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Woolf introduced her theory of the androgynous mind^[1] in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and the concept has caused contention among critics ever since. Often worried by the word and its binary baggage, critics have either loved or hated Woolf's ideal state for a creative mind which alternates between male/masculine and female/feminine. Lovers of the theory, including Carolyn Heilbrun and Nancy Topping Bazin, read androgyny as a balance and union between opposites ("the evanescent masculine and the eternal feminine"^[2]) which gives a satisfying pattern to life. However, others have read Woolf's vision of androgyny as variously: an escape from the body (Elaine Showalter and Lisa Rado), an avoidance of key feminist issues (Elaine Showalter), a "sexist myth in disguise" perpetuating the phallogocentrism it seeks to deconstruct (Daniel Harris, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi), a vision of self-destructive narcissism (Julia Kristeva, Francette Pacteau) or merely as an insipid form of homogeneity that "lacks zest and energy."^[3] However, Woolf distilled a purer essence from the concept than contemporary critics tend to do. Androgyny, for Virginia Woolf, was a theory that aimed to offer men and women the chance to write without consciousness of their sex – the result of which would ideally result in uninhibited creativity. Whether she succeeded in this aim will be the study of the following essay.

The foundations of Woolf's androgyny and Bloomsbury's sexual liberalism can be found in nineteenth and early twentieth century science. Figures such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Otto Weininger, and Sigmund Freud all put forward to some degree or other the theory of a third sex in which masculine and feminine characteristics (drawn of course along the lines of biological essentialist binary thought) came together in a single body.^[4] Havelock Ellis wrote that "each sex ... is latently hermaphrodite"^[5], while Dr

Anduin, as quoted by Freud, asserts that “there are masculine and feminine elements in every human being (cf. Hirschfeld, 1899); but one set of these – according to the sex of the person in question – is incomparably more strongly developed than the other, so far as heterosexual individuals are concerned ...”^[6]. This theory was developed further by Carl Jung whose concept of the anima, (the female within the male) and animus, (the male within the female), was interpreted as the healthy balance for the human psyche. The scientific recognition of the ability for men and women to contain the characteristics of each other, not only bodily as hermaphrodites, but mentally, (whether homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual), was a step forward even though this concept reinforced patriarchal binaries. The application of this thinking to androgyny begs the question of whether “we [can] move beyond androgyny as a mere merging of gender roles in a polarisation of traditional oppositions (passive/active, emotional/rational)?”^[7]

For these men of science the correct preponderance of one set of characteristics over the other led to heterosexuality while the incorrect preponderance led to homosexuality. To be an “invert” (Freud’s term for homosexual), whether “absolute” or “amphigenic” (Freud’s version of homo- and bi-sexual), was still to be degenerate in the eyes of the majority; and yet, it was generally believed to be a factor in creativity and there were concerted efforts at the time to demonstrate that a large number of great artists, musicians and writers were “inverts” including the Romantics, Michael Angelo and Shakespeare.^[8] Some psychologists such as Edward Carpenter even envisaged Uranians as “the advance guard of that great movement which will one day transform the common life by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external ties which now control and confine society.”^[9] Barbara Fassler points out that Ellis and Carpenter were read by members of the Bloomsbury group and most within that circle shared “the common belief that to be artistic one must have the unique combination of masculine and feminine elements found in hermaphrodites and homosexuals.”^[10] This view of the positive creative element in the “sexual aberrations” was taken up by the sexually liberal milieu of Bloomsbury and

clearly influenced Woolf's concept of the androgynous mind.^[11] In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf seems to be reiterating her scientist cousins:

I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating.^[12]

For modern thinkers the definition of androgyny has proven to be more of a problem than for the scientists of Victorian patriarchy. Despite its problematic origins which have led such critics as Mary Daly to pronounce it as a "semantic abomination," androgyny was for Woolf and many feminist critics, a way of liberating women from the negative forces placed by patriarchy on their sex. Carolyn Heilbrun, who started her critique in *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny* with its roots in the Greek *andros* (male) and *gune* (female), stated that the term "did not mean hermaphrodite, nor ... bisexual or homosexual" it meant, for Woolf, to be "fully human."^[13] As a consequence, "instead of referring to androgynous individuals, we [should] call them simply 'fully human men and women'" thus ridding ourselves of connections with sex and gender and the conceptual baggage attendant on them.^[14] The function of androgyny would ideally be to provide "a third term that neutralises the gendered way in which the subject is constructed."^[15]

One of the oddities of the concept of androgyny, and one which was arguably a part of Woolf's thinking, was its assignation to sex. Androgyny all too often escapes out of the grasp of critics and settles back down into the sexual polarisation it is designed to avoid. Thus we find ourselves mired once again in theories of binary opposition through male and female centred androgyny. Beginning with the latter which places the emphasis on women as the embodiment of androgyny, we can read the concept as either liberation for women,^[16] as a bisexuality to which women are closer than men^[17] or the result of

the split that continually takes place in female consciousness due to women's position in society.^[18] Pinkney suggests that Woolf saw women as having a closer connection with androgyny, because the woman inherits no tradition, she is an outsider and her mind is already divided into halves similar (though not exactly akin) to the androgynous ideal. Woolf writes, the woman "is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness... when from being the natural inheritor of that civilisation, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical."^[19] In this view Pinkney is backed up by Hélène Cixous who writes, "in a certain way woman is bisexual – man having trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality."^[20] In other words, the precepts of phallogocentrism keep man homogenous, leaving women, as "outsid[er]... alien and critical," to develop heterogeneously. Jane Marcus clearly states her view that Woolf has leant on the heterogeneity of the female in her theorising, calling women a "collective sublime" while men, who are "trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality," are trapped in an "egotistical sublime."^[21] Marcus writes, "While the poet is still for [Woolf] the legislator of morality, his authority is derived not from an individual talent but from the expression of collective consciousness. The 'egotistical sublime' of the patriarchy," she argues, "has been replaced by a democratic feminist 'collective sublime'."^[22] Elizabeth Abel claims that the "weighting of androgyny toward the maternal is in fact implicit throughout Woolf's discussion" of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*^[23] while Ellen Carol Jones argues that Orlando is more woman than man because "woman is defined by the absence of a stable position. In this sense, Orlando is 'woman' precisely because she changes sex."^[24] Reading along these lines one would come to the conclusion that Woolf, by centring it in the female, offers a stilted version of androgyny which does not achieve the unconsciousness of sex that creates great literature. However, despite giving space to the development of a specifically female style of writing, Woolf does not forget that the mind must contain elements of both sexes in order to be truly productive. After all, she states, "It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be a woman-manly or a

man-womanly.”^[25] And that “to think, as [she] had been thinking ... of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind.”^[26]

Recent Woolf scholarship has stretched the female centred version of androgyny by exploring the lesbian subtext of Woolf’s concept of the term and thus jettisoning the male altogether. An interesting exploration of the subject is made by Jane Marcus in her essay “Sapphistry: Narration as Lesbian Seduction in *A Room of One’s Own*”. In this essay Marcus argues that Woolf has “seduced us into sisterhood” by asking her female audience to collude in the exclusion of men from the lecture.^[27] Marcus sets her discussion of Woolf’s paper, given in a lecture at Girton and Newnham, in the context of Woolf’s sapphisim, the publication of *Orlando* and the trial of Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian novel then on trial for indecency. As a consequence, Marcus argues, the “literary women gathered in the room to discuss women and writing are, at least symbolically lesbians, and the Law is the enemy.”^[28] Instead of an androgyny in which both sexes play an equal part, Marcus suggests that “Woolf’s feeling for sexual difference privileges the female” and continues “When [Woolf] says ‘the book has somehow to be adapted to the body,’ she means the female body.”^[29] Marcus therefore suggests, to some extent, that Woolf’s androgyny is not only biased towards the female, its conceptual space is essentially lesbian.

In opposition to the female-centred type of androgyny which, although positive, is still not really the balance and unity that Woolf craves, we have the male centred form. A number of critics have argued that androgyny is a conceptual red herring for Woolf because it offers a design for the mind which subsumes the female into the male. Thus, the androgyny which appears as liberation actually achieves the opposite result. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg asserts that the “New Women” of the 1920s saw androgyny as a concept which offered the chance to see themselves as “social and sexual hermaphrodites, as an ‘intermediate sex’ that existed between and thus outside of the biological social order.”^[30] However, as Jones points out this strategy failed because “its rhetoric entailed only the inversion of dominant metaphors rather than their deconstruction.”^[31] Androgyny could only have served

these women if they had first rid themselves of the binary schools of thought on which the “dominant metaphors” were based. For Fayad androgyny is the epitome of patriarchal domination, the fusion of the female other within the male subject. Fayad argues that it is a characteristic of the “patriarchal need for assimilation and sameness.”^[32] As a consequence of this need for phallic unity the “splitting off of consciousness” which seemed to place women closer to androgyny than men has conversely be read by Luce Irigaray as a means to keep women as a negative other: “Do women remain divided and assigned to their lot so that men can remain one [un(s)]?” she asks:

Are women the site of an irreparable wound... torn between the yes and the no: the wound of all the “I want – I don’t want, I love – I hate, I take – I reject” which lie below, covered by the Good, the True and the Beautiful men? When you assert that “Man is and remains, as man – and assuming that he exists as man who would not be woman as well, - one” (Lemione-Luccioni, 1976, p.9: 1987, p.3), the “knowledge does not divide him” (ibid.) aren’t you making women a support for what you call the “splitting of the subject”?^[33]

The power of patriarchy is such that even in androgyny its force, these critics suggest, would cause the woman to either sacrifice her personality or remain as a negative “other” existing within the male. Androgyny can therefore be read as a patriarchal construct which has earned the title of “sexist myth in disguise.”^[34]

In her deconstructive reading of androgyny Gelpi enlists the help of history tracing the concept’s long heritage of patriarchal service and implying that its meaning is so deeply inscribed by patriarchy that its re-appropriation to the post-structuralist cause is more problematic than one might think. Gelpi argues, “Gnostics, alchemists, cabbalists of the remote past, as well as social visionaries from the Renaissance to the present, found in androgyny a male ideal of wholeness that, by subsuming the feminine, obviated the need for interaction with actual women.”^[35] Thus androgyny, as Irigaray, Harris, Fayad and Gelpi would

agree, can offer the chance to avoid confrontation with the female and its attendant femininity and all of the negative otherness that she embodies. In its ultimate negative incarnation male centred androgyny is read as self-destructive male narcissism. The psycholinguistic critic Julia Kristeva, argues that, “The androgyne does not love, he admires himself in another androgyne and sees only himself, rounded, faultless, otherless. Coalescing in himself, he cannot even coalesce: he is fascinated with his own image.”^[36] Narcissism as its mythic origins tell us is self-destructive and therefore cannot create or self-fertilise as Woolf would desire it. Certainly, Woolf would never have employed the term had she suspected it to be read as so antithetical to her cause.

Although critics have suggested Woolf’s vision of androgyny to be female centred, the concept as a whole to be secretly in the service of patriarchy and therefore counter-productive to her cause, it is important to establish what Woolf aimed to do with the theory rather than what the word means to others.

Ultimately, the term implied, in *her* usage, the forgetfulness of sex. A way of thinking that would enable women and by implication men to write as themselves, still in a sexed body, but without the attendant prejudices and discriminations that are connected to the body by society. To write without consciousness of sex is to see the piece of work for itself not as its author. When reading the angry writing of men about women, Woolf finds herself thinking “not of what he was saying, but of himself.”^[37] The result of this sex conscious anger is to make the reader aware of *who* is writing not *what* is written and this consciousness therefore undermines the argument. To be successful the mind must possess an ignorance of sex, Woolf writes in *A Room of One’s Own*, “the mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare’s mind,” Coleridge’s poetry and her sister’s painting.^[38] In the “Foreword” to Vanessa Bell’s 1930 exhibition catalogue Woolf writes: “One says, ‘Anyhow Mrs Bell is a woman’; and then half way round the room one says, ‘But she may be a man’.”^[39] Woolf is arguing here that sex should enter the mind and, through the medium of its androgynous

thinking patterns, re-emerge incandescent and unconscious of itself on the other side.

For Woolf, the enemy of androgynous thinking was summed up in the Victorian age which forced writers into a consciousness of their sex and led to the production of abortive works deformed by sexual self-awareness. Thus we find Orlando's hand gripped by the spirit of the age and forced to dash off insipid floral verse: "The pen began to curve and caracole with the smoothest possible fluency. Her page was written in the neatest sloping Italian hand with the most insipid verse she had ever read in her life."^[40] In order to avoid this abortive sexualisation of language Woolf proposes that "poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father."^[41] Just as the Victorian period ruined poetry by "feminising" verse, Woolf sees the rise of fascism, the ultimate motherless machismo in Europe, as the death of poetry: "The Fascist poem, one may fear, will be a horrid little abortion such as one sees in a glass jar in the museum of some country town."^[42] Fascism as the antithesis of androgynous thought leads directly to the deformation and death of language. As a consequence of the rise of fascism, Pinkney notices that the positive image of the couple getting into the taxi at the end of *The Years* is an "ideal of androgyny [which] seems further than ever away" in her subsequent pre-war novel *Between the Acts*.^[43] Shaking off current and ancient patriarchy is the only way to ensure that the mind and therefore language and literature are androgynously free.

Woolf leaves the reader in no doubt that the androgynous mind is the creative ideal, but what marks a text as the production of an androgynous mind? How do women avoid writing as women constructed by patriarchy, or avoid writing like men in the service of patriarchy? How do men prevent themselves from writing angrily about women and pompously or egotistically about themselves? In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf demonstrates the turgidity of the male sentence:

The sentence that was current at the beginning of the nineteenth century ran something like this perhaps: “The grandeur of their works was an argument with them, not to stop short, but to proceed. They could have no higher excitement or satisfaction than in the exercise of their art and endless generations of truth and beauty. Success prompts to exertion; and habit facilitates success.” That is a man’s sentence; behind it one can see Johnson, Gibbon and the rest.^[44]

She goes on to reinforce her point through the imaginary character of the poetry critic “Mr B.” whose sentence, due to his “purely masculine mind,” “falls plump to the ground – dead.”^[45] The presence of the male ego in literature which lies like a “straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I’” over their work, is also a sign of a mind which is single-sexed and therefore uncreative.^[46] But to think only as a woman is no better. In *Orlando*, as we have seen, writing as a woman involves sentimentality and floral imagery, however, adopting a patriarchal style does not provide the answer. Woolf argues that many female novelists have fallen prey to the man’s sentence: “Charlotte Brontë, with all her splendid gift for prose, stumbled and fell with that clumsy weapon in her hands. George Eliot committed atrocities with it that beggar description.”^[47] However, Austen managed to form her own sentence and therefore, Woolf argues, succeeded where the Brontës and Eliot did not. However, despite this ability on the part of Austen her style is still too “feminine” for Woolf to list her among the great androgynous minds. To write androgynously ignoring “the persistent voice” of patriarchy is the only way to save the literature of both sexes from stasis, corruption or deformity.

For Pinkney, Woolf’s writing is a working demonstration of her thinking, “an androgynous alternation, an impossible dialectic which aims to be ‘integrated’ at the moment of maximum dispersal.”^[48] In other words, Woolf’s writing matches the “ebb and flow” of the human mind, it moves like the rhythm of the waves or the pulsation of Kristeva’s semiotic *chora*. Pinkney states that “this dangerous, impossible dialectic is the existential reality of androgyny. The rhythm of the sea as a metaphor of the semiotic *chora* – its patterns and pulses of one/two, in/out,

rise/fall – cuts across the syntax of sentences and plot throughout the text, yet without dissolving them completely.”^[49] This androgynous rhythm in her writing is most evident in sections of *Mrs Dalloway*, *To The Lighthouse* and *The Waves* in which Woolf uses free indirect discourse. Nancy Topping Bazin actually draws a diagram of the pattern of *Mrs Dalloway* which forms the image of waves alternating between different minds and different locations.^[50] The constant flow of the text is a characteristic of the androgynous mind and one which Woolf demonstrates in her own writing as well as in the writing of others such as Shakespeare and the Romantics.

The strength of language and form as a means of realising Woolf’s androgynous vision lies in the fact that “masculine and feminine can be exchanged, or travestied, because words can be.”^[51] Language can alter its meaning and as sex and gender are arguably realised through language they too can be changed and exchanged. Jones argues that “gender is a symbolic construct, not an essence that has meaning outside or beyond discursive structures, and is as heterogeneous (and as empty) as writing itself.”^[52] Therefore, language offers the ideal medium through which to challenge, deconstruct and then reconstruct gender into a more positive androgynous creative form.

It is important to remember that for Woolf androgyny did not mean, as some modern critics would prefer it to mean, sexless writing. Preserving the differences between the sexes is an important part of the creative process and Woolf does not seem to be advocating the death of that. Rather that the differences should be played out within the mind of the individual not between two individuals who are sexed as male and female. This is where Nancy Topping Bazin’s book falls down in its attempt to see characters as a realisation of Woolf’s androgynous vision. Mr and Mrs Ramsay, for example, do not make an androgynous whole simply because they are the embodiment of patriarchal binary thought and are conveniently married. Topping Bazin goes on to suggest that by linking disparate notions such as depression and mania, personal and impersonal, life and death, Woolf creates a sense of homogenous androgynous unity. But Woolf does not

merely want to effect a “resolution of opposites.” As Pinkney points out, “Orlando lives alternation not resolution”^[53] and Woolf herself asks, “if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with only one? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is.”^[54] Difference is to be celebrated, but should exist within the individual androgynous self-fertilising mind. As an example of this, Woolf describes the effect of reading Coleridge, “when one takes a sentence of Coleridge into the mind, it explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas, and that is the only sort of writing which one can say that it has the secret of perpetual life.”^[55] The androgynous mind is united, but heterogeneous and creatively self-perpetuating. Woolf highlights this point by asking: “What does one mean by ‘the unity of the mind’? ... for clearly the mind has so great a power of concentrating at any point at any moment that it seems to have no single state of being. It can separate itself from the people in the street... Or it can think with other people spontaneously.”^[56] The power of the androgynous mind lies in its ability to alternate simultaneously between a million different subject positions preserving heterogeneity at the same time as giving the impression of unity. In the final chapter of *Orlando* we see this premise in practice as Orlando tries to call her many selves into one key or captain self.

However, Woolf’s heterogeneous version of androgyny has its ideological pitfalls. The multiplication of gender and self within the individual leads, Moi would argue, back to biological determinism: “the belief that if we can just turn sex into a more ‘multiple’ or ‘diverse’ category than it has been so far, then social norms will be relaxed. This is nothing but biological determinism with a liberal face.”^[57] Woolf, on the other hand, argues that multiplication of the self and the celebration of difference within the self leads to creativity and liberation from sexual prejudice in literature. To think androgynously offers not liberal biological determinism, but freedom to think creatively, with heterogeneity and difference playing a key role in this creative process.

Yet another attack on Woolf's concept of the androgynous mind has emanated from the theory of narcissism. Kristeva has stated her vision of androgyny as destructive male-centred self-obsession, but other critics have argued that even in perfect sexual balance, "The fantasy of the androgyne is exorbitant... It is a logical impossibility, outside systems of signification and their necessary foundation in difference. The androgyne transgresses the very existence of difference." Thus Pacteau sees androgynous fantasy as a "narcissistic 'caress' in which the subject annihilates itself."^[58] For Kristeva and Pacteau androgyny is not the solution to Woolf's problem because its love of self inscribed in its seemingly homogenous unity does not make for glorious difference or internalised heterogeneity, but for a narcissism which cannot create and can only self-destruct. However, androgyny in Woolf's usage did not imply homogeneity or nihilistic self-love. Woolf enjoyed difference and promoted androgyny as a way to *express* the self not as a self-obsession in which the subject looks back at itself until it expires. Reading androgyny as a form of narcissism would uphold the presence of the ego in literature which is something that Woolf very clearly wishes to dispose of.

Rado translates this self-destructive element detected by Jones, Pacteau and Kristeva in androgyny, not as narcissism or love of the self, but rather as fear of the body and argues that its success as an idea is "predicated on the repression of [Woolf's] own female identity, her own female body."^[59] Elaine Showalter would agree and calls androgyny a "myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to cloak and repress her anger and ambition."^[60] For Rado and Showalter the body is something that Woolf fears and androgyny offers the chance to get rid of it, but by getting rid of it, Showalter argues, she is reduced to the "sphere of the exile and the eunuch."^[61] Rado uses the comparison between the characters Orlando and Rhoda to illustrate how androgyny, without a strong sense of the body, actually causes insanity and death:

Rhoda – like Orlando – becomes so alienated from her physical self that she can only be made aware of it by slamming herself against a door – or a tree. By suggesting that this self-alienation is the source of Rhoda’s (and Orlando’s) madness and suicide, Woolf exposes their “androgyny” as a kind of female castration, a forced lack, a requisite sublimation that precipitates a terrifying void of sexless absence.^[62]

Androgyny, to these critics, is an untenable position because it “denies the importance of the body, of sexual desires... of any material markings of sexual difference.”^[63]

However, Woolf does not suggest that the body should be suppressed, rather that being a woman or a man is still an important factor – just not the only factor and not the conscious factor. Woolf keeps an awareness of the body in her writing, otherwise why advocate the development of the women’s sentence and state that “Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father?”^[64] Yet at the same time Woolf reminds the reader and writer not to judge or create the work on that basis alone. Ultimately, it is an unconsciousness of sex, not a “void of sexless absence” that Woolf calls for. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf holds the author, Mary Carmichael, in high esteem for her writing because she has “mastered the first great lesson: she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages [are] full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself.”^[65] Notice that there is still a “sexual quality” in Mary’s work which suggests that the body is *not* to be thrown away.

Perhaps Woolf would have created less critical contention if she had written in *A Room of One’s Own*, rather than in a letter to Ethyl Smyth: “I believe unconsciousness, and complete anonymity to be the only conditions ... in which I can write. Not to be aware of oneself.”^[66] By getting rid of the troublesome word, androgyny, Woolf would not have to content with critics arguing that it “underscores and reifies the binary it is attempting to transcend.”^[67] Despite all of

the drawbacks associated with the word androgyny and the many negative interpretations of Woolf's use of the term, Woolf's concept of the androgynous mind should not be read negatively or as counter-productive to her cause. Woolf's intention by introducing the concept was to promote a positive creative force that gets rid of gender stereotype, prejudice and discrimination in literature. It is not symbolic of a fear of the body, colourless homogeneity, self-dissolution or narcissistic death. That it is a concept based on feminine and masculine and all of the traits connected to them by patriarchal binary thought should not prevent the reader from seeing the concept as offering the possibility of creative transcendence. For Woolf, as for Cynthia Secor, "androgyny is the capacity of a single person of either sex to embody the full range of human character traits, despite cultural attempts to render some exclusively feminine and some exclusively masculine."^[68] The ability to access this "full range of character traits" and subject positions so that we read and write as "fully human men and women" is the ideal that Woolf is chasing.

Endnotes

^[1] Woolf takes the term from *The Table Talk and Omnia of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

^[2] Topping Bazin, Nancy, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*, (New York: Rutgers UP, 1973) 201.

^[3] Showalter, Elaine, *A Literature of Their Own* (London: Virago Press, 1982) 263.

^[4] This concept of a third sex can be traced back to Plato, who, in his *Symposium* through the voice of Aristophanes writes, 'the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which has once a real existence, but now is lost... the word "androgynous".' Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. Jowett, Benjamin. <http://classics.mit.edu/plato/symposium.html>

- [5] Ellis, Havelock, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex. Vol.II. Sexual Inversion*, (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1915).
- [6] Arduin, Dr., 'Die Frauenfrage und die sexuellen Zwischenstufen', *Jb. Sex. Zwischenstufen*, 2, 211. (54), quoted in Freud, Sigmund, *On Sexuality*, (London: Penguin, 1991) 54.
- [7] Fayad, Mona, "Aliens, Androgynes, and anthropology: Le Guin's critique of Representation in *The Left Hand of Darkness*," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>
- [8] For example, Christina Dokou provides an interesting insight on androgyny in Byron's "Don Juan." Dokou, Christina, "Androgyny's Challenge to the 'Law of the Father': Don Juan as Epic in Reverse," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>
- [9] Carpenter, Edward, *The Intermediate Sex. Homosexuality: A Cross-Cultural Approach*, Daniel Webster Cory (ed.), (NT: Julian OP, 1956) 139-204.
- [10] Fassler, Barbara, "Theories of Homosexuality as Sources of Bloomsbury's Androgyny," *Signs*, 5(2) Winter 1979, 237-50.
- [11] Freud, Sigmund, "The Sexual Aberrations," in *On Sexuality*. (London: Penguin, 1991).
- [12] Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 128.
- [13] Heilbrun, Carolyn. "Further Notes Towards a Recognition of Androgyny," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 2 (Winter, 1974), (London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers Ltd.,) 144.
- [14] Ibid. 146.
- [15] Fayad, Mona. "Aliens, Androgynes, and Anthropology: Le Guin's critique of Representation in *The Left Hand of Darkness*," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

[16] Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York: Knopf, 1973).

[17] Cixous, Hélène. *The Newly Born Woman*. Trans. Wing, Betsy. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Quoted in Fayad, Mona. "Aliens, Androgynes, and anthropology: Le Guin's critique of Representation in The Left Hand of Darkness." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

[18] Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987) 10.

[19] Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Quoted in Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987) 10.

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[22] *Ibid.*, 10.

[23] Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) Quoted in Piggford, George. "'Who's That Girl?': Annie Lennox, Woolf's *Orlando*, and Female Camp Androgyny", *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

[24] Ellen Carol Jones, "The Flight of a Word: Narcissism and the masquerade of Writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*" *Women's Studies* 23 (April 1994), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

[25] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. 136.

[26] *Ibid.*, 126.

[27] Jane Marcus, "Sapphisty: Narration as Lesbian Seduction in *A Room of One's Own*" in *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) 176.

[28] *Ibid.*, 166.

[29] *Ibid.*, 170, 174.

[30] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg quoted in Ellen Carol Jones, 'The Flight of a Word: Narcissism and the masquerade of Writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 23 (April 1994), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

[31] Ellen Carol Jones, 'The Flight of a Word: Narcissism and the masquerade of Writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 23 (April 1994), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

[32] Mona Fayad 'Aliens, Androgynes, and Anthropology: Le Guin's Critique of Representation in *The Left Hand of Darkness*' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

[33] Luce Irigaray, 'The Poverty of Psychoanalysis' *The Irigaray Reader*. Whitford, Margaret (ed.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 88-89.

[34] Daniel Harris, 'Androgyny: The Sexist Myth in Disguise.' *Women's Studies* 2 (1974), 171-184.

[35] Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, 'Sex as Performance with All the World as Stage', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

[36] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

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[37] *A Room of One's Own* 43

[38] *A Room of One's Own* 73: 'That the romantic poets were intrigued by androgyny is not particularly surprising, given their interest in an organically whole and transcendent state of being, and given their preoccupation with vision and realising that vision creatively. The androgyne symbolically encompasses all these... a quest for wholeness... and sexual union imaged and longed for as an ultimate oneness – in short, androgyny.' Baer Cynthia p.25 quoted in Dokou, Christina. 'Androgyny's Challenge to the "Law of the Father": Don Juan as Epic in Reverse' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>

[39] Virginia Woolf, 'Foreword', Exhibition Catalogue, 1930. Quoted in Goldman, Jane. *The Feminine Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 158.

[40] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Penguin, 1993) 164.

[41] *A Room of One's Own*. 134

[42] Ibid.

[43] The couple getting into the taxi was an image which Woolf previously used to spark off the reflection that to think 'of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind.' *A Room of One's Own* 126. Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987, p.189.

[44] *A Room of One's Own* 100.

[45] Ibid., 128, 132.

[46] Ibid., 130.

[47] *A Room of One's Own* 100.

[48] Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987) 159.

[49] Ibid., p.186.

[50] Bazin Nancy Topping, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*. (New York: Rutgers's University Press, 1973) 115

[51] Shoshana Felman, 'Rereading Femininity.' *Yale French Studies* 62, 1981: 19-44. Quoted in Jones, Ellen Carol. 'The Flight of a Word: Narcissism and the masquerade of Writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 23 (April 1994), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

[52] Ellen Carol Jones. 'The Flight of a Word: Narcissism and the masquerade of Writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 23 (April 1994), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

[53] Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987, 131.

[54] *A Room of One's Own* 1.

[55] Ibid., 132

[56] Ibid., 26

[57] Toril Moi, *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 38.

[58] Ellen Carol Jones, 'The Flight of a Word: Narcissism and the masquerade of Writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 23 (April 1994), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>

- [59] Lisa Rado, 'Would the Real Virginia Woolf Please Stand Up? Feminist Criticism, the Androgyny Debates and *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 26 (April 1997), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>
- [60] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*. (London: Virago, 1982) 264.
- [61] *Ibid.*, 285
- [62] Lisa Rado, 'Would the Real Virginia Woolf Please Stand Up? Feminist Criticism, the Androgyny Debates and *Orlando*', *Women's Studies* 26 (April 1997), <http://infotrac.galegroup.com>
- [63] Kari Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1992, quoted in Karabdrikas, Carol Anne Costabile-Heming Vasiliki. 'Experimenting with Androgyny: Malina and Ingeborg Bachmann's Jungian Search for Utopia' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>
- [64] *A Room of One's Own* 134
- [65] *A Room of One's Own* 121
- [66] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 5*. Ed. Nicholson, Nigel (London: Hogarth Press, 1975) 239.
- [67] Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, 'Sex as Performance with All the World as Stage', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 30, (Sept 1997), <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>
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First Response

Virginia Woolf's use of Coleridge's concept of the 'androgynous mind' as a key element in her theory of writing and gender has provoked much debate and contention over the years. A major source of the contention is the slippery nature of the concept of 'androgyny', for not only is the word itself open to a variety of interpretations, but critics and commentators have often approached it from particular ideological positions. For example, Elaine Showalter's well-known criticism of Woolf was made from a committed 1970s Anglo-American feminist position which read her advocacy of androgyny as disloyalty to the cause of women. Elizabeth Wright's article is useful for considering different ways in which androgyny has been theorized over the years, and for demonstrating how particular articulations of the concept have led to skewed interpretations of Woolf's ideas.

Wright's article reflects the recent thinking about gender (as exemplified by the work of Judith Butler) which goes beyond the binary oppositions of male versus female or women versus patriarchy to think of the various ways in which sex and gender are constructed by society. In looking at Woolf from such a perspective, Wright's article also reflects the contemporary perception that Woolf's work anticipates recent thinking on gender: for example, critics and commentators have compared her with Jeannette Winterson (particularly noting congruences between Orlando and Winterson's ambiguously-gendered protagonist in *Written on the Body*), or have seen Woolf as a figurehead in a tradition which Winterson

continues. [1] Studies like Wright's, written in the wake of this new thinking, help deepen our appreciation of the subtleties and complexities of Woolf's thinking on gender.

[1] See, for example, A. Harris: *Other Sexes: Rewriting Difference from Woolf to Winterson* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000) and L. Haines-Wright and T.L. Kyle, 'From He and She to You and Me: Grounding Fluidity, Woolf's *Orlando* to Winterson's *Written On the Body*'; in B.R. Daugherty and E. Barrett (eds) *Virginia Woolf: Texts and Contexts* (New York, Pace University Press 1996). 177-83.