

'When I Write, I am Sexless'

Cécile Ladjali

The myths which seek to assert the idea of completeness per medium of the creature of dual sex are legion. The androgyne of Plato, the Tiresias of the fable, through their double sexuality and their ability to meld in one body both *animus* and *anima*, the genius of man and the genius of woman, affirm the idea of ontological perfection. But, consubstantial with their radiant power is the terror that they generate. For they unsettle even the gods. Symbol of the creative harmony and beauty of the universe, the androgyne is nonetheless the harbinger of catastrophe. Its perfection is an anomaly. Its beauty a provocation. Its intelligence an insult. For the androgyne is the copy of God, the extremity of a hand that shapes, capable of what God is able.

It is this idea of the copy that we wish to emphasize, because it lies at the heart of the work of the writer. Authors construct copies of the world even as they transcend it. *Mimesis* accords authors the power to declare the totality of things and, after forging a copy of them, to locate themselves within that *vibrato* which amplifies them and which is called *genius*. But, so as to apprehend this totality and then to distil its essence in language, the writer will choose to be sexless. Neither man nor woman, but both at the same time. If, from the point of view of the everyday mortal, the androgyne is perceived as a calamity, from the author's point of view this dual state of being is something desirable to be embraced at all costs.

The writers we are examining, whether Baudelaire, Bachmann, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath or Marguerite Yourcenar, proudly claim the status of androgyny, though this idea for them is more one of mind than of body. For whether as form or phantom, the androgyne has always been a metaphor: that of the fully realized expression of genius.

The androgyne as book

Over the course of her novel, *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf returns repeatedly to a poem, 'The Oak Tree'. It is a manuscript infused with the essence of carnality, elaborated

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over the centuries by a creature who was male in his dawning and female in her twilight.

A poem encompassing all things.

The life, the hours, the beating heart of its androgynous author.

And always one central constant: the genderless being in the act of writing. Not only is this eternal presence embedded in the heart of the novel, but also deep within the body of the dual-sexed hero(ine) who felt the presence of the poem as a strange self-mirror, 'in the bosom of her shirt, as if . . . some locket or relic of lost affection'.¹

[It was] the manuscript of her poem, 'The Oak Tree'. She had carried this about with her for so many years now, and in such hazardous circumstances, that many of the pages were stained, some were torn, while the straits she had been in for writing paper when with the gypsies, had forced her to overscore the margins and cross the lines till the manuscript looked like a piece of darning most conscientiously carried out. She turned back to the first page and read the date, 1586, written in her own boyish hand. She had been working at it for close on three hundred years now. It was time to make an end. Meanwhile she began turning and dipping and reading and skipping and thinking as she read, how very little she had changed all these years. She had been a gloomy boy, in love with death, as boys are; and then she had been amorous and florid; and then she had been sprightly and satirical; and sometimes she had tried prose and sometimes she had tried drama. Yet through all these changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same.²

Orlando ends in the 1920s, close to Virginia herself who admits to being writing on 'the first of November 1927'.³ Thus the moment of composition coincides with that of the fiction. The author can encounter her character, if it's not the other way round. Orlando was a man until the age of thirty. At that fateful moment, he becomes a woman from then onwards. In this decisive instant, the irreparable change with which he must struggle has just occurred. A sort of premature final judgement which will create a simple creature from the androgynous essence of the divinity:

The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast –
'THE TRUTH'

at which Orlando woke.

He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but to confess – he was a woman.

.....

The sound of the trumpets died away and Orlando stood stark naked. No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man with a woman's grace.⁴

The page is divided in two by the dotted line, which distinguishes a before-and-after of the act of writing.

A blank.

An impossibility or an absolution.

A marginal zone: the tragic abiding place of the 'woman who writes'. And that woman is Virginia, who must suffer the cost of revealing to the reader a truth which

is that of her own metamorphosis. For the art will be that of a woman who, in the very moment of her creation, must remember her prior state: 'her memory . . . went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle'. And hence, to look into 'the clear pool of memory',⁵ the singular aim that Virginia-Orlando assigns herself.

The sex-marked outer form, however pleasant, has no interest for the author, who leaves these organic considerations and other such 'odious subjects' to 'biologists and psychologists'. Indeed, wherever Virginia may write 'he' or 'she' it is only by 'convention'.⁶

For, if we take care to closely read *Orlando* as a commentary on the totality of Virginia's literary work, we discover that the poetic subject, the work of art of genius, is in essence *asexual*, like its author: 'in each of us two forces are present, one male, the other female . . . The normal satisfying state is that where the two sexes co-exist in harmony and co-operate on the spiritual plane . . . It is when such a fusion takes place that the mind is made fully fertile and can make use of all of its faculties.'⁷

Thus, women will be able to write 'once they forget their sex'.⁸ Orlando, one of Virginia's alter egos, as Mrs Dalloway can be, strives to forget 'Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us', 'nature, who delights in muddle and mystery', 'making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite'.⁹

The androgyne is a *notion*, the subtle metaphor of the perfected genius whose figure of comparison is so elusive that there is a strong temptation to embody it in its most worthy receptacle: the book. Which is what Virginia Woolf did with 'The Oak Tree', whose roots and branches hold together the earth and the sky, linking two infinities, in the way of the androgyne.

The 'book as androgyne', as an object within which perfections of form and balance are subtly hidden, was already so honoured by the symbolists, as Joseph Delteil imagined it, for example:

*C'est, ô Livre androgyne
Pour voguer sur l'étang étroit, les jours impairs,
En cherchant le secret sexuel de ses rimes,
Et en tordant l'eau complexe
L'ample perfection de ta ligne classique!*¹⁰

(It is, o androgyne book
For sculling the narrow mere on odd-numbered days,
In search of the sexual secret of its rhymes,
Wringing out the intricate water
The broad perfection of your classic line.)

Anatole France also took up the androgyne nature of the book, albeit ironically, thereby distorting its image. To this end he pastiches the remarks of Aristophanes who, in Plato's *Symposium*, points to androgyny as justification for homosexual love: 'two Greek lexicons, copulating one with another, give birth to a single creature more monstrous than the human couples of the divine Plato'.¹¹ Paul Claudel, on the other hand, less acerbic in his philosophical outlook than France, and siding with the priestess Diotima who, in the *Symposium*, held out against Aristophanes by conceiv-

ing of the androgyne as the allegory of the essence of Beauty, picks up the image of the book now devolved upon the adulterous couple Méssa and Ysé of his play *Partage de Midi* (*Break of Noon*). This image echoes the monologue of the double Shadow, inserted at the end of the Second Day of Claudel's *Soulier de satin* (*The Satin Slipper*). At noon, Méssa parts from Ysé and their luminous couple 'opens down the middle like a book'.¹² Or, to take another instance, Balzac, while convinced of the exceptional character of the fusion of the male and female principles, admits that the androgyne is a 'rarity' which 'most often takes the form of a literary work in two volumes'.¹³

Thus, a variety of authors have represented the notion of the androgyne through the image of the book, and in doing so have underlined its very essence: the genius which may be found within it.

Androgynous authors

But, as the object is grounded in its founding principle, so the book begins from its author. It is in him or her that the androgyny effectively lies.

'I am a literary androgyne' declared Rachilde in the preface to *Madame Adonis*.¹⁴ 'Even half a century ago, the human being called today the woman of letters didn't exist. There were only men of letters, whether male or female.'¹⁵ Rachilde, who did not hesitate to have her visiting cards inscribed with 'Rachilde, *hommes de lettres*',¹⁶ regarded her era with an uncompromising gaze; and at a time when the boundaries were just beginning to become blurred, she became, both in her works and her person, the mirror of this change: 'Being neither of the race of "mere women" . . . , nor of the race of courtesans . . . , I am happy to remain a reporter, that is, to remain neutral, taking notes without taking part'.¹⁷

The writer in the act of writing is sexless,¹⁸ declares Marguerite Yourcenar through the pen of the emperor Hadrian. Virginia Woolf concluded that she was not completely a writer until as a woman she had cast aside her sex. These two authors were no doubt more than aware of the inevitable social principle which assorted women to the function of *procreation* while that of *creation* was allotted to men. The obviousness of this contrast is apparent in the conceptual role reversal that Goethe imagines when referring to the *labour pains* he suffered when writing his *Elective Affinities*: 'I see myself as a pregnant woman whose sole desire is to bring the child to birth, whatever it might turn out like'.¹⁹

For both Woolf and Goethe respectively, it seems that this conceptualization of their role in terms of sexual inversion was a metaphoric necessity for both genders as they commented on their art and its underlying principles.

But it is not only, or even mainly, through the voices of women that this type of discourse has been uttered. The androgyne as the genius of art was proclaimed by Baudelaire, for example, whose poetry has not been sufficiently considered from this point of view. More than being mere stereotypes, the dandy and the androgyne,²⁰ so closely associated in Baudelaire, are representatives of a certain superior *consciousness*.²¹ The poet defined it in a passage from *Paradis artificiels* under the term 'androgeneity' without which even the most relentless and virile genius will remain an incomplete being in relation to reaching perfection in art.²²

This genius draws effectively from the masculine and the feminine. Strength must needs ally with grace should any form of perfection in art be aimed at. Baudelaire borrowed from Plato the image of the androgyne whose primordial oneness became the metaphor for the perfected expression of the artistic genius. But it is an androgyny of the mind, not of the body. In the aforementioned passage, Baudelaire brings attention to the sensuousness of his writing, which would not escape the spiritual antennae of the sensitive female reader. To fully express itself, creative genius needs to inhabit the *gynaeceum*, the woman's space (*mundus muliebris*) which Baudelaire takes pains to adorn with silk and Latin harmonies as if to meld together tender feeling with intelligence. In consequence, 'the artist is artist only through embracing duality of being and through not remaining ignorant of any dimension of that dual nature'.²³ This attributive proposition, accompanied by its inherent restriction, well affirms the associated moral and aesthetic imperative.

Baudelaire's androgyny was already present prior to the publication of *Paradis artificiels* when, in his dedication, he likened himself to 'those languid and sensitive women'.²⁴ This androgyny, the unifying link between the man and his writing, coming thereby to stand directly for the poetic creativity itself, was given profile in an 1850 poem, 'Lesbos',²⁵ in which Baudelaire identifies himself with the poet Sappho. It is thus that, from 'virile Sappho, the lover and poet' (*l'amante et le poète*) can be born the beauties and pains in which 'Latin sport and Greek delights', 'kisses, languorous or joyful' are joined together in turbid harmony. The androgyny of the primordial being is revisited: addressing Sappho, the poet bids her: 'quit old Plato's austere and furrowed gaze' and engage henceforth in 'unfruiting pleasure'. This world-weary pleasure, willingly indulging life's manifold humours, is the essence of the poetic genius.

Thus, the whole of Baudelaire's opus describes a double proposition with regard to a sexualized conception of the genius of art and to the attraction that femininity held for him. On the one hand is the *body*, the feminine pole, manifest through a certain feminization of the writing through its impulsive leaps, its themes and its forms. On the other is the *soul*, the masculine pole, manifesting itself through the philosophical intent of the work found in the search for the aristocracy of beauty. This body/soul dialectic yet remains Platonic, even though Baudelaire's dandyism admitted his own femininity only with difficulty. Thus it is possible to find conjoined in the one poet a nostalgia for the 'woman's space' of childhood alongside a violent misogyny as attested by certain notorious pages of *Mon cœur mis à nu* (*My heart laid bare*). Poetic inspiration brings forth the woman in the artist, but this in no way prevents his aristocratic will from expressing itself as an exceptional masculine creating subject.

From ontology to theatre

For women artists, the attractive force of the masculine pole is expressed more through poetic than feminist action; the latter would have limited the profound creative desire to the realm of the politic. Sarah Bernhardt revealed a clear predilection for works with androgynous themes, as she 'preferred . . . the brains of men'. For the celebrated actress, 'men's roles are in general more intellectual than women's

roles'. And, she went on: 'there exists not one female character who has opened up such a broad field for the exploration of human feeling and pain as has that of Hamlet'.²⁶

It is certainly true that the theatre is an art-form that facilitates metamorphosis. If this is experienced from within by Sarah Bernhardt, its realization is entrusted to the actors in a play like Heiner Müller's *Quartett*. The theatre is a dual aesthetic form which offers the writer two non-mutually exclusive forms of existence: those realized through reading and through representation. This ubiquity is fertile ground for the notion of the androgyne.

The reader of *Quartett* perceives the name of 'VALMONT': set out in capital letters on the page, and yet the speech that follows the colon belongs in fact to (Madame de) Merteuil. When the play is staged, the same Valmont who, during the previous scene was playing himself, henceforth lends his exterior to his former mistress. Language wins out over physicality and is more determinant than Nature in establishing reality of being. For the duration of this scene, Valmont is Merteuil. And opposite this *he/she* is a *her/him*: Merteuil, who is Valmont. Metamorphosis thus confers more reality on the attribute than on the subject, more incarnate value on the rheme (predicate) than on the theme (grammatical subject). As a result, the time has come for the Flesh to be made Word:

VALMONT: The devil knows many disguises. A new mask, Valmont?

MERTEUIL: See the evidence of my truth. By what means should I become dangerous to you, with what penetrate into the crypt of your virtue? The devil has no part of me anymore, worldly lust no weapon. WASTE AND VOID THE SEA IS QUIET. If you won't believe your eyes, convince yourself with your tender hand. Put your hand, Madame, on the empty spot between my thighs. Don't be afraid of anything, I am all soul. Your hand, Madame.

VALMONT: You are a saint, Valmont. I permit you to kiss my feet.

MERTEUIL: You make me happy, Madame. And throw me back into my abyss . . .

VALMONT: I ask myself if you will resist those breasts, Vicomte. I see you wavering. Should we have deceived ourselves about the degree of your sanctity. Will you endure the tougher test. Here it is. I am a woman, Valmont. Can you look at a woman and not be a man.

MERTEUIL: I can, lady. As you see, your offer makes no muscle twitch, no nerve quiver inside me . . .

[Pause]

VALMONT: I believe I could get used to being a woman, Marchioness.

MERTEUIL: I wish I could.²⁷

Why this game and dialogue of sexual role reversal?

Love in its primordial form was an ideal love, for it was experienced by androgynous beings still formed in the image of the deity. But the libertine, in the verbal jousting in which he engages, shoots arrows which turn back to strike him fair in the heart. He plans his own suicide, and the provocation he contrives leads him to trip up on his own paradox. He transfers his gender on to the other, observes it for a while, then drops back into it. This division of the personality, this objectivization of the self are opportunities that only the dramatic space can offer.

The word-play on the images denoting the vagina is emblematic of this transfer

principle intending to create the illusion of movement. But this transfer is only verbal, as the sublime imperative of libertinage demands. In reality, it points to the individual who has become tragically mired in his/her own sexuality and carnal sheath. The woman's vagina is evoked through Biblical metaphors of the sea, the crypt, the pit, all lending themselves to a connotation of a deep place.

But these are disturbing images of sterility, persuasive of the chastity of the temptress who is male, the devil dressed as woman, the devil who loves. In the fine weave of the text may perhaps be glimpsed the imprint of the scene from the Apocryphal Gospels where Salome probes the Virgin's vagina to test whether she has remained pure, only to behold with horror her hand turning to ash as she withdraws it. The carnal touch, travestied here as a scene from the Inquisition, elicits the memory of the sacred hymen:

And immediately the cloud disappeared out of the cave, and a great light shone in the cave, so that the eyes could not bear it. And in a little that light gradually decreased, until the infant appeared, and went and took the breast from his mother Mary . . . And the mid-wife went forth out of the cave, and Salome met her. And she said to her: Salome, Salome, I have a strange sight to relate to thee: a virgin has brought forth – a thing which her nature admits not of. Then said Salome: As the Lord my God liveth, unless I thrust in my finger, and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth.

And the midwife went in . . . And Salome put in her finger, and cried out, and said: 'Woe is me for mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God; and behold, my hand is dropping off as if burned with fire'.²⁸

Müller is uttering a sacrilege. The scene of kissing the feet recalls Jesus and Mary Magdalene, when the eroticization of the principle of virginity reaches its point of greatest intensity in the moment when the tautology grants to the Word a more powerful reality than that yielded to the Flesh. *Saying* equates to *Being*. The devil Valmont creates by saying. Which, indeed, is a divine power.

But the characters always return to their own gender. It has been nothing more than a game of masks. Müller takes his place in a tradition recognized since Shakespeare. For already in *HamletMachine* we have read:

OPHELIA: Do you want to eat my heart, Hamlet? *Laughs.*

HAMLET: *Face in his hands.* I want to be a woman.

*Hamlet dresses in Ophelia's clothes. Ophelia puts the make-up of a whore on his face. Claudius – now Hamlet's father, laughs without uttering a sound. Ophelia blows Hamlet a kiss and steps with Claudius/HamletFather back into the coffin. Hamlet poses as a whore.*²⁹

By devouring (like the melancholic Bellerophon of the fable) Ophelia's heart, Hamlet gains access to himself by becoming a woman. This inversion, reaching into the very essence of being and brought about through the ritual cannibalism, opens the way for a re-ordering of the world. Hamlet-Ophelia conducts the marriage of Ophelia to Claudius in the coffin, and through this act he becomes a parricide. By burying his stepfather and his mistress side by side, he is killing his mother Gertrude, whom the now-cold body of Ophelia symbolically represents. He is no longer the poor orphaned victim, bereft of a father and duped by his mother, but the murderous son who cannot realize his being in the drama without recourse to a sex-change.

The doubt over Hamlet's sexual identity underpins the tragic pusillanimity of the individual. Granted, one illusion is swapped for another. And though Hamlet's indecisiveness in the action may represent impotence, it becomes affirmation of will in the ontological scandal that is the one who is purposively determined to change and rechange sex.

Grammar of myth and grammar of being: women who write, women who self-destruct

For the woman writer, language becomes the field of an absurd wager: after distorting ontology to create a hiatus between man and woman, language offers the chance to find a new balance, but which women writers can only access through their literary creativity. Having been humiliated by words, they will turn them to good use. For it is the specious codes implicit in language that have given body to the man/woman opposition; man creates/woman procreates. The opposition between the sexes is in no way primal, it is intra-linguistic. But by paying these categories no heed, the androgyne demonstrates mastery over words and cancels out the curse.

But more than indulging in a game of grammar and the grammar of myths, the androgyne cleaves to the writer's being, as in the case of Yourcenar writing *Alexis*. The essence of androgyny was already omnipresent in a book like *Feux (Fires)*, where each tale drew its substance from the substrate of antiquity. The sexual ambiguity embodied in it was thus located on the fragile boundary between antiquity and modernity, since the text was an allegory of the contemporary world. But the androgyne was not just a metaphor. With *Alexis*, the notion indwells the very person of the author. Yourcenar herself might well have declared, in place of Hadrian: 'A man who reads or who thinks . . . is representative of the species, not of the male sex; in his best moments he even transcends the human.'³⁰

The psychology of writers and their determination to cloak their sex through their composition allows us to advance the hypothesis of *androgyne writing*. This phenomenon has been most frequently observed in women. It reveals what Hélène Deutsch would have called 'the female masculinity complex'.³¹ Since women do not possess a physical virility, and with this lack being generative of a certain number of social singularities, they may invent for themselves a form of virility that is intellectual through literary creativity.

Hence Yourcenar, the first woman to enter the Académie française, speaks almost exclusively through the voices of men, be they named Alexis, Zeno or Hadrian. She constantly changes names and sex and invents for herself a new genealogy with each new novel. From her family tree, the female personages seem absent, except, surprisingly enough, when it came to writing her autobiography.

To express the homosexuality of Alexis, Yourcenar chose to drop obvious hints: 'The fruit falls only when it is ripe, when its weight has already long been drawing it towards the earth . . . It was not my fault if, that morning, I should encounter beauty.'³² By eroticizing the narrative through a subtle shift of referential associations, Yourcenar gains access to an infinite field of landscapes and sensations, without losing the vigour of the figured realities. Writing in the masculine mode requires

a gift of transparency, a skill of self-effacement. The author seeks to dissolve herself behind the figure of the Roman emperor:

I very soon realized that I was writing the life of a great man. Out of that came more respect for the truth, more care, and, in relation to myself, more silence.³³

And, with respect to this aptitude for transparency, Virginia Woolf was already writing that the spirit of genius, the androgyne spirit in Coleridge's terms, was 'resonant and porous', that it 'transmits emotion without impediment', remaining 'naturally creative, incandescent and undivided'.³⁴

Though Yourcenar does allow her woman's voice to be heard in her Correspondence, that voice has the pitch of a contralto. As the author of *Alexis*, she declares in her letters that she wanted to 'one day write a reply to Monique',³⁵ the eponymous hero's wife. But this *Reply to Monique* would never be written, as Yourcenar devoted her pen to the service of *him* whom she knew the most intimately. As a result, we become conscious of the mysterious person who is the object of the dedication of the work, whom the author designates on the first page by the sibylline formula: 'to himself (*À lui-même*)'. Yet poetic creativity could arise only from a true exchange of being, not from a travesty of the soul. The difficulty lies in knowing on which side one should place oneself in order to observe the truth. It would seem that, viewed through the mirror of the text which finally is none other than a long letter, Yourcenar has conversed with *herself* in inventing *Alexis*.

All women who write, outside of any feminist purpose which, as far as creation in its most complete form is concerned would necessarily be reductive, have walked a Utopia: that of language. In this desert waiting to bloom, they have declared that above all they were *authors*. To realize this state is the self-assigned goal of writers in search of the 'unique language which has never yet prevailed, but which governs our intuition and which we imitate',³⁶ as Ingeborg Bachmann expressed it. It is through possessing this language and embracing it with all one's being that the author will gain access to the self.

It is clear that Bachmann is constructing this self in a novel like *Malina*. The narratorial Ich regains her wholeness of self with Ivan. The two Is are superimposed in this unusual novel (which resembles a play) and in which the nightly dream-quests, the wandering through a half-rebuilt city, the back-and-forth searching between two love-relationships are multiple ways of signifying the struggle of the 'Ich' in its attempted reconciliation with itself. Ich becomes Ich when the other is encountered through love. With the second lover, Malina (a man despite the apparently feminine form of the name), the androgyny of Ich becomes an androgyny of word and not of body: 'Since I have spoken to you, I know that I am two persons, a man and a woman', confesses Ich. Malina is the spirit of the novel; Ivan is the body. Ich needs those two passions for self-discovery and attribution of a name.

On the other hand, that other 'Ich', that of Sylvia Plath and her poem 'Daddy', repeated four times in a sob (as preciously recorded in a radio broadcast in 1960) does not realize her dream of union. The poet's self-awareness is definitively cut off from her origin, separated from the father, impeded by the father.

In Bachmann, the father is less inhibiting because he also bears the features of the

mother, who 'had [the] father's brow and frowned exactly like he did'. The deep-buried manifestations of androgyne personality, despite the nightly anguish that they generate, penetrate the consciousness of the 'Ich' who is thereby enabled to decipher their mystery and reach self-understanding. But Sylvia Plath was amputated from such a redemptive source. Nothing was understandable to her. The four 'Ich' of her poem cry out the disintegration of the self, bereft of an irretrievable double origin. The shadow of the 'bastard', 'Nazi' father consumes both mother and daughter. Only one solution is left to Sylvia: to become a 'Lady Lazarus', following on from a failed suicide attempt. Bachmann's brilliant and victorious quest associates images of psychoanalysis and philosophy. But Plath's desperate search involved the extremes of suicide and resurrection. The adventure becomes theological. The myth has changed sex, Lazarus has become a woman, proof of the triumph of the poet.

This problematic at work in Ingeborg Bachmann and Sylvia Plath – the triumph of the poet – is at heart what we had perceived with Virginia Woolf. By writing *Orlando*, Virginia became reborn in herself, for by determining the destiny of her heroine, she determined her own.

The page from *Orlando* quoted at the beginning of this article appears as a luminous allegory of the creation of the androgyne. The woman who is writing, Orlando-Virginia, has for years been carrying a poem *upon* herself and not *within* herself. The idea of *paucity* (*disette*) stands in place of that of *plenitude* (*grossesse*). The substitution must be made in the *margins*. It was the *marginalia* of literature that were the lot of women writers even in 1927. To write *obliquely* was to break the straight line inevitably imposed by the baleful attitudes of society. The manuscript is a *piece of darning*, a hybrid score with multiple erasures, soaked in the *consciousness* of its author who weaves into it sometimes *prose*, sometimes *drama*. The androgyne book is hyper-intellectual, super-conscious of its essence. Time stretching to infinity installs the Platonic figure and the philosophy of the poem within the myth. Over the whole curve of time extends the graceful body of the androgyne like a rainbow, epoch-spanning, conflict-spanning.

The time of the writing, the time of the *labour* – Virginia takes up here a term associated with procreation – is not that of a man.

The androgyne and its textual manifestation have passed through all stages of *metamorphosis* across the prism of the ages only to *in fine* stay the same. By crafting a work of art, the androgyne has not procreated but self-created, engendering its own nature.

Hence, it has never been a question of writing in the feminine or the masculine. It was just about writing. In its simplicity. Writing from out of one's artistic genius and not giving way to betrayal.

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Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Notes

1. V. Woolf (1993: 162–3).
2. V. Woolf (1993: 163).
3. V. Woolf (1993: 55).
4. V. Woolf (1993: 97–8). (Note that in the English edition quoted, the textual separation shown is indicated by a single asterisk – trans.)
5. V. Woolf (1993: 98).
6. V. Woolf (1993: 98).
7. Remarks of Virginia Woolf as recorded by Libis (1980: 162).
8. Remarks of Virginia Woolf as recorded by Fraisse (2001: 118).
9. V. Woolf (1993: 55).
10. Delteil (1921:1).
11. France (1927).
12. Claudel (1967: 1001).
13. H. de Balzac, 'Réflexions morales', ch. LXXXIII, in Balzac (2002).
14. Rachilde (1888: XL).
15. Tinayre (1903: 219).
16. Recorded by Dauphiné (1991: 46).
17. Rachilde (1928: 84).
18. See below.
19. Letter from Goethe to Reinhard, 1 October 1809.
20. Barbey d'Aurevilly wrote that 'the dandies are the Androgynes of History' (see Barbey d'Aurevilly, 1966: 718).
21. J. Libis considers the androgyne to be 'both the structure and the expression of the psyche' (Libis, 1986: 16).
22. Baudelaire (1988a: 608).
23. Baudelaire (1988b: 378).
24. Baudelaire (1988a: 567).
25. Baudelaire (1988c: 112–13). This poem is one of the 'condemned pieces' of the *Fleurs du Mal*, whose edition of reference is *Les Épaves (Wrecks)* (1866).
26. Bernhardt (1923: 138, 140–1).
27. Müller (1984a: 114).
28. Protoevangelium of James, 19, 20 in *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Revelations*, trans. Alexander Walker, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark (1870), p. 12.
29. Müller (1984b: 55).
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31. Deutsch (1991).
32. Yourcenar (1984b).
33. M. Yourcenar, Notebooks for 'Mémoires d'Hadrien', in Yourcenar (1984a).
34. Woolf (1981: 98).
35. M. Yourcenar, letter to M. Daniel, dated 10 July 1957, in Yourcenar (1995: 164–5).
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