that a flesh and blood mate can. For this Orlando requires a male human partner, and a conventional heterosexual relationship.

Shel and Orlando's contrasting anatomies allow them to procreate – Orlando gives birth to a son, an heir to her estate. However this event is treated dismissively, particularly when compared to the fanfare surrounding Orlando's artistic creation, and thus seems to be an inadequate justification for the heterosexual marriage. Woolf, despite her advancement of bisexuality, appears unable to extricate herself entirely from prevailing conventions, which she satirises with such vigour elsewhere in the novel. However, in the light of historical events, this was likely a shrewd and conscious decision on Woolf's part. Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel, The Well of Loneliness, which was published earlier in 1928, was tried in court as indecent. Woolf was to have testified in its favour, but her evidence was ruled inadmissible, and the book was promptly banned (Bell, 1996: 138-9).

The most notable example of Woolf's satirical attack on patriarchal conventions occurs in the masque that surrounds Orlando's change of sex. Beer describes the masque as an "absurd song-and-dance of reticence and neo-classical personification" (in Belsey & Moore, 1989: 79). The Three Ladies – Chastity, Modesty, Purity – who discover Orlando's transformation are personifications of the traits of the stereotypical femininity enforced by the patriarchal establishment. They are the means by which the phallogocentric value system is regulated, but are powerless in Woolf's feminist fantasy. In their struggle to prevent the 'facts' of Orlando's transformation from emerging, they are easily defeated by "Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere gods

and argues that “The ‘third’ is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis... The ‘third’ is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge” (1991: 11).

Humm describes Orlando as “a utopian vision of ‘a world got topsy turvey where all the girls are boys and all the boys are girls’” (1991: 17). It is a feminist utopia where patriarchal conventions can be ignored in favour of an autonomist establishment of identity. As Orlando discovers, there is no universal truth, rather ontological success is a result of the acceptance and harmonising of the various elements within the individual. Orlando experiences several different selves through the course of her extensive life, and the denouement of the novel is her search for her Key Self, the one which controls the rest. Certain of these selves would be ‘masculine’, some ‘feminine’ and some both, but the Captain Self would be an amalgamation of them all, the androgynous centre of identity. Orlando is only able to discover this Key Self when all the others are in harmony, and she is immersed in her vision of wholeness. She is also only free to discern it when she ceases to actively pursue it, as this search implies a desire to privilege a single aspect of her personality. This is a self-abnegating process, for only when she embraces all of her selves equally can the Key Self appear. Her eventual discovery of her Captain Self signifies that she has overcome her internal divisions and fused the diverse fragments of her being into an androgynous synthesis. Woolf is conceptualising a metaphysical identity composed of a number of interrelated but autonomous constituents, governed by a pervasive central self. The multivalency of this theoretical identity is in no way undermined by the centrality of the Captain Self, as it is essentially a fusion of the others.

By extension, the androgynously synthesised entity is a vision of a non-discriminatory heterogeneous society. Marder describes *Orlando* as “a kind of hymn to androgyny. Virginia Woolf had discovered that the barriers between the sexes could be lowered, that the sharp distinctions which wounded her like ancient taunts could be smoothed down until they lost their sting” (1968: 111). The novel symbolises the potential that would exist in an ‘equi-valent’ society, emancipated from the restriction of phallogocentric conventions. “The androgynous mind... might yet save the world, or so Virginia Woolf suggests” (Heilbrun, 1973: 149). However, for this salvation to occur the androgynous mind has to transfer itself from the realm of fantasy to the domain of fact. This is the subliminal feminist significance of the text, although Woolf deliberately refrains from concluding with a moralistic peroration.

Towards the conclusion of the text *Orlando*, denying traditional narrative categories, laughs at her long-awaited fame and literary success, to the dismay of the biographer:

We must snatch space to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end, should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman everything is out of place. (Woolf, 1928: 145)

This is a subtle way of indicating that gender, despite its centrality in the novel, is only one aspect of identity. In the very end, Woolf refuses closure and is intentionally enigmatic, employing the three dots as originally planned. Shel returns at last from his travels, and when he appears,

There sprang up over his head a single wild bird.
 ‘It is the goose!’ Orlando cried. ‘The wild goose...’
 And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight,
 Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty Eight.
 (1928, 153)

This is the same goose that is described earlier as having been present everywhere Orlando has travelled, but that has escaped her reach because of its swiftness. Richter posits that the wild goose is associated with Shakespeare, and represents Orlando's search for her poetry (1970, 191). Marder argues that the goose symbolises truth and Orlando's attainment of androgynous perfection. It is highly possible that the wild goose is associated in some way with Woolf's androgynous vision, but the self-mocking choice of the symbol cannot be overlooked. There would be a certain cynicism in the implication that pursuing her vision would be a wild goose chase. It is as likely that the goose represents 'meaning', and therefore that any attempt to extract a definitive truth from the text, customary in conventional realist novels, is a fruitless exercise that Woolf deliberately obstructs. She refuses to behave in such a conventional or obvious manner.

By writing a feminist fantasy, Woolf was able to depart from the prescriptive practices of the traditional realist novel. She utilised that liberty to expand and transgress the limits of the novel. The key to this freedom is the androgynous protagonist whom fantasy enabled her to create, with an infinite variety of possibilities existing within a single character. The novel is a composite of genres and a fusion of genders. Woolf thoroughly enjoys decimating phallogocentric values and traditions, seizing the power of patriarchy and turning it on itself in a disruption of the concepts of 'realism', 'truth' and 'gender'. By converting her hero into a heroine, Woolf forces the reader to reconsider cultural assumptions in a psychoanalytic re-evaluation of the discursive signification of gender stereotypes. "Androgyny becomes a form of self-mastery, a metaphor for the autonomous self, a freedom from history, society, language" (Caughie, 1989: 44).

The concept of androgyny is central in Woolf's analysis of gender construction. It allows an escape from stereotypes by rejecting both of the only two positions offered by society. Orlando refuses definitive closure by opting to remain in the unclear space that androgyny imparts, a suspension between opposites, which fundamentally denies the opposition. This independence of identity is Woolf's same vision from A Room, in which the artist, like Orlando, attains a perfect psychic balance and is free to create beyond the confines of patriarchal dogma regarding gender, history and literature.

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Five

Angela Carter: The Sadeian Woman and 'Notes from the Front Line'



'Coniunctio (Intercourse)'

Carter shares Woolf's interest in the interrelations of literature, history and gender, and is likewise attracted to the concept of androgyny as a potential resolution to the gender conflict constructed by phallographic ideology. Carter's theoretical work represents the fifth alchemical phase, *coniunctio* or intercourse; it reflects the necessary sexual tone of this stage, in which chaos is unleashed. Carter is able to enter domains of explicit sexual discourse that were closed to Woolf. Carter directly connects her feminist theory on gender construction to the nature of conventional heterosexual coitus. The Sadeian Woman, published in 1979, is a theoretical re-evaluation of cultural codes of gender and sexuality through an exploration of Sade's writings. Her essay, 'Notes from the Front Line', is a self-referential analysis of women and writing, and a deconstruction of the myths that mould them (1983). These two works reflect the theoretical underpinnings of her apocalyptic novel, The Passion of New Eve. All three texts are teleological explorations of gender and its ontological ramifications within a feminist paradigm.

The Sadeian Woman is a forthright exposition of the unspoken normative requirements of the female subject through a critique of Sade's heroines, conducted within a Foucauldian paradigm of sexual power dynamics. It is not so much a literary analysis as it is a polemical investigation of characters and archetypes, and a deconstruction of phallographic epistemology. 'Notes from the Front Line' is both an autodiegetic interpellation and a socio-historical analysis. It forms part of a collection of essays by feminist writers responding to the question: "Do you situate yourself politically as a writer?" Carter professes, "I would regard myself as a feminist writer, because I'm a feminist in everything else and one can't compartmentalise these things in one's life" (1983: 69). Carter uses this position as a point of departure for her

feminist analysis that is in many ways a revisiting of Woolf's A Room of One's Own. Cultural shifts during the interval between 1928 and 1979, particularly the sexual revolution, enable Carter to analyse gender, sexuality and sexual intercourse with a great deal more candour than was possible for Woolf. Carter opens the bedroom door and engages directly with pornography and sex, extending her cultural critique beyond Woolf's and openly discussing matters to which Woolf could only subtly allude in her androgynous vision. Carter explores the concepts of, "Sadeian liberation by sexual transgression... of Yin and Yang, and sexual conflict as 'what-makes-the-world-go-round'" (Anderson, 1990: 38).

'And once the old world has turned on its axle so that the new dawn can dawn, then, ah, then! all the women will have wings... This young woman... will tear off her mind forg'd manacles, will rise up and fly away. The dolls' house doors will open, the brothels will spill forth their prisoners...' (Carter, 1984: 285)

Fevvers' idealistic rhetoric towards the end of Nights at the Circus epitomises Carter's historicist philosophy on the position of women as prisoners of a patriarchal paradigm that imposes femininity through cultural hegemony in order to maintain male dominance. Phallocratic myths have become naturalised through constant reiteration, creating a self-perpetuating historical discourse that reinforces female submission. Carter attempts to escape this gender prison by demythologising and deconstructing Western post-Enlightenment history and the tendentious scientific theories of biological essentialism. She selects Sade's work as the context for the analysis because, "He stands on the threshold of the modern period, looking both backward and forwards, at a time when the nature of human nature and of social institutions was debated as freely as it is in our own" (1979b: 1). The cultural conceptions of

'masculinity' and 'femininity' have also retained many of their eighteenth-century traits, which bifurcate humans and create relational discord.

'It was no accident that the Marquis de Sade chose heroines and heroes,' said Guillaume Apollinaire. 'Justine is woman as she has been until now, enslaved, miserable and less than human; her opposite, Juliette, represents the woman whose advent he anticipated, a figure of whom minds as yet have no conception, who is rising out of mankind, who will have wings and who will renew the world.' (Ibid. 79)

Sade's two heroines, the virtuous Justine and the depraved Juliette, represent the antithetical extremes of female behaviour – archetypal 'femininity' and phallus-identified tyranny. Both symbolic conceptions deny ontological autonomy, as do all archetypes. "All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway" (ibid. 5). These myths are intended to console women for their exclusion from power structures and to secure their complicity in patriarchal oppression. There is a common, if fallacious, association between myths and biology. Carter argues that "Baby is hermaphrodite. It is polysexual. It is all the sexes in one" (ibid. 124). On the basis of this concept, Carter endeavours to dismantle the essentialist equation of women with 'femininity' by exchanging the reductive myths of gender construction for multivalent individuality.

Carter asserts that "Myths deal in false universals," and offers the biological iconography of graffiti and pornography as examples in which women are largely reduced to metonyms of female anatomy (ibid. 5). Women tend to be defined within the paradigms of either reproduction or commodification, and Carter evidently wishes to extract women from these restrictive categories, without replacing them with new

definitive classifications. The phallic mother is as treacherous as the phallic father is. Carter, like Woolf, is advocating a move away from the hierarchical power matrix that is simultaneously created and reflected by mythology. "I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologising business" (Carter, 1983: 71).

Carter begins her feminist critique at the most basic level of sexual difference, anatomy, and critiques symbolisation of the female as a lack that originates in Freud's castration theories. "Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing" (1979b, 4). She satirises this concept in The Passion of New Eve by assigning the name 'Zero' to the violent phallocrat who enslaves Eve. Carter's anti-essentialist argument is a decentralisation of the role of anatomy in Freudian psychoanalysis and ontological aetiology, what she describes as the "total demystification of the flesh" (ibid. 19). A substantial proportion of The Sadeian Woman relates to the body and its physical functions, not as inherently fundamental, but as a causative factor in the cultural construction of gender that inscribes women's identities on their bodies. This type of approach is predicated on uniformity and denies both intra-personal allotropy and interpersonal multiplicity.

Although they share the same biology, Justine and Juliette are diametrical opposites. Their shared femaleness positions them both as sexual beings, but while Justine is a passive sexual object, Juliette is a powerful dominatrix. For Carter they respectively represent the archetypes of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in monstrous extremes, demonstrating the erroneousness of the synonymous connection between biological sex and gender. In Sade's tendentiously simplified world, women have only two

choices – the martyred femininity of Justine, or the adopted masculinity of Juliette. The androgynous middle ground that Carter favours is non-existent within the ‘reality’ of this polarised gender construct.

I don't believe there is such a thing as femininity. I really don't believe it. I don't believe that there is an essential womanliness that women have that men don't. (Carter in Atallah, 1987: 990)

In Carter's autodiegesis in ‘Notes from the Front Line’, she historically contextualises her recognition of the constructedness of femininity within the turbulent upheavals of the 1960s. “I can date to that time... my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. How that social fiction of my ‘femininity’ was created, by means outside my control and palmed off on me as the real thing” (1983: 70). Carter's feminist epistemology is predicated on this conceptualisation of ‘femininity’ as a social fiction and unquestioned normative requirement within a phallic economy. The prohibitive construct is embodied in the ideality of the ‘good woman’, a paragon of modesty, virtue and purity who has repressed all sexual instincts and privileged sentiment, but whose life is doomed to disappointment, “like that of a woman who wishes for nothing more than a happy marriage” (Carter, 1979b: 50). This figuration imbues ‘feminine’ women with marketable value in the phallic economy, and their convergent incompetence ensures that they cannot survive outside it. Carter argues that

Relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women upon men... The economic dependence of women remains a believed fiction and is assumed to imply an emotional dependence that is taken for granted as a condition inherent in the natural order of things. (Ibid. 6-7)

Carter engages in materialist criticism that is analogous to Woolf's. Economic independence is vital not only for the opportunity to write, but also for autonomy in general. From Carter's perspective, existential 'pleroma' requires emancipation from the constraints of sexual contracts, from prostitution to marriage, which enable men to control women through financial dependency. She acknowledges the ubiquity of this contractual methodology, and lauds the prostitute for exploiting her reified position:

However, in a world organised by contractual obligations, the whore represents the only possible type of honest woman... At least the girl who sells herself with her eyes open is not a hypocrite and, in world of cash-sale ideology, that is a positive, even a heroic virtue. (Ibid. 57-8)

The prostitute represents a small but significant distance from the apathetic passivity of the 'good woman' and the prison of idealised femininity, but is also an accomplice in the perpetuation of the capitalist commodification of women's sexuality.

Carter's feminist polemics incorporate socialist materialist analysis and postcolonial critique, relating imperialism and class to the patriarchal paradigm of Western European culture. In The Sadeian Woman she establishes a connection between class and 'femininity', a gender construct open only to those from advantaged backgrounds: "The rich can afford to be virtuous, the poor must shift as best they can. Justine's femininity is a mode of behaviour open only to those who can afford it" (ibid. 51). Justine's subsequent poverty, when combined with her 'feminine' virtue, positions her as a doubly disempowered victim, lacking the tools to alter her situation. Carter describes her as "an enigmatic image of irresistibility and powerlessness, forever trapped in impotence" (ibid. 71). This evocation of femininity has been the model for cultural iconography for the last two centuries. Carter identifies this ideal as culminating in the portrayal of women in the "celluloid brothel" of cinema during the 1940s, most obviously in the 'feminine' icon, Marilyn Monroe (ibid. 60). Cinema is

the matrix where passivity, visual commodification, and the manipulation of female sexuality converge. Carter identifies the European screen icons, Garbo and Dietrich, as the exceptions to this hegemonic portrayal of women; their disruptive adult sexuality was acknowledged and tolerated only because of their foreignness. However, Monroe's apparent fragility, childlike innocence and beauty combine to create what Carter describes "a successful but imaginary prostitute... [who] must make up to the paedophile in men, in order to reassure both men and herself that her own sexuality will not reveal to them their own inadequacy" (ibid. 67). Monroe is the incarnation of the tendentious passivity of culturally constructed 'femininity'.

Juliette, Justine's diabolical sister, escapes from the prison of 'femininity' by abandoning the "praxis of femininity" as Carter terms it (ibid. 78). Juliette adopts 'masculine' agency instead, with its connoted traits of violence, financial wealth, lack of sentiment and sexual freedom; nonetheless it is an identity that is created for her by the perverse phalocrats with whom she associates.

If Justine is a pawn because she is a woman, Juliette transforms herself from pawn to queen in a single move and henceforward goes wherever she pleases on the chess board. Nevertheless, there remains the question of the presence of the king, who remains the lord of the game. (Ibid. 79-80)

She is trained as a sexual terrorist, and through homologous identification with the phallic power paradigm, consolidates it in the manner described by Kristeva in her essay 'Women's Time' (in Warhol and Herndl, 1981: 452-454). Carter describes Juliette as "rationality personified. She will never obey the fallacious promptings of her heart" (1979b: 79). Carter seems marginally to prefer Juliette to Justine as a behavioural type for women, but is, as Russo points out, "quite explicit about Juliette's limits as a model of the future for women" (1994: 165). Wood argues that:

We should always, if we have any respect for our bodies and our desire, choose Juliette... Although [Carter] says she doesn't really want Juliette to renew her world... it is important to see that the imaginary wreckage caused by Juliette, the real wreckage that could be caused by a woman who would resist hypocrisy the way she does, "will have removed a repressive and authoritarian structure that has prevented a good deal of the work of renewal." (1998: 135)

Perhaps the fundamental significance of Juliette is as the incarnation of Carter's assertion that, "A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster" (1979b: 27). Genuine emancipation necessitates the prior transformation of society. The concept of positive androgyny cannot succeed within a traditional patriarchal ideology predicated on phallogocentric values and discourse, which govern not only sexual, but all social interaction, and continue to inscribe essentialist fictions on women's bodies.

Justine is the thesis, Juliette the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling. (Ibid. 79)

In Carter's configuration of the dialectical relationship between the two sisters, they represent extreme opposites, who are nevertheless both inextricably linked to pain and suffering; Justine is the passive victim, Juliette is the violent practitioner. The subject/object (other) dichotomy that characterises patriarchy (and colonialism) is equivalent to the 'masculine'/'feminine' opposition in its active/passive figuration, which in its most extreme form can be understood in terms of the dichotomy between sadism and masochism. The development of agency is required in 'feminised' women for them to liberate themselves from their oppression. Carter identifies the missionary position in sex as the most basic manifestation of this passivity, in which gender outweighs personality: "She is most immediately and dramatically a woman when she lies beneath a man, and her submission is the apex of his malehood" (ibid. 7). The missionary position replicates the notion of women as chthonic archetypes and

reiterates phallogocentric agency. Carter argues that women must extricate from sexual passivity and repression in order to attain independence and the ability to transform the culture that marginalises and persecutes them:

Women do not normally fuck in the active sense. They are fucked in the passive tense and automatically fucked-up, done over, undone... [Sade] urges women to fuck as actively as they are able, so that powered by their enormous and hitherto untapped sexual energy they will then be able to fuck their way into history and, in doing so, change it. (Ibid. 27)

Although this contention refers to heterosexual sex, it is by no means heterosexist; Carter, as does Sade, embraces bisexuality and homosexuality as significant rejections of the active/passive power paradigm. Bisexuality in particular is an intrinsic component of both gender emancipation and androgynous ontology. Carter acknowledges the occasional duplication of heterosexual gender dynamics in homosexual sex, but emphasises its egalitarian possibilities.

Within the context of an analysis of Sade's work, Carter necessarily focuses on biology, sexuality and sexual intercourse, both as independent political realities and as manifestations of cultural constructions of gender. This approach represents a feminist inversion of the essentialist teleology of gender and sexuality, and of the perception of biological sex as immutable and definitive. "But our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does... Flesh is not an irreducible human universal" (Carter, 1979b: 9). The history to which Carter is referring is one largely defined by a Judaeo-Christian heritage of sexual repression and morality, which prescribes universalising behavioural norms. Carter continues to rebel against the concept of homogeneity and the forms of its cultural construction:

The notion of a universality of human experience is a confidence trick and the notion of a universality of female experience is a clever confidence trick. Pornography, like marriage and the fictions of romantic love, assists the process of false universalising. (Ibid. 12)

Sage claims, "It's an observation that, if taken seriously, ought to modify the way we think of history, as well as the way we think of sex. History, in other words, would take account of the changing strategies for fashioning selves" (1992: 174). 'Notes from the Front Line' correlates the rise of feminism and the decline of imperialism as signals of the decline of the patriarchal culture of the West, which has oppressed women and non-whites alike. The concept of subject/other is collapsing in on itself as the Centre disintegrates. "It is possible, assuming Western Europe is allowed to sidle out of the spotlight of history rather than going up with a bang, that, for the first time for a thousand years or so, its inhabitants may at last be free of their terrible history" (Carter, 1983: 73).

In discussing intertextuality in her work, Carter freely admits, "I feel free to loot and rummage in an official past, specifically a literary past... It is a vast repository of outmoded lies, where you can check out what lies used to be à la mode and find the old lies on which new lies have been based" (ibid. 74). She favours an historicist approach in her writing, both fiction and theory, "putting new wine in old bottles" (ibid. 69). She acknowledges the influence that the past has on her work, and bears a strong resemblance to Woolf in many of her ideas, although, working in a more progressive context Carter enjoys greater freedom than Woolf did. Carter nonetheless appears to be familiar with the 'Angel in the House', and describes the influence of the Angel somewhat more bluntly. "Apart from feeling a treacherous necessity to charm, especially when, however unconsciously, I was going for the testicles, I was, as a girl, suffering a degree of colonisation of the mind" (ibid. 71). This patriarchal influence manifested itself as an unconscious identification with hegemonic values and discourse, which Carter strives to demolish in her later work.

Carter attributes her feminist radicalisation to sexual and emotional experience, and thus “increasingly writing about sexuality and its manifestations” (ibid. 72). Carter establishes a connection between women and writing, describing writing as “only applied linguistics”; she then asserts that: “This is, of course, why it is so enormously important for women to write fiction *as* women – it is part of the slow process of decolonialising our language and our basic habits of thought” (ibid. 75). This argument is analogous to Cixous’s concept of ‘écriture féminine’ and Irigaray’s ‘womanspeak’, in its intersection of women, sexuality and writing (Belsey & Moore, 1989: 13). The separatist undertone of this approach is again a Wittgensteinian ladder, a necessary interval between the phallogocentric past and an androgynous future in which language has been transformed. “Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation” (Carter, 1983: 77)

Like Woolf, Carter situates her literary theories in relation to the historical subjugation of women, but focuses her attention specifically on the significance of women’s reproductive role, rather than on domestic constraints in general. She situates herself hypothetically in preceding centuries and surmises, analogously to Woolf, that she would, in general, have been unable to create under the existing material circumstances. Carter briefly examines Japan, Britain and France, and argues that in the latter two countries, motherhood and a writing career were mutually exclusive until the advent of contraception. “In fact, most women were *///* most of the time until the introduction of contraception... and you need to be quite strong to write big, fat books” (ibid. 74). In her introduction to The Sadeian Woman, Carter identifies the significance of Sade’s work in his refusal to perceive women purely in reproductive terms, but women have only recently been readily able to control their

reproductive capacity, and thus escape its determinative role. This enables not only opportunity for artistic creation, but for a multiplicity of experience, which Carter argues, necessitates the transformation of language to encompass it.

The emancipation of women from the 'feminine' gender position of passivity not only broadens their range of experience, but also validates it as a contributing factor to their existential development. Justine's passivity prohibits her metaphysical evolution, producing a stagnating impotence that results in her physical death. As Carter observes, "To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is, to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman" (1979b: 77). Juliette, as the antithesis of Justine's passivity, becomes a killer instead. Carter is searching for an intermediate position that eradicates violence entirely, a synthesis of the favourable aspects of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' into a "new kind of being" (1983: 74).

The androgynous characters that Carter identifies in Sade's work have all combined destructive elements, and so become hybridised monsters rather than examples of multiplicitous harmony. Carter includes the homosexual de Bressac, female libertines with dildos, and females whose erect clitorises are capable of penetrative sex. But she posits Durand as "the queen of all these androgynes... She is handsome with superb breasts, an enormous clitoris and an obstruction of the vagina which has prevented her from ever engaging in orthodox heterosexual intercourse" (1979b: 112). Durand embodies the idea of the phallic mother, which Carter parodies in the character of the Great Mother in The Passion of New Eve. Carter's character, like Durand, "treats science as if it were magic... She is the omnipotent mother of early childhood... the

cruel mother, huge as a giantess" (ibid. 114). In the phallic mother, according to Carter, "The Enlightenment returns to pure mythology. Reason overreaches itself, and turns into the opposite of reason. Scientific order, ruthlessly applied, reduces the world to chaos" (ibid. 115). Chaos and an antilogos philosophy can however be utilised advantageously in the deconstruction of patriarchal discourses and the development of positive androgyny, what Carter refers to as "A new kind of being, unburdened with a past" (1983: 74). She proceeds to assert, "I/we are not the slaves of the history that enslaved our ancestors" (ibid.).

In another analeptic echo of Woolf's argument in A Room of One's Own, Carter discusses the idea (or absence of) a female Shakespeare. In a humorous summary of the concept behind Woolf's fictive account of Shakespeare's sister, Carter offers a characteristically open-ended opinion:

One last thing. So there hasn't been a female Shakespeare. Three possible answers: (a) So what. (This is simplest and best.) (b) There hasn't been a *male* Shakespeare since Shakespeare, dammit. (c) Somewhere, Franz Fanon opines that one cannot, in reason, ask a shoeless peasant in the Upper Volta to write songs like Schubert's; the opportunity to do so has never existed. The concept is meaningless. (Ibid. 75-6)

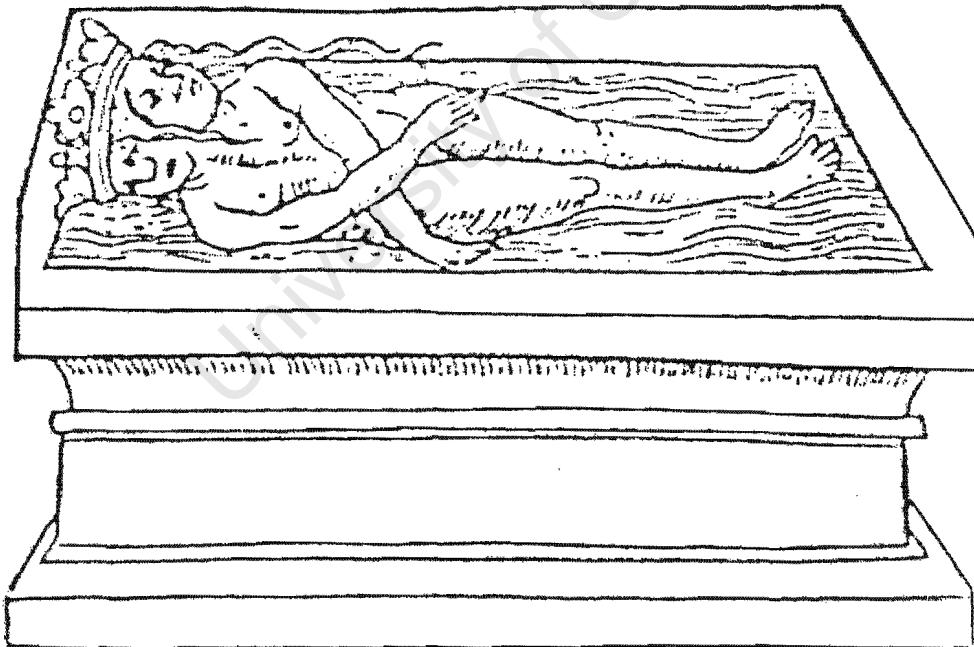
Carter concludes her historical analysis by identifying the bourgeois novel as a means of behavioural instruction, and rejecting the concept of didactic fiction in favour of a transformation of fiction and language to evoke and anticipate alterations in society and individual ontology.

Carter's interest in historicism and the (re)fashioning of selves is manifestly demonstrated in the polemic of her feminist fantasy, The Passion of New Eve. New Eve and The Sadeian Woman exhibit many correlated concepts, including assumptions regarding the immutability of biological sex, the conceptualisation of

women as castrated men, the notion of a dark Beulah that represents “the abode of unrepressed sexuality”, issues of ontological reconfiguration, phallic mothers, cinematic iconography and, of course, androgyny. Carter admits at the conclusion of ‘Notes from the front Line’, “What I *really* like doing is writing fiction and trying to work things out *that way*” (1983: 77). In accordance with her beliefs regarding the transformation of fiction, Carter explores these ideas without resorting to didactic moralising in order that each reader is able to reach an individual conclusion. Her averred intention is to “present a number of propositions in a variety of different ways, and leave the reader to construct her own fiction from the elements of my fiction” (ibid. 69). The Passion of New Eve epitomises this multivalent approach to reading and writing, which converges with her conceptualisation of ambiguous sexuality and allotropic androgynous identity.

Six

Angela Carter:
The Passion of New Eve



'Death and Putrefaction'

The Passion of New Eve appeared at the height of the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s. Published in 1977, this fictional feminist critique focuses on androgyny and demythologising as means of creating an alternative discursive paradigm. Carter employs science fiction to deconstruct traditional patriarchal ideology, producing an alternative, cosmogonic parody in a bleak landscape of contrasting extremes. The atmosphere is an apt reflection of the sixth stage of the alchemical process, death and putrefaction. Death pervades the novel, symbolically and literally: many of the landscapes are associated with death, and the majority of characters experience death in some form. Carter's novel is also pervaded by a sense of decomposition, of the gradual decay of society and its traditions, as well as the inevitable decaying process inherent in human mortality. Androgyny, in the forms of transsexualism and transvestism, features as a revolutionary epistemological movement away from the conventional construction of gender as polarised and exclusive, towards an allotropic, alchemical ontology. New Eve is a dialogic amalgamation of deconstructive analysis and fiction, a reconciliation of sex and text.

The relationship of gender and genre is pivotal in Carter's androgynous experiment. Like Woolf's Orlando, Carter's Eve cannot exist within conventional perceptions of reality, necessitating the use of utopian fantasy. New Eve is proleptic while Orlando is predominantly historiographic, but both authors have found their "raw material in the lumber room of the Western European imagination" (Carter, 1983: 72). Woolf finds English literary theory and humanist ontology; Carter finds Freudian psychoanalysis and mythology. Carter's fantastical and apocalyptic vision is largely science-fictional. The science fiction genre had acquired a certain popularity for the exploration of issues of sexuality, for example Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness and Piercy's

Woman on the Edge of Time. However New Eve cannot be circumscribed within a single genre categorisation. Carter rebels against the scientific logic of classification, forging and wielding Cixous's "antilogos weapon" (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 338). The blurring of gender is reflected in a pastiche of genres – gothic, fantasy, science fiction, erotic romance and phantasmagoria. These narrative genres are further combined with psychoanalysis and a feminist polemic. These components are synthesised into a fluid pastiche characterised by a multiplicity that refuses a final reducible meaning. Curti offers an aetiological explanation for this coalescence, which echoes Woolf's argument in A Room of One's Own regarding literary ancestors:

The necessity for women to retrace their way in the literary canon, to re-visit and look at fathers and mothers with different eyes, has brought about the blurring of genres and the transformation of models: metamorphosis and grafting have produced new hybrid forms, monstrous shapes and bodies... The displacements, ambiguities and pluralism of the female narrative texts lead to genre transgression and contamination. (1998: xiii)

The reassessment of gender and identity requires an alternative epistemology that rejects generic and diegetic moniformity. "Sex in society, gender in language, genre in narrative... Genre and gender are reified... lead[ing] to an aestheticisation of masculine and feminine that interrupts 'social' and 'emancipative' discourses" (ibid. 32). Neither genre nor gender can be natural; both are cultural constructs and Carter transgresses the boundaries of both. "Carter engages with the postmodern desire to privilege... the 'ex-centric'" (Robinson, 1991: 78). She regards herself as a feminist writer, and the contiguity of the political and the fictional is clear (1983: 69). New Eve utilises narrative fiction to destabilise gender and genre:

The social fictions that regulate our lives – what Blake called 'mind forg'd manacles' – is what I've concerned myself with consciously...

I'm in the demythologising business... because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree...

I wrote one anti-mythic novel in 1977, The Passion of New Eve – I conceived it as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity. (Ibid. 70-71)

Carter employs parodic hyperbole to effect this demythologising, imbuing the narrative with a dark humour. In Carter's anti-mythic world, Medusa is laughing, as argued by Cixous (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 342). The exaggeration of gender stereotypes and sexual conflict serves to defamiliarise and denaturalise them. This disrupts the discursively produced essentialism of gender difference, and overturns its concomitant subject/ object dichotomy. As the novel is a feminist fictional critique, the parody and humour of New Eve have a serious political purpose but also operate on a level of autonomous hedonism. This multiplicitous style allows for a variety of interpretations and emphases determined by the individual reader in the space Carter creates between fiction and critique, fantasy and logic. The events of the novel can reflect a visionary feminist fable, an entropic nightmare, or simply a fantastical anecdote.

New Eve is an analeptic fictional response to Cixous's 1975 essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', and a proleptic dramatisation of Kristeva's 'Women's Time' (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991). Cixous offers an anticipatory theory of women's writing, and argues for the subversion of phallogentric constructions of gender and sexuality:

The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them... to confuse the biological and the cultural. Anticipation is imperative... to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable. (334)

Carter is breaking Cixous's 'millennial ground' with her futuristic vision of feminist revolution, emancipating the 'little girls immured in the mirror' through a deconstruction of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Cixous states, "It is time to liberate the

New Woman from the Old” and Carter takes up the challenge, creating a New Woman who is androgynous rather than ‘feminine’ (ibid. 336). The primary target of Carter’s demythologising approach is the patriarchal discourse that inscribes gender and sexuality, what Cixous refers to as “self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogentrism” (ibid. 337). Another aspect of this patriarchal order that Cixous identifies is the oppression of bisexuality under castration anxiety. Carter recovers bisexuality as an expression of allotropic ontology, epitomised by the coitus between Eve and Tristessa; she confronts the castration complex and paradoxically dismisses it by surgically transforming her hero into a heroine.

Kristeva, similarly to Carter, re-evaluates women’s relationship to temporality and spatiality. She points to the common association of women with space rather than time and history, but she restores time to women by distinguishing between “cyclical and monumental” temporality (ibid. 445). She argues that the first generation of feminism, suffragism, irreversibly inserted women into history, but that second-generation, post-1968 feminism then refused linear temporality (ibid. 447). Likewise, Eve returns to history from her mythic nightmare and embraces cyclical temporality. Kristeva argues that castration anxiety is hypothetical and identifies the attempt by women to shatter the language of science; Mother’s scientific methods involve surgically realising the fear of castration with appropriated scientific precision.

Kristeva also explores the implications of maternity, analysing its importance and the continuing desire of women to be mothers, although within a less patriarchally biased paradigm. She argues that if the fundamental challenge to identity that motherhood poses can be negotiated, that the utopian potential exists for a guiltless maternity, but

that women's eternal indebtedness to their mothers makes them vulnerable. By the conclusion of the novel, Eve has liberated herself from her 'mother' and embodies this utopian potential as the child she is carrying represents the signifying space that Kristeva describes as the 'third generation' (ibid. 458). This space relegates the man/woman dichotomy to the realm of metaphor, and allows for multiplicitous individual identity. "What can 'identity', even 'sexual identity', mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged?" (Ibid.)

Carter's entropic fantasy takes place in a near-future United States, which Cixous identifies as a site of altering power relations (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 340). It is narrated by the intradiegetic protagonist Eve(lyn), whose journey encompasses a variety of contrasting landscapes. The postmodernist fragmentations of spatiality and identity are analogous. Evelyn's stereotypical 'masculinity' is most extreme in the urban settings, London and New York; his ontological crisis is situated in the desert; and Eve reaches existential 'pleroma' against a thalassic backdrop. Richard Brown argues that the America symbolises the Self, and can be "a shifting, ambiguous sign, ineradicable from all our cultural discourses. As such it expresses the shifting, ambiguous and contradictory nature of many of the desires and anxieties we might experience... as individual selves" (in Massa & Stead, 1994: 92-93). America has always represented a new world of alternative possibilities, and is therefore a fitting setting for a futuristic vision of feminist revolution and gender inversion.

Evelyn's initiation into America, his first experience of the feminist revolutionaries, and his sadistically patriarchal relationship with Leilah all occur in New York. Here, the gothic element of Carter's writing is most apparent: New York is portrayed as a

dark, rat-infested nightmare. Carter employs alchemy as an analogy for Evelyn's process of transformation in which New York represents 'nigredo', the state of putrefaction. "It was then an alchemical city. It was chaos, dissolution, nigredo, night" (1977: 16). Baroslav, Evelyn's New York neighbour practises alchemy, which reiterates the alchemical associations. Baroslav actually succeeds in creating a gold ingot, the symbol of post-transformation perfection. At the novel's conclusion, the androgynous Eve barter it for the boat that will carry her into the future. 'Putrefaction' implies death, and in *New Eve*, New York exemplifies Piercy's notion of "cities of the dead and cities of the unborn" (in Massa & Stead, 1994: 316). The man that Evelyn was is dying, but Eve is not 'born'.

The transformation process requires Evelyn's transposition from the teeming decay of the city to the barren desolation of the desert. The journey into the wilderness has obvious biblical connotations, but is also a topographical metaphor for Evelyn's identity: "I have found a landscape that matches the landscape of my heart" (Carter, 1977: 50). The desert also represents a space that exists outside the patriarchal structures that are located in the cities; it is a place where the inverse, Carter's hyperbolic matriarchy, exists. Beulah is the centre of the feminist revolution, a dystopia where Evelyn's physical transformation is performed. 'Beulah' is Hebrew for 'marriage', and refers to the marriage of Jerusalem with God (Browning, 1996: 43). Furthermore, it is a favourite concept of Blake's, with whom Carter had an affinity (Carter, 1983: 70). Blake's poem 'The Invocation' reads,

Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song,
Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your realms
Of terror and mild moony lustre, in soft Sexual delusions
Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer... (1994: 280)

'Milton's Journey to Eternal Death' refers not only to Beulah, but also to androgyny:

Then on the verge of Beulah he beheld his own Shadow,
A mournful form, double, hermaphroditic, male and female
In one wonderful body... (Ibid. 281-2)

Carter appropriates both of these ideas for her feminist fable, although her representation of Beulah is a parodic distortion of the divine capital. "And here I am in Beulah, the place where contrarities exist together... Beulah is a profane place. It is a crucible. It is the home of the woman who calls herself the Great Parricide" (Carter, 1977: 61-2).

Beulah is the residence of the Great Mother and her terrorist acolytes. In her essay 'Women's Time', with which New Eve has many similarities, Kristeva argues that when women refuse hegemonic power, they might create "a parallel society, a counter-power which then takes on aspects ranging from a club of ideas to a group of terrorist commandos" (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 452). These countersocieties are imagined as harmonious and free, but revert to the structures of the old regimes. "This terrorist violence offers as a program of liberation an order which is even more oppressive, more sacrificial than those it combats" (ibid. 454). This epitomises the matriarchal terrorism of Carter's Beulah. Despite this negativity, it is still the 'crucible', a chthonic womb, where Evelyn's transformation occurs, without which he would probably have remained the sadistic chauvinist he was at the start of the novel.

The first chapter of New Eve serves almost as a prologue to the main story, and is the only section that takes place outside America. The autodiegetic narrator acquaints the reader with Evelyn and his sordid sexual proclivities; with Tristessa, who is the epitome of reified, aestheticised femininity; and with Mother in a proleptic reference

to Evelyn's surgical transformation. It is immediately apparent that although Evelyn is narrating his own story, his descriptions of himself are brutally honest, a practice that is re-emphasised by his remorseless account of his abusive behaviour towards Leilah. The implication is that Evelyn is trustworthy as a narrator, and therefore that even the most fanciful elements of the story can be believed.

The unlikeliest, and probably most disturbing, event in New Eve is the complete surgical transformation of Evelyn into Eve, the new First Woman who is produced rather than reproduced. It is a magical process conveyed in scientific terms, and exemplifies Freud's 'castration complex'. Cixous identifies the reduction of man in phallographic ideology to "a single idol with clay balls" (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 341). This is embodied in the structure at the entrance to Beulah; it is an enormous stone penis snapped clean in half, beneath which "sits the Mother in a complicated mix of mythology and technology" (Carter, 1977: 59). Leilah threatens Evelyn with castration – "She issued voodoo threats against my manhood; she told me a chicken would come and snap my cock off, but I did not believe that" – and Mother realises that threat (ibid. 37). This process represents the destruction of the boundary between masculine and feminine, formulating not only gender, but also biological sex as a construction rather than an immutable essence. As the epitome of corrupt 'masculinity', Evelyn is unable to offer feminist insights himself, but the critical treatment of his character reveals Carter's feminist epistemology. This incorporates a determinist theory of gender that is extrapolated into a non-essentialist theory of sex. This reinforces the determinist perspective and creates the opportunity for a practical demonstration of gender construction through cognition and experience. "[Carter's]

writing takes for granted not only the past constructedness of gender, but also its logical corollary – that it is continuously being constructed” (Sage, 1992: 177).

Carter posits gender as performative rather than substantive, and establishes the roles of ‘masculinity/activity’ (Evelyn) and ‘femininity/passivity’ (Leilah) as a point of commencement for her disruption of oppositional stereotypes. By the end of the novel Leilah is transformed into Lilith, the assertive first wife of Adam who was replaced by the submissive Eve; she bears no resemblance to the persecuted prostitute from New York. Both Evelyn and Leilah are hyperbolised versions of their respective genders and reflect the conflict between men and women that Carter perceives as central (Kenyon, 1991: 8). Carter then breaks down this binary opposition and explores the androgynous space that is in between, since, like Woolf, she believes that either extreme is equally dangerous. Kenyon argues that Carter’s writing is designed to alienate, as “Such ‘alienation’ is ... an essential tool to challenge cultural constructs” (ibid. 30). The gender dichotomy is not the only constructed binary that Carter assails, turning her attention to the time/space, science/magic, and myth/history oppositions of hegemonic discourse.

Then the loudspeaker crackled again, to attract my attention; a gong sounded and a crisp voice... delivered these maxims which, to me at that time, were quite incomprehensible.

“Proposition one: time is a man, space is a woman.

“Proposition two: time is a killer.

“Proposition three: kill time and live forever. (Carter, 1977: 66)

In a superb foreshadowing of Kristeva’s theory on counter-power and its reversion to old regimes, Carter portrays a matriarchal countersociety that is as oppressive as its patriarchal antithesis. Mother’s thesis on the gendered nature of time and space as binary opposites reproduces the patriarchal paradigm, although from a different

perspective. Likewise she embraces myth as the opposite of history, which is foregrounded in patriarchy. In the end Mother can escape neither time nor history as Carter, employing the disruptive power of androgyny, demolishes the boundaries, causing the binarisms to collapse in on themselves. Mother's dream of immortality fails because she fails to realise the androgynous nature of the universe, that everything contains both the 'masculine' and the 'feminine'.

An analogue of the alchemical marriage, Eve fuses these elements thereby enabling her transcendence. She moves from extreme 'masculinity' as Evelyn, to extreme 'femininity' as Zero's wife and thence to androgynous balance in her marriage to Tristessa. Eve suffers the humiliations that Evelyn inflicted on Leilah, thus gaining rare insight into the experience of the 'other': "[Mother] will free me from being, transform my I into the other and, in doing so, annihilate it" (Carter, 1977: 74). Evelyn is an abusive and misogynistic voyeur of unrestrained licentiousness. Eve is abused and despised, objectified and sexually enslaved. These two grotesque polarities of gender identity both disintegrate - Evelyn in Zero's house, and Eve in the flickering reflections of Tristessa's vitrified mansion. Lost in the desert once more, Eve's new synthesised identity begins to emerge, and is then expedited by her regressive journey through the seaside caves. She emerges from this symbolic 'athanor' as the embodiment of the Philosopher's Stone – androgynously balanced in a fluid identity and, it is implied, possessing the power to transmute others.

Evelyn/Eve's journey contains elements of both flight and quest (Sage, 1992: 175). Eve is constantly fleeing those who would impose an identity on her. As Cixous points out, "if the New Women... dare to create outside the theoretical, they're..."

pieced back to the string which leads back, if not to the Name-of-the-Father, then, for a new twist, to the place of the phallic mother” (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 347). Eve’s search for an ontological autonomy is catalysed by the surgical mutation inflicted by Mother. Mother is magically able to transform Evelyn into a female, to ‘give birth’ to Eve, but cannot make him a woman. Eve’s feminisation is achieved through cognition and her experiences as a female. Her initial external experiences are of feminist and maternal indoctrination at the hands of Mother’s acolytes; her internal experience involves the visual recognition of her new female incarnation as ‘herself’, a reconciliation of her female physicality with her ‘masculinist’ psychology. Eve experiences a great deal more difficulty than Orlando does in the same situation, probably because Eve is an unwilling lab rat while Orlando is magically transformed without suffering.

The mirror phase of identity development is central to Lacanian psychoanalysis:

We have only to understand this mirror-phase *as an identification*, in the full sense which analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation which takes place in the subject when he assumes an image... [It] would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (In Mitchell, 1974: 384-5)

In her thematisation of this process, Carter disrupts the theory through the dyadic formation of the character; Eve is consequently both self and other. This duplication complicates the identification process, creating a division rather than a constitutive stabilisation. The contrast is incorporated in the symbol of feminist revolutionaries, “bared teeth in the female circle” (Carter, 1977: 13). Painted in bloody red, this symbol embodies violence and femaleness; ironically, the female circle is a simplified graphic of Aphrodite’s mirror, denoting the perceived vanity of archetypal

'femininity'. This directly contradicts the ideology of Beulah, which is nevertheless the site where Evelyn passes through the looking glass, and his identity is reversed.

Eve does not fully realise her physical transformation until she surveys herself in the mirror. Eve's first view of her reflection parodies the male gaze; Evelyn's personality is watching Eve's appearance, motivated by the same mind-set with which he observed Leilah:

Then she opened the wall upon the mirror and left me alone with myself. But when I looked in the mirror, I saw Eve; I did not see myself. I saw a young woman, who, though she was I, I could in no way acknowledge as myself... Let the punishment fit the crime, whatever it had been. They had turned me into the *Playboy* centrefold. I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy. And – how can I put it – the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself. The psycho-programming had not been entirely successful.
(Ibid. 95-6)

The necessary psychological transformation only occurs when Evelyn lives in his new skin, experiencing life as a woman, a process that is compactly encompassed in Eve's relationship with Zero. It highlights the disparity between Mother's attempt to inscribe identity upon Eve's body, and the identity that ensues from experience; Gasiorek refers to these competing conceptualisations as "body as surface" and "lived experience of body" (1995: 125). Jordan points out "the joke inherent in Zero's name... he is the sign for nothing. Zero satirises the power of the phallus, which Carter suggests is an arbitrary sign" (in Anderson, 1990: 36). In Zero, Carter subverts the Freudian concept of femaleness as the lack of a phallus, thereby deconstructing the patriarchal myth, in the same way that Mother is used to deconstruct patriarchy.

"I felt myself to be, not myself but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection, forced me to know myself as a

former violator at the moment of my own violation” (Carter, 1977: 132). Zero’s house is a microcosmic patriarchy, maintained through violence and the harem’s devotion to Zero. Here Eve experiences the nastiest facets of male domination – rape, degradation, deprivation and reification and enforced silence – in a dramatisation of Cixous’s theory on writing: “Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be coned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem” (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 338). This component of Eve’s journey is a necessary rite of passage in the process of androgynisation. It is an experience of marginality to counteract Evelyn’s prejudice. Gasiorek describes Eve as “a neophyte in liminality, who... must undergo ‘ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character’ in order to become a *tabula rasa*” (1995: 126-7). Gasiorek argues that Eve never achieves the aggregation that is the final stage of such rituals, following separation and experience of the limen, perhaps because of the fluidity that characterises her androgynous identity.

A fundamental aspect of Eve’s identity is an acceptance of her female form and its consequences, a metaphysical reconciliation with the phenomenal. Mother violently drives Evelyn from his male body in an inversion of the manner in which, according to Cixous, women have been driven from their bodies and from writing (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 334). It is a forced removal from phallogocentric monosexuality, whereby Evelyn loses his phallic power, but gains both Cixous’s “cosmic libido” of bisexuality and female reproductive power. Initially this procreative capacity represents a threat because of Mother’s intentions to turn Eve into a feminist Messiah, but comes to reflect utopian potential when Eve is impregnated by Tristessa.

The relationship to Tristessa is one of the few constants in “the interrupted continuum I refer to as myself” (Carter, 1977: 218). Analogously to Orlando, Eve can only feel true affection for concordantly androgynous figure, and can only procreate with a male mate. Mother’s intended in vitro fertilisation procedure holds no appeal for Eve. Eve discovers this ideal mate in the screen icon of Evelyn’s adolescence, Tristessa de St Ange – “Tristessa. Enigma. Illusion. Woman? Ah!” (Carter, 1977: 2). The first name reflects his melancholy; the surname belongs to a character in Sade’s Philosophy in the Boudoir, which Carter analyses in The Sadeian Woman (1979). Madame de Saint-Ange is a merciless libertine with a voracious and amoral sexuality, as depraved as Tristessa is martyred. Tristessa’s transvestist appearance is a metonymic manifestation of his androgynous psyche. He employs clothes to disguise his maleness and perform his ‘feminine’ masquerade, a Garbo-esque embodiment of the stereotype of ‘femininity’ perpetuated by the hegemonic iconography of Hollywood culture. Curti suggests that Tristessa “appears as an elusive double from the start, in spite of being the apotheosis of the feminine in the most powerful mythography of our century, the filmic imaginary” (1998: 126). Tristessa is a hyperbolic dramatisation of the concept of gender as performance, and of the perceived castrative menace and voyeuristic desirability that converge in archetypal ‘femininity’. He is a male who is more feminine than most females:

‘Mama told me, he was too much of a woman already, for the good of the sex; and, besides, when she subjected him to the first tests, she was struck by what seemed to her the awfully ineradicable quality of his maleness.’ (Carter, 1977: 227)

Eve and Tristessa are ambivalent dyads, twins similarly trapped in foreign bodies suffering ontological crisis. Their sexual union is “the meeting – on both sides of a threshold – between two new entities, one female in which the male trace is ever

present, the other a perfectly ambivalent icon, in which femininity triumphs through the constant recollection of an underlying male element” (Curti, 1998: 126). The mock wedding of Eve and Tristessa is a farcical contravention of orthodox matrimony, in which the gender boundaries between bride and groom are eliminated by transvestism and transsexualism. “So he made us man and wife although it was a double wedding – both were the bride, both the groom in this ceremony” (Carter, 1977: 177). The ‘service’ is performed by Zero, the representative of the patriarchal status quo, and is witnessed by his harem and a selection of suitably androgynous reassembled waxworks of movie stars, who also observe the enforced consummation.

Eve and Tristessa’s sincere catenation occurs in the desert, “the arena of metaphysics, the place where I became myself” (Carter, 1977: 215). It is also the domain in which the bleak eroticism of Tristessa and Eve’s bisexual coupling is enacted: “Their love-making in the desert, taking turn and turnabout in terms of the pleasures of activity and passivity, intensification and dissolution... enacts the royal marriage envisioned by alchemists, by Jung” (Anderson, 1990: 36). Their coition represents a departure from phallogentric penetrative monosexuality in favour of reciprocal bisexuality, dramatising Cixous’s concepts of the “cosmic libido” and the “erotogeneity of the heterogeneous” (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 345). In their mating they reject their culturally inscribed identities, and temporarily escape from time:

Alone... in the heart of that gigantic metaphor for sterility, where our child was conceived... yet we peopled this immemorial loneliness with all we had been or might be, or had dreamed of being, or had thought we were... the very essence of our selves... as if, out of these fathomless kisses and our interpenetrating, undifferentiated sex, we had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite together, the whole and perfect being. The erotic clock halts all clocks. (Carter, 1977: 194)

The implication is that this perfect being is replicated, like the Philosopher's Stone, in the androgynously conceived child, who has two mothers and two fathers. The child represents the utopian potentiality of gender emancipation, Kristeva's 'new generation' and Woolf's 'elsewhere', and thus in a certain sense Eve fulfils the messianic destiny for which Mother created her. "The fact that this period [of phallogocentric values] extends into the present doesn't prevent woman from starting the history of life somewhere else. Elsewhere..." (Cixous in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 348). Carter's protagonist in 'The Bloody Chamber' asks, "Elsewhere. But, where?" (1979a: 9). Carter chooses to leave this question open, unanswered in New Eve.

In a proleptic thematisation of Kristeva's argument in 'Women's Time', Eve's impending motherhood effects a reunion with her own creator (ibid. 455). The final encounter with a withered Mother effects the final stage of Eve's reconciliation with her new physiology, paradoxically enabling metaphysical transcendence through regression and allegorical rebirth. The reunion is a necessary demonstration of the failure of the false universals of myth and the re-entrance of the gender debate into history. Eve has passed through the apocalyptic political chaos of this contingent history on her "curious psycho-mythical return journey to Mother" (Massa & Stead, 1994: 95).

The inescapable effects of time are clearly reflected by 'mad old lady' that Mother has become, but its cyclical nature is manifested by Eve's alchemical experience of rebirth in the caves, where "Time is running back on itself" (Carter, 1977: 240). The chthonic journey backwards through evolution is the mystic portal to entelechy, a

metaphysical 'athanor' in which Eve's "series of enormous solipsisms" is distilled and reconstituted as an uninterrupted continuum (Carter, 1977: 218).

I have come home.
 The destination of all journeys is their beginning.
 I have not come home...
 I called for my mother but she did not answer me... Speleological apotheosis of Tiresias – Mother, having borne her, now abandons her daughter forever.
 (Ibid. 244)

Eve will become the mother as her journey continues, simultaneously perpetuating the cycle and opening a space of new possibilities within it. There is potential for a new mode of signification, which will create its own semiotic and symbolic domains.

I think it was Rilke who so lamented the inadequacy of our symbolism – regretted so bitterly we cannot, unlike the (was it?) Ancient Greeks, find adequate symbols for the life within us... He was wrong. Our external symbols must always express the life within us... The nature of our life has determined their forms. A critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives.
 (Carter, 1977: 2)

By the conclusion of the novel, the nature of the life within Eve has altered radically and she has departed from the conventional symbolism of patriarchy; her androgynous identity necessitates a new symbolic order, or a complete absence of one. Carter has inverted the traditional symbolic meaning of the mythic figures with which she plays in *New Eve* – Lilith, Oedipus, Tiresias, the Creator, the Screen Siren, and the Messiah. It is a parodic deconstruction of the cultural codes of gender, patriarchy, essentialism and the mythography that tendentiously fabricates them. In Carter's entropic vision, history in its irrepressibility overtakes myth and its archetypes, and dismantles them; Mother's paragon of 'femininity' defies the symbols and begins to create her own androgynous identity beyond the gender dialectic.

“New Eve dramatises Judith Butler’s claim that if ‘one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” (Gasiorek, 1995: 133). Although Eve has experienced maleness and femaleness, she still does not entirely comprehend either ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’, opting to exist in a no man’s/no woman’s land in between.

Masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another. I am sure of that – the quality and its negation are locked in necessity. But what the nature of masculine and the nature of feminine might be, whether they involve male and female, if they have anything to do with Tristessa’s long neglected apparatus or my own factory fresh incision and engine-turned breasts, that I do not know. Though I have been both man and woman, still I do not know the answer to these questions. Still they bewilder me. (Carter, 1977: 195-6)

Eve does not discover an answer because Carter refuses to proclaim a single, universal Truth. In the same way as Woolf, Carter leaves her fictional critique open. Humm in fact argues that “Carter ‘thinks back’ to other women authors. She engages with the maternal figure of contemporary feminism – Virginia Woolf” (1991: 33). Like Orlando, New Eve ends with an ambiguous episode depicting re-exploration of multiplicitous selves in search of a contemporary identity; Eve’s speleological experience is analogous to Orlando’s summoning of her Key Self. “We start from our conclusions” (Carter, 1977: 250). New Eve’s final chapter is comprised of Eve’s philosophical reflections on circuitry, love, and her oneiric relation to Tristessa. The ocean takes the place of Woolf’s wild goose: “Ocean, ocean, mother of mysteries, bear me to the place of birth” (ibid.). Gasiorek criticises this ambiguous ending, arguing that, “The critique offered by New Eve leaves a problem: what to offer in place of that which has been rejected?” (1995: 133). However Eve is not intended to be a universal figure; the purpose of Carter’s multiplicitous style is to offer a critical opinion without dictating meaning or prophesying. The process that Eve/lyn

undergoes is of greater significance than her final destination. To specify the nature and site of the new generation would be merely another form of cultural prescription and oppression, an endeavour as doomed to failure as the Great Mother's separatist matriarchy. As Lizzie observes in Nights at the Circus, "to travel hopefully is better than to arrive" (Carter, 1984: 279).

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Seven

Jeanette Winterson: Art Objects



'Ascent of the Soul'

“Every journey conceals another journey within its lines” (Winterson, 1989: 9). Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery reflects a ‘new generation’ of feminist literary theory in which many of the anticipatory ideas of Woolf and Carter have been realised. Published 66 years after A Room of One’s Own, and 16 years after The Sadeian Woman, Winterson’s essays nevertheless engage with many of the issues and concepts on which Woolf and Carter focused. As in the seventh phase of the alchemical process, the emphasis has shifted from the physical to the spiritual. The soul departs from the physical body in great distress. Winterson’s dismay at the crisis in contemporary art reflects the depression experienced by the evolving androgyne. The crisis is also one of gender, as a cultural construction that exists beyond the realm of the physical. The return to spirituality is an important part of the resolution of these conflicts. Art Objects explores the role of art in transforming hegemonic patriarchal paradigms, and their phallogocentric discourses. In her work, Winterson deconstructs monovalency and monosexuality, and most significantly for androgynisation, the essentialist relationship between sex and gender. She rejects the polarised dichotomies that continue to pervade culture with regard to gender and epistemology, in favour of the postmodernist multiplicity that characterises her fiction.

The essays contained in Art Objects are personal reflections on art and literature in relation to gender, sexuality and identity. Instead of offering abstract academic theory, Winterson is offering opinions arising out of her own experiences as a writer, as a woman and as a lesbian within a heterosexist patriarchy. The essays are often self-referential, characterised by autodiegetic analepses, within which Winterson’s observations are contextualised. The narrative element evident in her writing is similar to Carter’s autobiographical style in ‘Notes from the Front Line’, which

refuses the usual categorisations of genre, but in addition Winterson's reminiscences display the qualities of an apologue. Winterson's subtly didactic approach therefore also bears a resemblance to Woolf's tactic of employing fictional narrators to elucidate her argument in A Room of One's Own. Winterson's diegesis situates her in history, personally and externally, and conveys the reader to the same position by demonstrating the route by which she arrived there.

If truth is that which lasts, then art has proved truer than any other human endeavour. What is certain is that pictures and poetry and music are not only marks in time but marks through time, of their own time and ours, not antique or historical, but living as they ever did, exuberantly, untired. (Winterson, 1995: epigraph)

This assertion raises the questions 'What is truth? Art? Time?' Winterson has a postmodern distaste for the traditional conceptualisation of truth as monovalent and immutable. For her art is not concerned with proof, it is "an act of faith" (ibid. 96). As the narrators of The Passion constantly reiterate, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" (1987). Her authoritative style of argument, which Wood describes as "persistent snobbery," tends to make her statements seem like assertions of 'fact' (1998: 186). However, the autobiographical context in which they are situated is a reminder that they are the personal opinions of only one individual among many, at one moment. Winterson's conceives of temporality as cyclical, but does not deny history, only conventional historiography.¹ Within this conception, longevity and even immortality are not understood merely in terms of chronology, but of a continuing intra- and inter-cyclical presence, what Winterson describes as a fusion of "temporal and perpetual realities" (Winterson, 1995: 143). In his discussion of Art Objects, Wood observes, "Story in one sense enslaves us to time; in another it allows us to replay

¹ Winterson's novels Sexing the Cherry, The Passion and Boating for Beginners all rewrite accepted accounts of well-known historical periods, producing what Hutcheon describes as 'historiographic metafiction' (1988: 5).

time and even take it back, invites us to rearrange and reinterpret what we have done and what happens to us” (1998: 190).

For Winterson, art’s importance lies partially in its ability transverse time, to “reach across distance and time” (1995: 109). This characteristic endows art with its own unique temporality,

Over and above all the individual rhythms of music, pictures and words, is the rhythm of art itself. Art objects to the fakeries of clock culture. This is one reason why it remains anarchic even at its most canonised. The modern world is Time’s fool. Art is master of itself. (Ibid. 90)

Winterson extrapolates this theory to include enduring relevance as a requirement of art, arguing that art should have a significance that is unconnected to its historical context. This is a central aspect of art’s independence and broad accessibility, which enables it to exert an influence on the emotions and consciousness of a wide range of readers. Winterson suggests that, “Art is a way into other realities, other personalities” (ibid. 26). This idea echoes Woolf’s conceptualisation in Three Guineas of biography and autobiography as a substitution for “memory transfusion,” a means of moving beyond the confines of actual experience and gaining understanding of human motives (1938: 113).

For Winterson, art offers not only the opportunity to understand unfamiliar paradigms, but also to transform them through the dual stimulation of consciousness and emotion. As Winterson observes of Woolf, “She knows that if she is to pierce the thick wall of personality, her arrows, however beautifully decorated, must be sharp” (1995: 91). Art challenges identity through a disruption of the conventional dichotomies on which identity is predicated – thought/feeling, imagination/reality,

self/other and, of course, masculine/feminine. Winterson argues that a rejection of art occurs through the reader's fear of the unfamiliar,

...because the work falls so outside the safety of your own experience that in order to keep your own world intact, you must deny the other world... This denial of imaginative experience happens at a deeper level than our affirmation of our daily world. Every day, in countless ways, you and I convince ourselves about ourselves. True art, when it happens to us, challenges the 'I' that we are. (Ibid. 14-15)

In this manner, art exercises an influence on the reader's consciousness and beyond it, engaging with acknowledged ideas and unconscious assumptions. These assumptions are created through their constant reiteration in cultural hegemony, which seeks to construct a homogenous 'reality' strictly differentiated from the realm of imagination. Winterson argues that, "The doctrine of Realism saves us from a bad attack of Otherness," which poses a threat to the safety of uniform identity (ibid. 27). She later asserts that, "it is worth remembering that the conventional mind is its own prison" (ibid. 110). Winterson's philosophy encourages an integration of the mundane and imaginative worlds for the development of a more sophisticated ontology. "Art shows us how to be more than we are" (ibid. 93).

Winterson's evaluation of art extends beyond that of Woolf and Carter¹, encompassing primarily literature and painting, but also music. Her conceptualisation of art is not categorical, but rather descriptive of its significance and functions, primarily as the instrument of transformation. However, Winterson maintains that no-one should ever presume to comprehend art completely, as it is a "foreign city, and we deceive ourselves when we think it familiar... We have to recognise that the language of art, all art, is not our mother-tongue" (1995: 4). This is largely as a result

¹ Winterson identifies Carter as one of her literary heroes, asserting that "I can find little to cheer me between the publication of Four Quartets (1944) and Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop (1967)" (1995: 40).

of Winterson's view of art as proleptic, not mimetic: "Art does not imitate life. Art anticipates life" (ibid.) Analogously to Carter, Winterson has adopted Cixous's belief that "Anticipation is imperative," particularly in feminist fiction (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 334). In 1975 Cixous argues that in 'écriture féminine,' "Beauty will no longer be forbidden" (ibid. 335). In 1995, Winterson claims, "I do not believe that art (all art) and beauty are ever separate, nor do I believe that art or beauty are ever optional in a sane society" (5).

Winterson's idea of 'écriture féminine' is reflected in her assertion that, "a writer breathes to her own pulse and that should be evident throughout her work" (ibid. 184). Winterson believes strongly in the importance of universal accessibility in art, but nonetheless differentiates between male and female writers. Her view of gender acknowledges basic biological differences between men and women, but Winterson supports a determinist theory of gender in which many of the differences are caused by women's alternate experiences and historical oppression¹. In Art Objects, as part of her revisiting of Woolf, Winterson asserts,

Woolf... argued against a society that hoxes women. Hox is a racing word: it means to hamstring a horse not so brutally that she can't walk but cleverly so that she can't run. Society hoxes women and pretends that God, Nature or the genepool designed them lame. (Ibid. 62)

This idea is reminiscent of Woolf's argument regarding science and nature in Three Guineas (1938), in which the cultural construction of gender is cunningly disguised immutable fact, and analogous to Winterson's ironic view of science in Gut Symmetries:

SHE: What you see is not what you think you see.
ME: Sound science.
SHE: Doesn't that depend on the scientist?

¹ For a full account of Winterson's views on the differences between the sexes, see her appended interview with Atallah (1987).

ME: I wouldn't depend on the scientist... (1997: 115)

The determinist view of gender is evident in most of Winterson's fiction, but is particularly clear in Written on the Body, which refuses gender distinction altogether (1992).

In a similar approach to that of Woolf and Carter, Winterson focuses her discussion of art primarily on issues of gender and its cultural construction, and the potential of art to demolish the patriarchal dichotomies. Winterson, like her predecessors, engages in a historical evaluation of the construction of 'femininity' and the position of women in relation to writing.

To worm into the heart and mind until what one truly desires has been encased in dark walls of what one ought to desire, is the success of the serpent. Serpents of state, serpents of religion, serpents in the service of education, monied serpents, mythic serpents, weaving their lies backwards into history. Two myths came out of many: the first, Hebrew: Eve... The second, Greek: Medusa. (1995: 115)

Winterson identifies the Victorian era as the apex of 'masculinity,' "valuing experience over imagination and action above contemplation" giving rise to a conflict between loyalty to society and loyalty to the Muse (ibid. 31). Winterson evaluates the Brontës, George Eliot and Dickens in this context, and argues that, "The Muse was fighting back, cross-dressed as a pretty young man" in the work of Wilde, Swinburne and Yeats, which signalled the death of Realism (ibid.). She identifies a "marked polarisation between the sexes" during the Victorian period, reflected in the dress codes of the time, which was a reaction against the 'femininity' of the Romantic period (ibid. 28). Any deviation was equivalent to alienation from hegemonic society, an acceptable status for women, who were already Other, but not for men. Winterson seems to associate the Romantic traits of emotionality, introspection and vision with 'femininity,' and the Realist traits of reason, extroversion and didacticism with

'masculinity'. Her idea of androgynous synthesis in certain ways reflects a merging of these two literary traditions.

In her historical overview, Winterson includes a materialist analysis of the commodification of art, the general necessity to sell art in order to subsist, and asks, "How will the artist support herself if she has not private funds? Sell her work is the obvious answer, but that is not easy" (1995: 34). In the interview with Atallah, Winterson revealed an alliance with the philosophies of both Carter and Woolf with regard to the historical position of women writers:

There are these little oases of creative women in the past that lead us to believe that, had conditions been different, they might have been able to produce more, or more women would have produced more. Because certainly, if you're denied access to education, or you're doing all the work, or if you're having all the children, you're not going to have the leisure time to be creative. I think Virginia Woolf is quite right: you have to have a room of your own and your metaphorical £500 a year. (1987: 778)

In a humorous autobiographical reference, Winterson declares, "I cannot claim too much for the provision of an outside toilet when there is no room of one's own" (1995: 153).

The literary period with which Winterson claims the greatest affinity is that of Modernism, particularly the 'Bloomsberries', as MacCarthy calls them (in Marler, 1997: 7). "It may seem hopelessly old-fashioned to have returned to Bloomsbury, but I do not care about fashion, only about permanencies" (Winterson, 1995: 5). It is an appreciation for the significant position of women writers in Modernism, and for the unusual combination of entropic disregard for genre boundaries, and exactness of language that characterised the work of Modernist writers. Winterson supports the Modernist idea of challenging the consciousness of the reader, by returning to "a

place outside of both rhetoric and cliché” (ibid. 37). As the protagonist points out in Written on the Body, “It’s the clichés that cause the trouble” (1992: 10). The most significant aspect of Winterson’s connection to Modernism lies in her relationship to Woolf as a literary ancestor: “When I read Virginia Woolf she is to my spirit, waterfall and wine” (1995: 65).

“What woman writer writing now can pass by A Room of One’s Own[?]. . . Here she is and here she was, of private ancestors, the most complete” (ibid. 131). A substantial portion of Art Objects is dedicated to a reevaluation of Woolf and her work, contained predominantly in the section entitled, appropriately, “Transformation” (ibid. 23). Winterson’s admiration of Woolf is based on Woolf’s subtle demolition of cultural boundaries, in that she “identified and exploited the weak-mindedness of labels,” and on her brilliant application of language in this subversive exercise:

Bring on the Trojan horse. . . Woolf smuggled across the borders of complacency the most outrageous contraband; lesbianism, cross-dressing, female power, but as much as that, and to me more than that, she smuggled her language alive past the checkpoints of propriety. (Ibid. 50)

This assertion is made specifically with regard to Orlando, which embodies the idea of positive metamorphosis and the transgression of boundaries: “Art is metaphor. Metaphor is transformation. Orlando is metaphor, is transformation, is art” (ibid. 66). Winterson’s alliance with Woolf is further reinforced through their common interest in gender, sexuality and history; she asserts that Woolf, like herself, “is adept at plundering the stock of revisings bequeathed to her by her literary ancestors. . . When Woolf writes she writes with generations at her back” (ibid. 92).

Woolf and Winterson share the skill of the thaumaturge, a multiplicitous style that subtly defamiliarises the ‘real’ and familiarises the outrageous in order to create new

ontological possibilities for holistic harmony beyond traditional boundaries. For Winterson, one of Woolf's greatest feats was the veiled deconstruction of the normalised pattern of phallogentric monosexuality. In an echo of Carter's argument regarding passive female sexuality in The Sadeian Woman, Carter asserts, "Woolf wanted to say dangerous things in Orlando, but she did not want to say them in the missionary position" (1995: 68). Winterson's approach to the issue of sexuality is characterised by directness similar to that employed by Carter: "What you fuck is much more important than how you write... What is it about? Prurience? Stupidity? And as Descartes didn't say, 'I fuck therefore I am.'?" (ibid. 104). The heterosexism of society persists, erroneously defining identity only in terms of sexuality.

Winterson considers contemporary society repressive and phallogentric in its values, privileging 'masculine' ("macho") values and traits (ibid. 113). Her precise understanding of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is not always clearly conveyed; comments such as "Dear Gertrude, all woman and twice the man" are offered with reference to Stein, but without further elucidation (ibid. 128). This lack of precision is perhaps reasonable in a writer who is endeavouring to move beyond gender dichotomies, but Winterson continues to employ the concepts in her advocacy of an integrated androgynous identity. In discussing the Shakespearean idea that art should hold the mirror up to nature, Winterson asks, "But what is nature?" and answers herself,

It is my nativity, my astrology, my biology, my physiognomy, my geography, my cartography, my spirituality, my sexuality, my mentality, my corporeal, intellectual, emotional, imaginative self. And not just my self, every self and the Self of the world. There is no mirror I know that can show me all of these singularities... *Natura* is the whole that I am. The multiple reality of my existence. (Ibid. 149-150)

No figuration of one of these multiple elements on its own can constitute ontological 'reality'; they are all indispensable, and all make a vital contribution to the individual's understanding of self.

Winterson claims that, "We mostly understand ourselves through an endless series of stories told to ourselves by ourselves and others. The so-called facts of our individual worlds are... arbitrary, facts that fit whatever fiction we have chosen to believe in" (1995: 59). The objective of art is, in part, to raise awareness of those aspects of identity that are unconscious. Winterson remarks of Woolf, "She is not afraid of pain. The dark places attract her as well as the light and she has the wisdom to know that not all dark places need light" (ibid. 77). Woolf epitomises Winterson's conceptualisation of the ideal artist as a synthesis of emotion and control and as a transgressor of boundaries.

"It is the poet who with her dredging net must haul up difficult things and return them to the present. As she does this, the reader will begin to recognise parts of herself so neatly buried that they seem to have been buried from birth" (ibid. 115). To exert this influence on the reader, on all readers, art must necessarily display the multiplicity upon which universality is predicated, in a voice that speaks to everybody, regardless of differentials such as gender and sexuality. Winterson suggests that the Modernists were trying to find a language that "could cope with the multiplicity and fragmentation of the new modern world and yet speak out to a growing body of readers" (ibid. 83). She recognises this as a necessary paradox in artistic endeavour, arguing that, "The best work speaks intimately to you even though it has been consciously made to speak intimately to thousands of others" (ibid. 105). However, a

central tenet of Winterson's definition of art is the role of the reader in the literary process: it is necessary to commit oneself utterly to the practice of art appreciation. "Art leaves nobody out, but it cannot condescend, we have to climb up if we want the extraordinary view" (ibid. 41).

"The future is foretold from the past and the future is only possible because of the past. Without past and future, the present is partial" (Winterson, 1987: 62). According to Winterson's conceptualisation of art, the artist not only dredges history, but also anticipates transformations that are yet occur, claiming that "the original role of the artist as visionary is the correct one" (1995: 133). This proleptic process completes the temporal cycle that is contained in art: "Art is a shared human connection that traces the possibilities of past and future in a whorl of now" (ibid. 117). Through the linguistic precision of literature, the artist is able to create an 'elsewhere' in which new stories are realisable, and new androgynous ontologies. It is a new territory in the realm of the imagination, in literature. Winterson goes so far as to proclaim, "The novel form is finished" (ibid. 191), as part of a theory that Wood describes as "incoherent... and certainly her argument is not tidily made" (1998: 190). However, 'elsewhere' is also an opening within the language of literature itself, in the spaces between words, which are created through the absolute exactitude of language. Winterson herself creates a new, androgynous territory in the space between masculine and feminine pronouns: "The obsessive writer is now a psychopath incapable of letting in any reality other than *his* own. A writer's obsession is *her* beguilement..." (1995: 183).

The theory of androgyny occupies a less obvious role in Winterson's articulated analyses, but its tacit adumbration suffuses the entire book as an alternative to the phallocratic monovalency that circumscribes gender, sexuality and identity. Beyond the inevitable references to androgyny with regard to Orlando, Winterson also refers explicitly to certain historical examples of androgyny or sexual ambiguity in art – transvestism and role swapping in opera and Shakespeare, and music, which is “androgynously sexy and with the same sensuous determination penetrates male and female alike” (1995: 107). In describing the evolution of androgyny within the artist, Winterson avers that,

The attendant personalities that are clinically labelled as schizophrenia, can be brought into a harmonious balance... The artist knows this; at the same time that art is prising away old dead structures that have rusted almost unnoticed into our flesh, art is pushing at the boundaries we thought were fixed. The convenient lies fall; the only boundaries are the boundaries of the imagination.” (Ibid. 116)

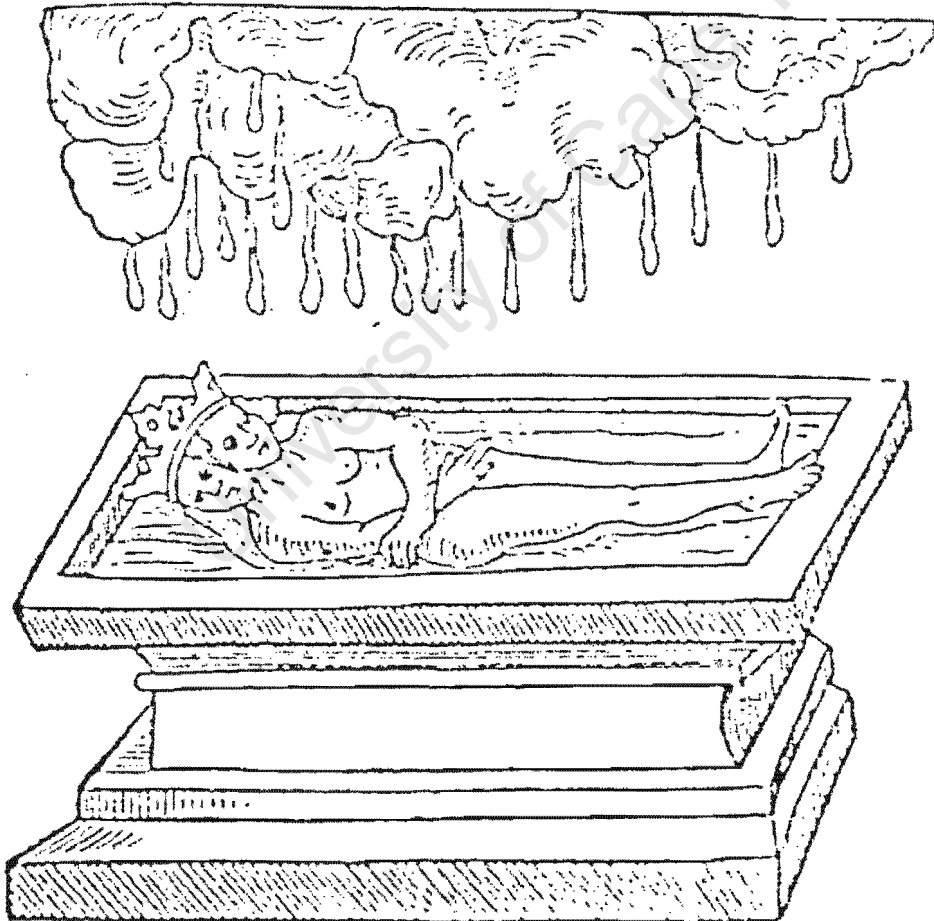
As with Woolf and Carter, Winterson's androgynous conceptualisation is contiguous with proleptic refusal of closure or final meaning. The syndetic vision involves a continuing development of identity: “Process, the energy in being, the refusal of finality, which is not the same thing as refusal of completeness, sets art, all art, apart from the end-stop world that is always calling ‘Time Please!’” (Ibid. 19). Winterson's own predilection for rhetorical questions is an epideictic manifestation of this rejection of finality, as is the ending of Art Objects itself, which embraces Kristeva's idea of a new generation, but transposes it into a literary context.

The true writer will have to build up her readership from among those who still want to read and who want more than the glories of the past nicely reproduced... They do not care for maundering middle-class middle-aged elegies. Judge the work and not the writer seems to be what a new generation is prepared to do. It is for a new generation that I write. (Ibid. 192)

Winterson's literary, historical and cultural analyses are both expansive and eclectic, and her observations are often offered in a rather dogmatic style. However, the personalised context and continual self-referentiality remind the reader that the statements contained in Art Objects are opinions stemming from personal experience, not indisputable facts or universal truths, however much Winterson might wish them to be. In many ways, the theories that Winterson propounds in this collection of essays reflect the perspectives portrayed in her fiction. The concept of androgyny features in The Passion and Sexing the Cherry, particularly the latter, which considers questions of grafting and hybrids, sexuality and plural identity. It also features the Dog-Woman who is a positive version of Carter's Mother. However androgyny is embodied in her enigmatic novel, Written on the Body.

Eight

Jeanette Winterson: Written on the Body



“The book has somehow to be adapted to the body” (Woolf, 1929: 72). Winterson’s 1992 novel, Written on the Body, is a fictional manifestation of this concept, as reflected by the title. Text and body intertwine on a number of levels in an apt successor to Orlando and The Passion of New Eve. The androgynous idea has evolved in an era more accustomed to the possibilities of sex changes offered by modern medicine; these advances create different boundaries, the transgression of which necessitates new extremes. The logistics of transformation need not occupy a central role in the text anymore, allowing more attention to be paid to the correlated aspects of human existence, to the exploration of common ground. This novel represents the eighth stage of alchemical evolution, purification. The androgyne is cleansed, chaos is replaced by purity, and the alchemist has reached theoretical understanding. However, this rational function must be balanced with emotion and intuition. Winterson’s novel demonstrates the potential tragedy of rational bias and adherence to facts and logic at the expense of feeling. Written on the Body is a shifting diegesis of romantic love, desire and anatomy that incorporates a deliberately ambiguous narrator. The concept of androgyny portrayed in this text is one which has moved away from issues of biological transformation, and the ontological synthesis of the protagonist enters the novel as a ‘fait accompli’. The focus of the text has been transferred from intrapsychic tensions to inter-personal relations, particularly the romantic and the erotic. Conventional concepts of gender and sexuality become redundant in Winterson’s multiplicitous narrative.

Written on the Body incorporates elements of feminist and psychoanalytic discourse in a multivalent postmodernist framework. Winterson’s utilisation of multiple discourses prohibits simplified genre classification. She blurs the lines between

personalised narrative and disinterested scientific asseveration, in a prototypical enactment of the “contamination of genres” (Curti, 1998: 40). This contrivance underlines Winterson’s deconstruction of the cultural hegemony that constructs not only literary convention, but also identity. She deliberately refuses to name her protagonist, because the exclusive designation of a name is one of the central means through which identity is constructed and discussed. Winterson rejects the linguistic restrictions that isotropic genre enforces, instead appropriating any vernacular that is pertinent to her chosen subject matter. In Written on the Body, the primary linguistic mediums are those of romance and medicine, a dualism that reflects the ambiguous and shifting identity of the narrator.

Jeanette Winterson’s Written on the Body is an extreme statement, or rather refusal of one, on sexual ambiguity... The ambiguity is in the narrator, whose sex eludes the reader throughout the narration, here and there giving a baffling suggestion in one direction or another, or in the erotic descriptions lingering at times on caressing or penetrating, but always moving in a disturbing balance between one sex and another, in an interstitial zone. (Curti, 1998: 128)

The use of an autodiegetic narrator allows Winterson to avoid committing herself to a specific sex or gender, and consequently to a particular sexuality. The object of the narrator’s desire, Louise, is unquestionably female, but this provides only one part of the conventional categories used to classify sexuality in relationships. This avoidance of conventional distinctions could be described as androgyny by default. It has nevertheless become a popular game among certain critics to attempt to deduce the gender of the narrator from the personality traits and events portrayed in the novel. Pearce (1997) assigns the name ‘Lothario’ to the character as a result of the protagonist’s self-referential account of “playing the Lothario” (Winterson, 1992: 20). Pearce claims that, “women tended to read the narrator as female, while men assumed ‘him’ to be male” but asserts that,

Lothario isn't a very convincing woman to me: his/her role in the heterosexual economy of marriage/adultery is too prototypically masculine, and Louise too stereotypically feminine. While nothing in his self-representation genders him especially... his positioning of the other as 'an other' is indicative. (1997: 141, 159)

However, this opinion seems to make assumptions about the emancipation's contingency upon a denial of 'femininity'¹, about the egalitarian nature of homosexuality, and ignores Winterson's deliberate refusal of classification. Pearce seems to be immured in the Realist craving for definitive 'truth', for understanding through classification. Winterson's perspective on 'truth' and multiplicitous interpretations is reflected in Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit:

Perhaps the event has an unassailable truth. God saw it. God knows. But I am not God. And so when someone tells me what they heard or saw I believe them, and I believe their friend who also saw, but not in the same way, and I can put these accounts together and I will not have a seamless wonder but a sandwich laced with mustard of my own... Here is some advice. If you want to keep your own teeth, make your own sandwiches... (1985: 93)

The intentional effect of the ambiguous narrator is that, like Carter's fiction, it permits multiple interpretations of and points of access to the text. Within this paradigm the unitary subject of patriarchy's master narratives no longer exists; it is an articulation of both male and female subjectivity that depends on the particular 'mustard' of the individual reader. Pearce argues against this methodology of reader positioning because it "interpellates an 'ideal reader' who is not me" (1997: 163-5). However, the space that Winterson creates for the hypothetical reader benefits from a similar lack of boundaries as the protagonist; the assumptions and objectives of the reader impose the boundaries. Winterson attempts to develop the reader's awareness of these impositions by disrupting the diegetic flow with narratorial asides, which direct the focus onto the reader. The technique of apostrophising to the reader temporarily

¹ Winterson voices her concern over women's sacrificing of their traditions in her interview with Atallah (see appendix). For her, emancipation is a balance of 'masculine' and 'feminine', not an absolute rejection of either.

alienates the reader from the text in order to disrupt complacency and passive acceptance of narrative. For example, the assertion of the protagonist that, “I can tell by know that you are wondering whether I can be trusted as a narrator” causes readers to re-examine their own position in relation to the text (1992: 24).

Winterson’s deliberate ambiguity with regard to the narrator involves an appropriation of elements traditionally delineated as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, such as intellect and sensitivity, which she amalgamates in her protagonist. It also entails an exploitation of those factors that are generally considered ‘unisex’ in Western society: items of clothing and shared anatomical characteristics such as hands and tongues. This departure from a phallogentric paradigm rewrites the language of sexuality, and of ontology. Winterson constantly reassesses the conventions of language in relation to its servitude to the dominant culture, quoting Caliban’s bitter recognition of his binary relationship with language:

You taught me language and my profit on’t is
I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language. (1992: 9)

The language to which Winterson is referring is that of love, which carries with it the restrictions and denotations imposed by centuries of adaptation to hegemonic social values. In Sexing the Cherry, Jordan observes, “Language always betrays us” (1989: 90).

In Written on the Body, Winterson attempts to defamiliarise the languages of love and desire and to personalise the language of science. The inextricable interconnection of language with the constitution of identity necessitates a deconstruction of language

when reconstructing identity, as Winterson is endeavouring to achieve in this text. As the narrator observes, "It's the clichés that cause the trouble. A precise emotion seeks precise expression" (1992: 10). Clichés become a prison for rebellious individuals. When identities and relations alter, the existing language is no longer adequate as it denies the 'reality' of these transformations. Language reflects the social and cultural conventions on which it is predicated, for example the monovalent discourse of a heterosexist, phallogentric paradigm cannot accommodate bisexual androgyny. Pearce identifies the irritation she experiences at the evasive narrator's disrespect for traditional values, which is evinced through repeated references to previous relationships, the constant recurrence of the phrase, "I had a lover once" (Winterson, 1992: 16). Pearce objects to the text's refusal of "highly conventional values (such as monogamy, destiny, the existence of eternal love)," which she desires in addition to a challenging of "traditional sexuality/gender roles" (1997: 161).

Winterson's challenge of traditional sexuality and gender roles necessarily precludes an adherence to the conventions in which they are constrained. "I used to think of marriage as a plate-glass window just begging for a brick. The self-exhibition, the self-satisfaction, smarminess, tightness, tight-arsedness" (Winterson, 1992: 13). Winterson reveals the inadequacy of social institutions for containing human emotion: "Marriage is the flimsiest weapon against desire. You might as well take a pop-gun to a python" (ibid. 78). Rejection of these conventions does not ensure freedom, but it is impossible to achieve within them. Winterson's argument extends beyond Carter's theory on marriage as she recognises the imprisonment of both men and women, without denying the hierarchical advantage which men enjoy. Written on the Body seeks to demythologise the sacred cows of Western society and to deconstruct the

patriarchal paradigm within which they exist. “Emphasis is placed on the fragmented and constructed nature of subjectivity and culture, which are perceived to be in a state of process and flux... [Winterson] emphasises the fictionality of the text and its ideological focus” (Palmer in Massa & Stead, 1994: 322).

Written on the Body is a manifestation of Cixous’s idea in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ of writing as a “springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 337). Onega in fact describes Winterson as the “contemporary Medusa of British fiction” (1995: 129). Winterson is a determined renegade; in the same way that she rejects patriarchal structures, she refuses to align herself with any established feminist culture. In Written on the Body, her deconstruction of hegemonic structures includes a satire of a Kristevan counterculture of feminist terrorists. The protagonist’s relationship with the supposed terrorist, Inge, results in an immersion in extremist feminism, although Inge is gently mocked for the conflict between her romantic sensibilities and her anarchic ideology. “This was hard for her because she couldn’t blow up beautiful buildings” (1992: 21). This analeptic episode includes two instances of the demythologisation of the phallogentrism, in psychoanalysis – “Freud didn’t always get it right” (24) – and art:

She said, ‘Don’t you know that Renoir claimed he painted with his penis?’
 ‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘He did. When he died they found nothing between his balls but an old brush.’
 ‘You’re making it up.’
 Am I? (Ibid. 22)

This is echoed later in the novel with reference to Henry Miller, and an interesting inversion appears in Winterson’s short story, ‘The Poetics of Sex’, in which the

painter, Sappho, enquires of the fairy Gabriel, “Don’t you know I paint with my clit?” (1993: 417). Winterson is rewriting the female body.

Written on the Body is a thematisation of Cixous’s advocacy of a “return to the body... Write yourself. Your body must be heard” (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 337-8). The body becomes the text; both the protagonist and Louise are incarnated books with their identities inscribed on their flesh. Pearce objects to what she describes as “the fetishization of Louise’s body” as merely another objectification of women’s bodies (1997: 160). However the reciprocal reification of the narrator’s body as book, and the mutual inscription and reading of one another’s bodies counteract any oppressive consequences that this might have:

Articulacy of the fingers... signing on the body body longing. Who taught you to write in blood on my back?... You have scored your name into my shoulders, referenced me with your mark... Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like braille. I like to keep my body rolled away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole story. I didn’t know that Louise would have reading hands. She has translated me into her own book. (Winterson, 1992: 89)

The fetishisation to which Pearce is referring occurs through the protagonist’s incremental obsession with Louise’s body and her illness. The immersion in medical textbooks slowly begins to integrate the narrator’s personal experience of her body with the scientific ‘facts’ in the textbooks. It is a fictional representation of Kristeva’s idea of the attempts of women “to break the code, to shatter the language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and the emotions” (in Warhol & Herndl, 1991: 452). When the protagonist first discovers Louise’s illness, s/he insists on, “The facts, Elgin. The facts” (1992: 101). This transforms into a compulsion for anatomical detail after s/he melodramatically sacrifices their relationship to save Louise’s life. “These

meditations trace the source of the writer's anguish from regions of desire rarely spoken to the mythical site of physical sensation: the body, where desire is born, cultivated, and ultimately slashed and burned by its own forces" (Quinney, 1993). The erotic desire that characterises the early sections of the narrative transmogrifies into a morbid fixation. Both are manifestations of the protagonist's love for Louise, which is simultaneously conventional and yet entirely original for the characters involved, existing outside the traditional institutions in which love is usually contained. Of the protagonist's assertion that, "No-one can legislate love... Love is not something you can negotiate" (77), Wood remarks that, "this would be pretty flat and sappy even if it were true, as every instance in Winterson's books... shows it is not" (1998: 189). Probyn asserts that, "love above all things thwarts the passage from ontology to epistemology" (in Pearce, 1997: 159). Despite this alleged lack of precision, the narrator recognises the distinction between sex and love, "Sex can feel like love or maybe it's guilt that makes me call sex love" (1992: 94).

The novel opens with an exploration of love: "You said, 'I love you.' Why is it that the most unoriginal thing we can say to one another is still the thing we most long to hear. 'I love you is always a quotation'" (ibid. 9). The intensity of their emotion and their understanding of each other presents the concept of androgyny on another level, as an interpersonal fusion of identities: "We shall cross one another's boundaries and make ourselves one nation" (ibid. 20). Subsequent to the two characters' attainment of this synthesis, the narrator relates that: "Of the visions that come to me waking and sleeping the most insistent is your face. Your face, mirror-smooth and mirror-clear... your face in its mystery, revealing me" (ibid. 132).

It is possibly the hierogamous nature of the connection between the protagonist and Louise that enables their unconventional relationship to defy the conventions of time, space, and even death. "She was my twin and I lost her... I am afraid. Is this her revenge? 'I will never let you go'" (ibid. 163). When they are apart, that connection is maintained oneirically, and the protagonist asserts, "There are no clocks in Misery, just endless ticking" (ibid. 183). S/he nevertheless begins to speculate on the reality of Louise's existence, "'I couldn't find her. I couldn't even get near finding her. It's as if Louise never existed, like a character in a book. Did I invent her?'" (Ibid. 189). This embodies Jameson's description of postmodernism as characterised by "the transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (in Massa & Stead, 1994: 323). Conventional temporal and spatial boundaries become meaningless in the genuine fusion of two separate identities. The protagonist observes, of an old couple whom s/he encounters, "Time had not diminished their love. They seemed to have become one without losing their individual selves" (ibid. 82). The androgynous symbiosis is a harmonious whole in which the components are themselves wholes. The protagonist and Louise are altered through their experience of one another, but they maintain their individuality within their union.

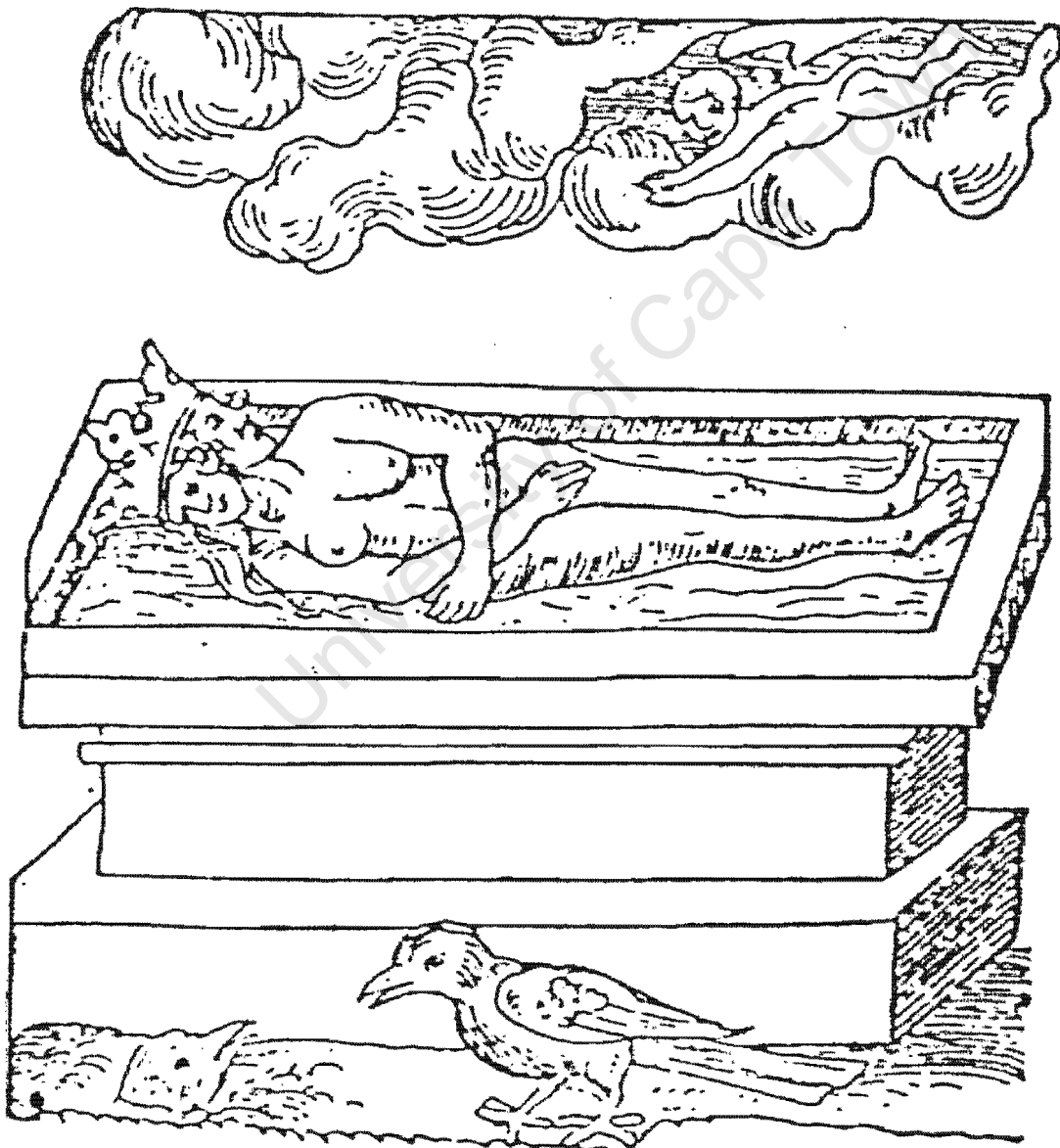
In an analogue of the alchemical ideal of immortality through androgynous balance, the protagonist's synthetic bond with Louise appears to defy death and the story begins itself anew. "From the kitchen door Louise's face... I put out my hand and felt her fingers... Am I stark mad? She's warm" (ibid. 190). The reader cannot be certain if love has thaumaturgically defeated death, or if the protagonist has indeed lapsed into insanity. Wood suggests that, "Eliot's 'Only through time time is conquered'

becomes Winterson's 'Through the body, the body is conquered'" (1998: 186). It is a narrative circuitation that refuses closure in the same manner as Orlando and The Passion of New Eve. The final paragraph of the novel begins, "This is where the story starts" and ends, "I don't know if this a happy ending but here we are let loose in open fields" (ibid. 190).

Wood claims that, "The trouble is that the narrator arrives at an understanding of [his/her] self-deception some fifty or so pages after the slowest reader will have got there" (1998: 188). Furthermore, he criticises Winterson for forgetting in Written on the Body that "not all dark places need light," arguing that the novel is "damaged to some degree by sermonising, a regular badgering of the reader" (ibid. 187). Winterson's work seems to evoke a diverse range of reactions in critics and readers, this novel in particular, but the negative criticism often appears to stem from discomfort with Winterson's refusal of conventional concepts of gender, sexuality and identity. Her deliberate evasiveness in some areas, such as gender, is contrasted by her narrator's explicit avowals in others, such as love. Taken as a whole, the evasiveness 'engenders' an impression of androgynous entelechy within her characters, in which the conflict between previously 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements continues. "What have I said in Written on the Body? That it is possible to have done with the bricks and mortar of conventional narrative, not as monkey-business or magic, but by building a structure that is bonded by language" (Winterson, 1995: 190).

Nine

Jacqueline Harpman:
Orlanda



'The Return of the Soul'

Jacqueline Harpman's 1996 novel, Orlanda, originally in French, is a modern reworking of Woolf's Orlando. It reflects the social changes that have occurred since 1928 and the opportunities that are available to Harpman and her characters, which were denied to Woolf. The transformation that occurs is no longer inexplicable thaumaturgy, but a conscious act of will on the part of the protagonist. The connection between literature and identity persists, as does the idealisation of ontological androgyny. However Harpman's novel encompasses the processes of both splitting and fusing in the search for balanced identity. The novel reflects the ninth alchemical stage, the return of the soul, in which the 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements have been distilled, unified and purified. The soul is consequently able to return and bring life to the hermaphroditic body. When soul and body are reunited, the hermaphrodite becomes an androgyne. Although Harpman's protagonist ultimately occupies a female body, the process of disintegration, evolution and reunification is effected with greater detail and thoroughness than by the preceding authors.

The story, narrated extradiegetically with continual apostrophising to the reader, recounts the events experienced by Aline Berger, a thirty-five-year-old professor of literature. Through years of repressing her 'masculine' side, she has created a twelve-year-old alter ego, who eventually tires of his unacknowledged existence in the subconscious. He finally asserts himself by consciously transposing himself into the body of a young man sitting nearby. The freedom, which the split parts of Aline initially enjoy, begins to wane as their need for one another begins to make itself known. Their individual experiences highlight their mutual necessity, but the process of reintegration requires the ontological development of both the 'masculine' and 'feminine' components of the bifurcated whole.

The epigraph for the novel is a quotation from the dictionary definition of 'novel'. In the same way as Winterson, Harpman intends to depart from the conventional form while retaining the ascribed elements of "character, action, thought, etc." (1996). The purpose of the epigraph is to alert the reader to this intended double discourse, as well as to stimulate an assessment of the unquestioned acceptance of hegemonic definitions. The opening scene is characterised by alienation techniques similar to those employed by Winterson in Written on the Body, in which readers are deliberately reminded that they are engaged with a work of fiction, with which they should consciously interact and continually question. "The opening scene takes place in Paris... The time is just after 1 pm" (ibid. 3). This is intended to raise the readers' awareness from the outset that they are reading a representation of a fictitious 'reality' not a mimesis of some objective Reality.

The connection to Woolf becomes apparent immediately as Aline is struggling through Orlando for a class she has to teach on Woolf; the extent of the connection is, however, only revealed subsequently during Aline's own transformation. Aline has become trapped in the passage relating to Orlando's transmogrification because its meaning continues to elude her. It is only after her own separation has occurred that she develops a convincing interpretation, in which she identifies the transformation as an elaborate portrayal of puberty. Her alter ego, bored with Woolf, begins to consider changing sex. The narratorial persona that Harpman adopts describes how,

From the privileged vantage point of the novelist – and I have never made a secret of believing it is mine by right... I hear something that leaves me dumbfounded: "How about changing sex? Suppose I abandoned you, O bashful creature, suppose I freed myself from this female body and went and made my home in a boy's body?" (ibid. 4)

This is precisely what the alter ego proceeds to do, in a transformation that equates the biological body with clothes, which can be changed at will according to mood. Sex and clothes are both mere disguises for the metaphysical identity, and perhaps not always representative of the multiplicity of that identity, thus necessitating a transition.

The separation is achieved with greater effort than Orlando's transformation, but with less ceremony. "It can't be done, it's incredible, and I'm doing it. I leave you without a backward glance and I achieve the impossible" (ibid. 7). Aline has repressed her 'masculine' instincts so thoroughly that she is initially unaware of the loss, but the release from his female prison creates an exciting new life for the alter ego. The separation of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' allows for both to be dominant, in their respective realms. The emancipation has more significance for the 'masculine' personality, as it was the previously subordinate one.

In the conventional manner of gender construction, Aline's process of feminisation is facilitated primarily through her mother. Madame Berger passes on the values that she inherited from her mother in the ageless tradition of acculturation, "the twenty generations of respectable women who had ruled over Aline's shoulder" (ibid. 40). For Harpman's protagonist, 'femininity' is equated with modesty, restraint, diffidence and altruism. 'Masculinity', the part that chooses to leave her constricting 'femininity', represents boisterous enthusiasm, confidence and self-interest. While Aline is a child, the two elements are in harmonious balance; but when she becomes a woman during puberty, the space allowed to the 'masculine' begins to diminish, until the 'masculine' is entirely isolated from the outside world.

The result of this socially encouraged repression is that the 'masculine' persona remains a child. After the transformation, Orlando is effectively "a twelve-year-old soul in the body of a twenty-year-old, with the knowledge of an adult woman who teaches literature" (ibid. 85). After the transformation, he revels in his new experiences and body with a childlike excitement. He is described exploring his new genitals with an openness that would have been unthinkable in Woolf's time. Two of his first acts in his new body are masturbation and urination. Within the hour he has engaged in his first sexual experience with another person, a man, which demonstrates that sexual preference is a function of personality, not gender. In *Aline* the desire for men was heterosexual: in *Orlanda* the desire would automatically be defined as homosexual. The casual sex on the train is an event that the narrator refuses to watch, claiming in a self-descriptive aside that, "this is no place for a lady of my age, brought up in polite society" (ibid. 29). It is a place where Woolf would also have hesitated to go, and which would detract from the ontological development which is the primary focus of the novel.

In acknowledgement of his new identity, the 'masculine' persona names himself, choosing 'Orlanda' as a tribute to Woolf. This action cements his independence from *Aline*, as well as his distance from *Lucien*, the man of whose body he took possession. *Aline* begins, on the other hand, to feel a strange sense of loss. This loss gradually develops into an incrementally desperate need, on the part of both *Aline* and *Orlanda*, to be in each other's company. In *Aline*, the need becomes a desire for reunification, but *Orlanda's* fear of a return to isolation maintains his desire for independence. Finally *Aline* is forced to shoot *Lucien* in order to regain *Orlanda*, but their reunified identity has achieved balance as result of their separate experiences. The narrative is a

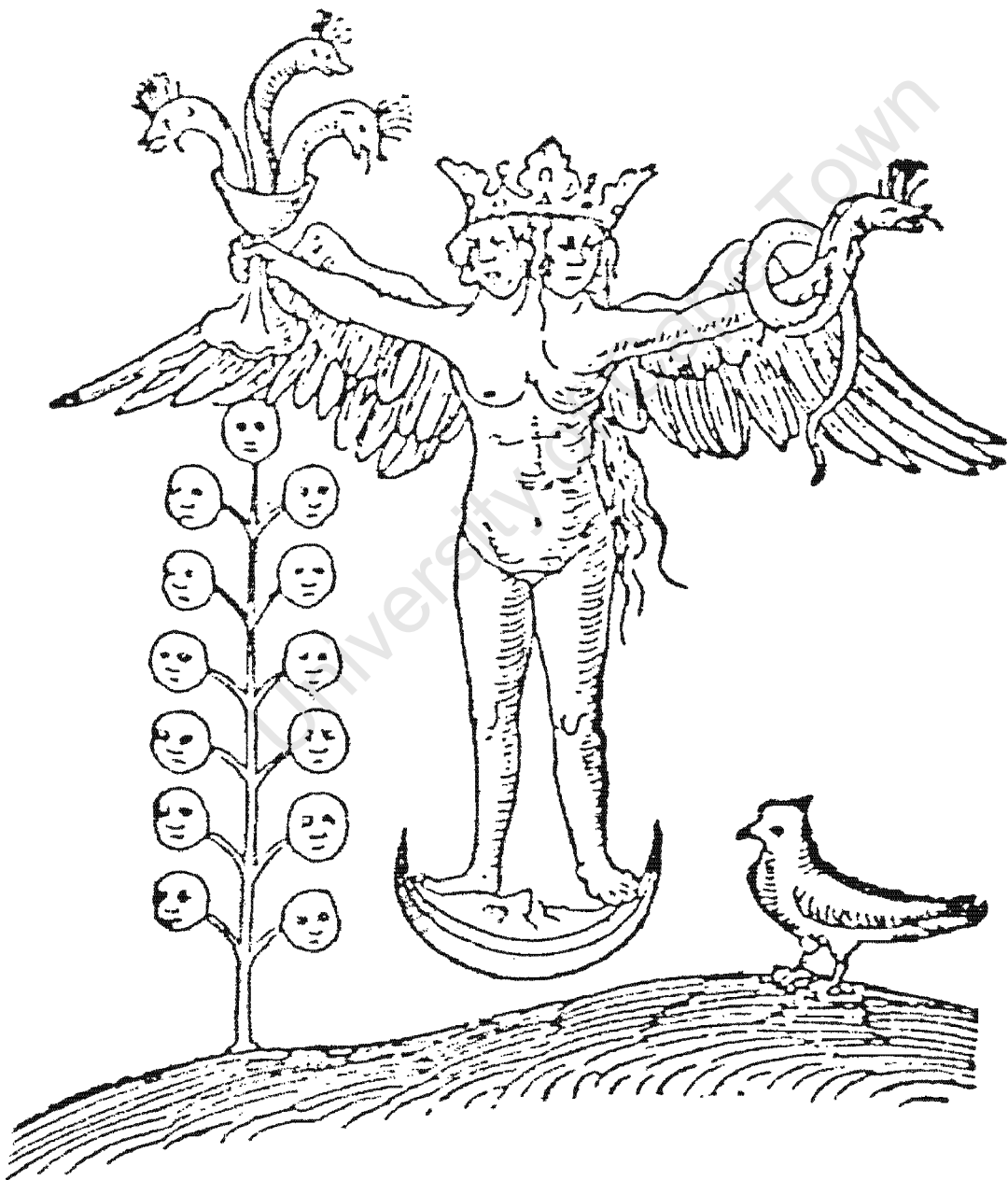
fictional representation of the central tenet of androgyny – that both the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ are essential parts in the identity of the individual, requisites for ontological wholeness.

Orlanda also demonstrates the unalterable nature of the personality that exists beyond divisions of sex and gender. Aline and Orlanda share the same basic personality, differentiated only as a result of the cultural imposition of gender identity. That which is socially acceptable in Aline, such as her sexual orientation, is considered unsuitable in Lucien. The fantastical events of the novel allow these differences to be overcome, and for Aline to go unpunished for her crime, but as the narrator points out in the ‘Moral’ with which the novel concludes,

Who would have gone on trial?... If I were the judge I would be faced with a dilemma. People will say I’m responsible for the whole thing. But, it is a novel, a made-up story which only takes place in my head. I have no blood on my hands, only a little ink... I have never claimed to write stories that are morally correct. (Ibid. 214)

Ten

Conclusion



'Rebis (New Birth)'

Although they are separated by years, sometimes decades, Woolf, Carter, Winterson and Harpman are coexistent within the feminist paradigm of androgyny. Their works share a number of traits, from fantastical style to refusal of closure. Their perspectives might alter slightly according to their historical context, but they have the same intentions: the deconstruction of conventional gender paradigms, and the embracing of the androgynous ideal. There is not a separatist philosophy seeking only the liberation of women, although that is their main aim: they are seeking better conditions for and better relations between men and women, and the transformation of society and its methods of hegemonic domination – language and literature.

At this stage, the alchemical process is complete, for both the alchemist and the androgynous creation. The final product is an androgyne in which the elements of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' have been distilled, purified and unified. The previously bifurcated parts are synthesised in perfectly balanced being. The balance exists between the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', and also between the body and the spirit, between reason and emotion and intuition. This highly evolved being has attained ontological perfection, and is thus reborn as an immortal. It is a being, furthermore, with the power to effect this process of androgynous entelechy in others, a philosopher's stone. The literature of these four writers possesses this same potential for incremental multiplication.

Appendix
and
Bibliography

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APPENDIX

Extracts from an interview with Jeanette Winterson in Women by Naim Atallah
(1987)

'Differences'

Jeanette Winterson: There are enormous biological differences, and there should be, because, in a sense, it's set up for us to interact. That ought to work for the benefit of both sexes, and if we were exactly the same, it would be terrible. But I am concerned that there have been so many attributes simply ascribed to women over the years, that they are more loving, more nurturing—you know, naturally they will want children, they are weaker or whatever, they can't make their minds up. There's an endless stream of things that have just been pasted on layer by layer until it is built into an enormous legend about what a woman is. That has to be carefully scrutinized. The differences are there, but we have to be sure they are real differences and not made-up ones.

Women have periods, and this is quite crucial in the way they operate. Contrary to the belief that it makes women completely irrational and off-the-wall for a few days of the month, I think it actually makes them terribly clear-sighted. I do my best work around that time. I don't know why, but that is the case. If I have a problem, I will solve it around that time. I find it very creative, I know this experience is shared with a number of women. I think we always have a sense that our bodies are undergoing a change, which perhaps men don't so much. And that gives you perhaps a rather more precarious outlook on the world, but also a very sensitive one, because you feel the changes in yourself, and so, you're more able to respond to changes in your life outside.

I think men are very concerned with how things work: building a world that you can see and touch and is concrete. And I think, to a large extent, women look behind those things, perhaps into motives, perhaps into personalities, into the way things actually work, and into people more. Which is why, I think, women make very good personal-relations people and they are good in advertising. If it is to do with human nature, women are more likely to be able to see into that and use the information, because they look beyond the surface. We have to, because so often in the past our way forward has been via men, so we have learned to look into the heart. Men have rarely had to do that, because they can just crash and bang through the world and it quite often works for them simply because they are male.

Women often do the listening, so they pick up things about human nature which they can then apply in other situations, whereas men are often doing the talking. If you go into a bar and see couples or groups, it's often the men who are talking and the women who are listening and putting in comments here and there. And that's not always passive—women are picking up so much.

Because, if you're talking all the time, you're not hearing, and that's where the skill comes from. I've known men who are equally skilled, but they're unusual. (1091-1092)

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