

# The Invention of the Neuter

Laure Murat

‘I would dearly love to know if the “new woman” in her joyous celebrations, will manage to avoid sliding into drunkenness and filth.’  
‘What do you mean by the “new woman”?’ enquired the cavalry officer.  
‘Why, the third sex that’s beginning to emerge.’  
Ernst Ludwig von Wolzogen, *The Third Sex*, 1902

From the Symbolist period to the inter-war years, and in works ever more numerous as time went by, literature and medicine, both together and separately, constructed a discourse progressively focused on the enigma of the ‘third sex’. But how perceived? As an aberration, a mere legend, a mirage, a mental defect, a mistake of nature? The ‘third sex’ came to designate the sex of the indistinct, that which has no name, drawing within its sphere the primordial Adam, the angel, the ephebe, the androgyne, the hermaphrodite, the transvestite, the effeminate male, the mannish woman, the pederast, the sodomite, the tribade, the Sapphist, the transsexual, the degenerate. Around 1900, to this unsettling tribe was even added the working woman who, as a result, was thought to have ‘abandoned her true condition’, and who thus had become ‘desexualized’ or ‘asexual’. In his preface to Willy’s treatise on the *Third Sex* (1927), describing the Paris of Sodom and Gomorrah, Louis Estève drew attention to the part played by a now totally forgotten novel of the same name, *The Third Sex* by Ernst Ludwig von Wolzogen (1902), in the creation, handing down and popularization of this term. But contrary to what this title might suggest, Wolzogen does not focus on homosexuals in his book, but rather on those independent women, without husbands but with jobs, whom he refers to as ‘the neuters’. Neutrality conceived of as the effacement of the masculine and the feminine, perhaps as an effect of modern life? The theme has now come full circle in the corpus of reflection on the third sex, though it seems to have been applied more specifically to emancipated women, and singularly to lesbians.

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### **The emancipated woman**

Passing from the discreet boudoir Sapphist to the lesbian who had openly come out and who worked, the female homosexual of the turn of the 20th century had become a social category, a 'species' as Michel Foucault would have called it. From 1893 on, Dr Julien Chevalier was already drawing a subtle link between lesbianism and employment, as part of a study on sexual inversion, when introducing his discussion of Sapphism.

One can no longer count the numbers of women type-compositors, designers, accountants, cashiers, brokers, business agents; some administrative departments are employing them by the hundreds. In the liberal professions there is the same onrush; we already have the woman journalist and the woman doctor; the woman lawyer is at hand while the female engineer is not far off, take my word for it. In the field of art, it is even worse; there's a whole clutter of women. The woman painter, sculptor, composer, novelist are but some of the manifold states of being in which this drive for assimilation is apparent. There's no need to labour the point: through the independence that a profession and their talent provide, women have reached the point of self-sufficiency.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences: 'The near-sudden explosion of the lesbian vice is a trend so contemporaneous with this evolution in behaviour that it is difficult not to detect a cause-and-effect relation between these. For several years now, lesbosism [sic] has taken on alarming proportions, both in Paris and in most European capitals . . .'<sup>2</sup>

For Chevalier, 'the woman is more than becoming emancipated, she is becoming mannish', she is 'adopting at will the boyish look'.<sup>3</sup> She is playing vigorous sports, and pays mere lip-service to modesty and innocence. She is an aggressive virago or a neurotic, afflicted with 'malady of the soul', one whose eyes had been opened, a 'devotee of literature'.

A few years later, the assimilation of the independent, emancipated woman into the same category as the lesbian was no longer in doubt. In his standard work on sexual inversion, Havelock Ellis could write as follows:

It has been stated by many observers who are able to speak with some authority – in America, in France, in Germany, in England – that homosexuality is increasing among women. It seems probable that this is true. There are many influences in our civilisation today which encourage such manifestations. The modern movement of emancipation – the movement to obtain the same rights and duties, the same freedom and responsibility, the same education and the same work – must be regarded as, on the whole, a wholesome and inevitable movement. But it carries with it certain disadvantages. It has involved an increase in feminine criminality and in feminine insanity, which are being elevated towards the masculine standard. In connection with these we can scarcely be surprised to find an increase in homosexuality which has always been regarded as belonging to an allied, if not the same, group of phenomena. . . . Having been taught independence of men and disdain for the old theory which placed women in the moated grange of the home to sigh for a man who never comes, a tendency develops for women to carry this independence still further and to find love where they find work. I do not say that these unquestionable influences of modern movements can directly cause sexual inversion, though they may indirectly, in so far as they promote hereditary neurosis; but . . . they probably cause a spurious imitation. This spurious

imitation is due to the fact that the congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in woman of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily, influence others.<sup>4</sup>

But by doing no more than taking note of the modern movement 'and its disadvantages', Ellis gave further weight to the fundamental difference in the way that male homosexuals and lesbians were historically perceived: whereas the figure of the pederast, regarded as a degenerate and a sexual deviant, was born under the microscope of criminal and medical science, that of the lesbian owed its formation essentially to a process of social evolution. The pederast was *an invention of psychiatry*, the lesbian *a creation of the political context*. This fundamental contrast lay at the heart of two constructions of the identity which, without being wholly separate, remain nonetheless irremediably distinct.

The assimilation of the emancipated woman with the lesbian barely conceals another threat: the regression of dimorphism, the terror of indifferenciation, foreshadowing the eventual 'extinction of the race'. Even within the feminist movement, there are many who are very uncomfortable with butch lesbians within their ranks. Their marked disapproval of the 'flapper' look and of a masculinization contrary to their ideals, their intense contempt for activists in britches like Madeleine Pelletier or Violette Morris (an Olympic champion who had her breasts removed in order to drive her race-car with greater freedom) all bear clear witness to this. This suspicion around the blurring of sexes was clearly enunciated by the pioneering feminist Maria Deraismes, who echoed an attitude that was widespread among the activists of her era:

I want a woman to remain a woman. She should retain her grace which is at once her strength. I am opposed to those ugly and dubious garments which turn us into hybrid creatures, some kind of neutral and suspect intermediaries between man and woman. Who are we dealing with in these desexed figures to whom we can scarce give a name?<sup>5</sup>

Neutral intermediaries, sexless and nameless figures: it was precisely within that undefined zone that the identity of the modern lesbian was to be constructed, using that very lack of differentiation as a strategy to undermine the paradigms and find her place. Neither man by sex nor woman by gender (or at least in the most rigid cultural presuppositions associated with that concept), she was determined henceforth to invent herself outside of the normally prescribed canons.

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As early as 1878, Barbey d'Aurevilly had anticipated the rise of this threat in his pamphlet directed against the *blue-stockings*, those women who wrote and were therefore – 'at least in ambition – but would-be men'.

In the history of mankind there have been periods of veritable social hermaphroditism, where men have become like women and women like men. When these unnatural fusions take place, the consequence is always that the order is further troubled by the female absorbing the male, until such time as there no longer exists male nor female, but some imprecise neuter substance, which becomes easy fodder for the first nation along to assimilate.<sup>6</sup>

Infinitely complex, this notion of the neuter sex thus appeared very early as a significant strand in histories of women seeking to 'escape their condition' and in the history of lesbianism in particular. Generally pejorative, almost an insult, it designated women of indeterminate sexuality who composed the immense majority of homosexual women who did not identify with the image of the *butch/femme* couple. Creatures devoid of spark or substance, they were perceived as resembling the melancholy lesbian figures of the paintings of Romaine Brooks, whose androgynous silhouettes and featureless expressions emerge as from a monochromatic grey mist where their images constantly dissolve and reform, like the 'shadows' and 'phantoms' denounced by Édouard Bourdet in his play *La Prisonnière* (*The Woman Imprisoned*).<sup>7</sup> As though in mourning for their lost sex, they never smile, and they exude a malaise all the more difficult to define as it is indistinct and diffuse. All manuals of psychiatry which point to the reputed lack of restraint of openly homosexual men fetch up against the opposite characteristic in lesbians: the discretion and silence with which they cloak their sexual behaviour, their 'self-effacement' which effectively conspired to make their personality ungraspable – a stumbling-block to investigators which long saved lesbians from being tabulated in statistics or probed by science.

This lesbian invisibility would be experienced in some cases as the stigma of an unresolved shame, in others as the sign of their unadaptability to the world, but in general as a symbol of marginality left unexplained within the general category of homosexuals. As previously mentioned, the term 'neuter' is first and foremost a pejorative concept which derives practically always from a process of *subtraction*, or cutting away. Its dictionary entry is defined as: 'belonging to *neither* of the belligerents or contending parties'; 'a stance taken *on the margin* of the hostilities'; 'one who *declines* to get involved', 'taking *neither* one side *nor* the other'; 'a substance *neither* acid *nor* base'; 'describing a body with *neither* positive *nor* negative electric charge'; 'that which is *bereft* of passion, which remains cold, detached and objective'. In their great majority, lesbians, being *without* husbands and *without* children, *deprived* of the joys of motherhood, *neither* masculine *nor* feminine and allegedly *lacking sex*, conceptually correspond to perfection to this broad category of definitions of 'the neuter'; to these it is pertinent to add two other complementary ones whose relevance shall shortly be seen: 'belonging to a grammatical category from which a male/female essence or a masculine/feminine form is absent'; 'applied to types of insect (ants, bees, termites) whose sexual organs have atrophied and who fulfil a role of protecting and provisioning the community of their fellows (e.g. soldier-ants and worker-ants)'.<sup>8</sup>

It is to these images that Ernst von Wolzogen refers in his book *The Third Sex*. He introduces his argument in the context of an evening meal shared by a group of men, where one of the protagonists enquires what Arnulf Rau, theoretician of the 'third sex' and chief character of the narrative, understands by the concept of the 'new woman'. The length of the following quotation may be excused on the grounds that it condenses a very important element in the history of human mentality.

– I understand by the expression *the third sex* all women who, by natural disposition or by dint of circumstance come to the point of no longer considering themselves as persons of

strictly limited rights and duties, but simply as fellow humans. . . . In the past, these 'neutrals' nevertheless had to keep within the narrow bounds of the woman's role, for law and custom forbade them access to careers which, physically and intellectually, were considered the exclusive domain of men. They passed through existence unnoticed, like ghost moths in the twilight, and on their tombstones one could read only that they had been 'worthy spinsters'. The march of economic conditions towards pitiless capitalism has provoked an incalculable growth of this spinster army, within whose ranks some are volunteers, but others are there by forced conscription. . . . The majority have not entirely given up the hope of marriage and hence have retained something of their womanhood. They bitterly resent being slaves to work and fail to appreciate that as individuals they have freedom. But a growing minority is learning to get satisfaction from work – it is these who are the recruits of the third sex. The present-day emancipation of women has as its end the calculated insurrection of the army of spinsters. Seeds of disaffection are being sown among them, they are injected with the arrogance of knowledge and lashed with the whip of ambition to rival men in all fields of culture. The third sex is indubitably the living proof of the intellectual equality between the man and the woman.<sup>9</sup>

The third sex was then conceived of as the working woman who aspired to the equality of the sexes. But, in her forced renunciation of the role of being a 'real woman', what form of sexuality could this 'neuter' creature claim? One of the male guests at Rau's dinner responded instantly with the obvious allusion when he referred to the considerable number of 'amazons of the third sex'.<sup>10</sup> Such a state, it was implied, would be truly 'abominable and disgusting' or simply 'sad' depending on one's opinion. A telling detail comes in the assertion that the legitimization of the third sex would derive directly from the political environment, as the rest of the scene shows:

– Please God, you're not a socialist I hope, exclaimed the count, clinking glasses with the orator across the table.

– No, absolutely not, said the latter; for if socialism were to become a *fait accompli* before time, it would serve only to hasten the development of a society which would find its model among the bees. And personally I would consider a state based on the principle of the hive as the greatest misfortune that could afflict humanity; for it would interrupt the natural evolution towards the reign of the superman (*Übermensch*).

– A state based on a hive? repeated the prince, appreciating the comparison. Workers, drones and queens, eh what? – a horrid perspective – even though one might consider the artificial creation of the third sex in the face of the will of nature as a triumph of the human spirit. The hive-state would adapt itself perfectly to a development whereby human beings, instead of dining, would simply swallow food pills, and instead of making love, would send the women off to be incubators each in their turn.<sup>11</sup>

The image of both the bee and the modern woman assimilated to the neuter state was, however, not confined to discussions of social and moral behaviour in popular literature. In *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*), considered the first work of 'surrealist' theatre, not staged until 1917 though written in 1903, Guillaume Apollinaire enacts a little revolution: Thérèse, who wants to work and not have children, becomes Tirésias. She is soon hailed as a political and military leader, leaving her husband to lament:

Fameux représentants de toute autorité  
Vous l'entendez c'est dit je crois avec clarté  
La femme à Zanzibar veut des droits politiques  
Et renonce soudain aux amours prolifiques  
Vous l'entendez crier Plus d'enfants Plus d'enfants  
Pour peupler Zanzibar il suffit d'éléphants  
De singes et de serpents, de moustiques et d'austruches  
Et stérile comme l'est l'habitante des ruches  
Qui du moins fait la cire et butine le miel  
La femme n'est qu'un neutre à la face du ciel.<sup>12</sup>

(Renowned representatives of all authority  
I believe you have heard it clearly said  
In Zanzibar women want rights of polity  
And spurn henceforth the child-making bed  
You will hear them cry No more child, No more child  
To populate Zanzibar elephants suffice  
Along with mosquitoes, apes, ostriches, mice  
And though the hive-dweller sterile may be  
At least she makes wax and collects up honey  
Woman is but a *neuter* creature out in the wild.)

The husband therefore decides to bring forth offspring without the agency of women. He achieves this miracle by bringing 40,049 children into the world in the space of one day. As a result, things finally get sorted out, as always.

The choice made by many lesbians of the inter-war period to enter a space of creativity freed from gender specification, to disappear inside that 'neuter zone' of the hive-state which would allow them to be recognized for their talents alone was part of the mainstream development of this concept. A concept which was not at all passive in its expression, as Roland Barthes emphasized in his lecture series at the Collège de France on 'The Neutral' whose 'authentic title' could have been 'The Desire for Neuterdom'. For, he added, the neuter state 'did not necessarily correspond to the flat, thoroughly depreciated image that the Doxa, had of it, but could constitute a strong and active value'.<sup>13</sup> The Neutral, that is to say, 'everything that confounds the paradigm' or else which 'annuls or counters the implacable binarism of the paradigm by recourse to a third term'<sup>14</sup> emerges as a particularly pertinent concept for the analysis of the 'third sex'. In the writings of Barthes, the neuter as a refusal of submission, a free space that is both fluctuating and untenable, unregulated action, goes far beyond questions of sexuality to become universal, and, more than simply seeking a definition, finding occurrences in all aspects of everyday life: 'the Neutral is the shimmer of a gleaming surface: an image which subtly changes its appearance and maybe even its sense according to the angle of the subject's gaze'.<sup>15</sup>

**'Neuter is the only gender that really fits me'**

Now it is that indefinite space, unbounded and ever-changing, that those lesbians wish to construct for themselves, aiming at indifferentiation and objecting to being pigeon-holed in the scientific categories of the 'female homosexual' as much as being confined by the general image of 'the woman'. From the second decade of the 20th century onwards and during the whole inter-war period, a large number of them would bear eloquent witness to this desire for non-difference, particularly in cultural life. In preference to the attribute of 'working woman', they chose that of 'artist' (in its neutral meaning, since the French form 'artiste' is one of the few common-gender words of that language which may be used equally with a masculine or feminine article), clearly indicating thereby their intention to be free of the gender-based specifications which shut them in. They took pleasure in 'scrambling the deck' in the manner of the photographer and writer Claude Cahun: 'Masculine? Feminine? That depends. Neuter is the only gender that really fits me. If our language had a neuter gender you wouldn't see such indecision in my thought. I would be the definitive worker-bee.'<sup>16</sup> We also find a parallel commentary by Adrienne Monnier, the famous bookseller of the rue de l'Odéon in her preface to Bryher's *Beowulf*, in relation to English society: 'Restraint in one's personal behaviour among the English is not so much natural as firmly inculcated, for the purposes of realising more productive social outcomes – *much as the productivity of worker-bees is enhanced by their being asexual*. Nouns in English referring to objects are neither masculine nor feminine, they have no gender, which is much more sensible and comforting.'<sup>17</sup>

It is not unnoteworthy either that Adrienne Monnier should choose that her letterhead paper should show her as 'A. Monnier'. Her meeting with Jules Romains, soon after she set up the *Maison des Amis des Livres*, was to confirm her in this intuition. She would tell some time later how she had sent Romains a note saying something like: 'At 7 rue de l'Odéon there is a bookshop where your works are admired'. She went on: '(As you see, I was neither man nor woman, but bookshop.) He called in a little while later (he still had his beard then) and asked for Monsieur Monnier. Ha! How happy I was not to have him guess my sex.'<sup>18</sup>

If Adrienne Monnier and those like her did not invent the idea of the neuter in their time, they did lend to it an unaccustomed clarity and vigour. From a value associated with insipidity, with something missing, even with failure, the neuter became the vector and instrument of liberation, establishing the nomenclature for a new form of identity and for a space in which a new dimension of freedom could be lived. In a novel by Alice Stronach published in 1901, one of the main characters begs a friend who was living in community with other working women: 'Don't be one of them, dear friend. Don't be a neutral [sic].'<sup>19</sup> The anxiety of the pre-World War I era where the emancipation of women was perceived as sterilization by neutrality was transformed during the 1920s into a vibrant and constructive reality: a genuine strategic option.

But this third, neuter sex was entirely specific to lesbians. In his novel, von Wolzogen takes pains to make it clear that one of his heroines, Claire de Fries, though a socially emancipated doctor of medicine, does not form part of this circle,

despite appearances. On the day of Claire's marriage to a doctor of philosophy, Arnulf Rau once again sets out his opinion, to refine it even further:

For me, responsible as I am for the currency of the term 'the third sex', this marriage takes on a symptomatic importance. Our charming friend Claire certainly passes for an emancipated woman . . . But does she belong to the sex that I have given identity to? Is she a mere human object, neither fish nor fowl, all of whose mental faculties are turned only towards the study of medicine? Women, you who are proud of the accomplishments of your sister in the harsh struggle to have her free-will affirmed, will perhaps assert that she is a 'super-woman' who has overcome the weaknesses of her nature and her humble need for male protection; but, as a man myself, I say, along with all other men who know her, that she is not a man in women's form nor an ungendered thing, but purely and simply a woman, unquestionably a member of the second sex. Her whole being emanates the sweet-scented charm of woman, for whom it would not be possible to pass through life without love.<sup>20</sup>

The 'true' woman's role would thus include her liberation, but she should especially take care not to become assimilated into that 'veritable third sex', meaning those sexual inverts of whom the novel reiterates the traditional definition: 'diluted souls of men within a charmless female exterior . . . Wretched souls in a purgatory for whom no one prays . . .'.<sup>21</sup> However, purgatory, like limbo, is a featureless, intermediary space suspended in nowhere: as such, the image corresponds in fact to the exclusive domain claimed by the third sex, a place of outside, an elsewhere which confounds the paradigm of heaven and hell.

If this space effectively knows no bounds or fixed limits, it does perhaps have a colour, or rather a tonality: the intermediate hue, one might appropriately say, of the 'intermediate sex', or that associated with the neuter gender, called in some languages such as Japanese or Croatian the 'middle gender'. In a study on *The Lesbians of Berlin* published in 1928, the following may be found: 'Someone described one day the curious agitation of those people who are "neither black nor white" as a "tableau in mauve"; and from that point on the concept of this soft, gentle, scarcely marked colour became linked to the whole milieu'.<sup>22</sup> 'La Chanson mauve (The Song in mauve)' would even become a popular homosexual anthem, with the following refrain: 'We love the night in mauve with its overpowering scent / that's how it is; we are quite different from others!'<sup>23</sup> It was in the same spirit that Adrienne Monnier chose grey as the symbolic décor for her boutique or for her outfits whose colour never varied. Romaine Brooks, too, had her visiting cards printed with the words: 'painter of harmonious greys'.

### The resurgence of the androgyne

Neither black nor white or, in other words, neither masculine nor feminine: the androgyne, the emblematic figure who undermines paradigms, remained the symbolic figurehead for many lesbians. The generation brought up on symbolist literature did not burn its idols, and from being a fictional character, the androgyne became the object of learned research and messianic commentaries, such as are



found in the work of Joséphin Péladan, author of a 1910 essay entitled *De l'androgynie, théorie plastique* (*On the androgynie; a theory of forms*).<sup>24</sup>

Reading this 'theory' today may elicit an amused reaction. Its inflated style and gobbledegook vocabulary occasionally conveying a mish-mash of woolly ideas should not obscure the fact that this text made a lasting impact, picking up as it did on a very persuasive current of thinking of the period. That a woman as intelligent as Adrienne Monnier, a friend of Walter Benjamin and the publisher of James Joyce, could have considered it a 'devastating document that has perhaps not yet ceased its devastations' may well be taken as witness of this. Adrienne Monnier could even add: 'It impressed me personally in the highest degree, to such a degree in fact that it caused me to feel scorn for my female form and to bind up my breasts, as a nun or an amazon does'.<sup>25</sup>

From the very outset, Péladan is emphatic: 'Androgynomorphism is not just one way of conceiving the world, it is the only possible way'.<sup>26</sup> If the androgynie is recognized as the 'Archetype' of all works of art and the symbol of genius, it is an archetype of a very particular type, in fact, an essentially masculine one: the androgynie is 'a graceful young man';<sup>27</sup> he 'emerges at the age of the choirboy or the first communicant, and does not remain beyond adolescence: the seven years from 13 to 20 form the brief lifespan of this miraculous creature'.<sup>28</sup> This first distortion of the original myth, which imposes a sex-specification on a primordially indeterminate being, doesn't prevent Péladan from including under this category the angel which 'has no sex', Joan of Arc, and even an operatic diva of the time, madame Caron, who sang in the role of *Fidelio* on stage . . . . In other words, the biological sex mattered little as long as the gender – that is, the image, bearing, and role traditionally accorded to boys – retained its integrity. Péladan is not bothered by contradictions: 'To have beauty, he concludes, is to belong to a third sex that is impenetrable and intangible'.<sup>29</sup> He concludes in a flourish of lyricism: 'O hesitating moment for body and soul, nuance of subtlety, unperceived interval in the music of forms, supreme sex of the third mode! Behold thee!'<sup>30</sup>

The right-wing anarchist philosopher Camille Speiss would draw from this source to make the androgynie the pivotal emblem of his eschatological vision of the world and his ideal figure, in the form of the youth who realizes and incarnates a favoured concept: that of 'neutrality or passive-activity'.<sup>31</sup> By rhapsodizing 'neutrality', 'chastity' and 'abstinence' and by dissociating noble (or spiritual) pederasty from vulgar (or material) sexual inversion, Camille Speiss was engaging with a current of thought that was becoming more and more pronounced among certain inter-war intellectual circles: the raising of the third sex to the ranks of a spiritual elite. The pure and disinterested 'Greek love' of Gide's *Corydon* (1922) may be read in this light. But, from a utopian symbol of peace, the Androgynie, bearer of an 'hermaphroditic spirit', 'an individualized incarnation of reborn humanity' would evolve in Speiss's works towards the 'paragon of the race', the only creature capable of being 'the Mediator of humanist redemption transcending Christianity'.<sup>32</sup> This tangential development in Speiss's thinking, that goes hand in hand with virulent anti-Semitism and a misogyny that on every page denounced an 'invasive feminism', fell easily into step with the coincident re-interpretation, simplified to the extreme, of Nietzsche's superman (*Übermensch*) or Gobineau's 'king's son', constructing a theory

which reiterated: women behold only their womb and Jews gaze on nought but their circumcised member; it is only men who focus exclusively on the mind, the seat of all Intelligence and sovereign good.

In 1938 this hitherto respected 'philosopher' gave free rein to his opinions in a form of discourse which reflected the obscene rhetoric characteristic of extremist thought, as evident in the title of his work: *Mon autopsie, Éjaculations autobiographiques* (*A Self-autopsy, Autobiographic Ejaculations*).<sup>33</sup> One may read for example: 'It is not war that is the CRIME but the exploitation of Youth or the perversion of its education through the treachery of the Jews (save us, o HITLER) or the moral suicide of those who are destroying it!'<sup>34</sup> Or further: 'With HITLER, anti-Semitism has become a beneficent reality which I cannot but admire, for he knows, along with all defenders of the race, that Israël is destroying that race, degrading the individual and corrupting humanity . . .'.<sup>35</sup> The revulsion for all matters to do with sex, in a scientific sense, considered to be the tainted heritage of a 'Judaified' psychoanalysis incarnated by Sigmund Freud, found fertile political ground in which to take root.

How, starting from a philosophy of the neuter and the androgyne, could such an apology for war come about? While it is possible to consider this simply as a personal lapse into irrationality – Spiess indeed became particularly paranoid at the end of his life – may it not nevertheless echo certain aspects of an infinitely complex issue: that of the embracing of fascism by certain homosexuals, both male and female (Marcel Jouhandeau, Maurice Sachs, Romaine Brooks, Gertrude Stein and others). But drawing such parallels immediately comes up, as a general principle, against the simple fact that no one would think of studying in reverse the identification of certain individuals with fascism as a function of their *heterosexuality*. The danger is that establishing a collusion between homosexuality and fascism presupposes that there might indeed be a correspondence between so-called 'deviant' sexuality and a 'deviant' ideology. This initial hypothesis is not only inadmissible, but is also contradicted by history. There are too many counter-examples, the communist Gide being perhaps the most obvious, but also Adrienne Monnier or Claude Cahun, for any schematic equation to hold up. The fascination exercised by the androgyne as a redemptive figure of the 'third kind' no doubt is best interpreted as a momentary historical phenomenon and a response to society's prevarication over the gradual regression of dimorphism, along with prophecies of 'racial extinction'. Homosexuals, belaboured by a psychiatric discourse that designated them as monsters and threats to the nation – blame was heaped on Gide, for example, for the defeat of 1940 – no doubt did seek solace for a time in this philosophy of the neuter and in this distrust of sexuality so as to rid themselves of such demonization. The political expression of such a choice would subsequently be simply a matter of interpretation, as always.

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Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

## Notes

1. Original French quotation from Chevalier (1893: 219).
2. Chevalier (1893: 227).
3. Chevalier (1893: 220, 224).
4. Ellis (1915). In 1908 one could still read: 'Feminism, which was initially a single-minded obsession in pursuit of equality, has become the apology for bestial instinct. It emanates an equivocal odour of lust. Has not one of our most shameless feminists, a certain Renée Vivien, transformed herself, in a book of bad verse such as *women contrive in their moments of irrationality*, into the high priestess of "Lesbian love"? This modern-day Sappho constantly intersperses with her effusive lyricism the most strident declarations of feminist dogma.' Original French quotation from Joran (1908: 27).
5. Deraismes (1891), quoted by Bard (1995: 204).
6. Barbey d'Aurevilly (1878: XIX). This same quotation was to be taken up, slightly modified and abridged, without attribution of source but with the reference 'from the pen of one of our fellow writers' in Estève (1927b: 7).
7. In this bourgeois melodrama, one of the protagonists advises a friend that he should distance himself from a woman he is in love with by revealing that she is in fact his wife's lover: 'You must abandon her, don't you understand, or else you are done for! You will spend you life pursuing a phantom that you will never grasp! For they remain beyond reach. They are shadows. You must leave them to walk amongst themselves in the shadow realm! Don't go near. They are dangerous' (Bourdet, 1926: 101). *La Prisonnière* was a three-act drama first staged on 6 March 1926 at the Femina Theatre, Paris.
8. Original French definitions are taken from Rey and Rey-Debove (1993); the emphases in italics have been added by the author of this article, Murat.
9. von Wolzogen (1904: 180–2). The quotation here is an English rendition of the original translation from German into French, with emphasis added by the author of the present article. (There is an existing English translation of the novel, made by Grace Isabel Colbron, published under the title *The Third Sex* by The Macaulay Company, New York, 1914 – trans.)
10. von Wolzogen (1904: 184).
11. Ibid.
12. Apollinaire (1994: 896).
13. Quotation translated from Barthes (2002: 261–2). (A full translation of this text into English by Rosalind E. Krauss is due for publication in August 2005 – trans.)
14. Barthes (2002: 31).
15. Barthes (2002: 83).
16. Original French quotation from Cahun (1930: 176).
17. Bryher (1948: 14–15). Emphasis added by the author of this article. In 'Notre amie Bryher' ('Our friend Bryher') Monnier further remarks: 'Impossible to describe her clothes; there's absolutely nothing to say about them; everything is neutral in the extreme. I've simply the urge, whenever I see her, to brush her beret, as for Sylvia' (*Les Gazettes*, Paris, Gallimard, 'L'Imaginaire', 1996, p. 266).
18. Monnier (1989: 53). The exact French sentence is 'Il y a rue de l'Odéon une Librairie qui vous aime bien. Peut-être passerez-vous un jour devant elle.' (. . . Perhaps one day you will pay her a visit). Letter from Adrienne Monnier to Jules Romains, late 1915 or early 1916, *Correspondance Adrienne Monnier–Jules Romains, I- 1915–1919*, in *Bulletin des amis de Jules Romains*, no. 75–6, automne 1995, p. 19.
19. Stronach (1901: 385).
20. Original French quotation from von Wolzogen (1904: 303–5).
21. von Wolzogen (1904: 306–7).
22. Roellig (2001: 17). The author of this article has quoted from the French edition. This quotation has subsequently been translated into English. No direct English translation of this text from the original German is known – trans.
23. Roellig (2001: 17).

24. Péladan (1910).
25. Original French quotation from Monnier (1989: 186).
26. Péladan (1910: 55).
27. Péladan (1910: 31).
28. Péladan (1910: 37–8).
29. Péladan (1910: 89).
30. Estève (1927a: 59).
31. Estève (1927a: 87).
32. In 1929, the journal *Hermétisme* subjected the philosophy of Spiess to critical enquiry, as part of which Georges Normandy notably wrote: ‘The powerfully original thought of this very bold and attractive writer has created an impressive stir in literary and philosophical circles’ (quoted in Spiess, 1938: 163–4).
33. Spiess (1938: 106).
34. Spiess (1938 : 159).

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