The concept of androgyny:  
A working bibliography

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ANDROGYNY has been variously understood at different times in different cultures, but the idea has been everpresent. Just as in each age myths are reinterpreted, so too the androgy nous ideal must be redefined again and again by succeeding generations. Our androgy nous vision can be informed by tradition and history, but it must be free of the misogyny and sexism which has pervaded much of what men have written about it heretofore. The continued use of the term androgy nous is necessary if we are to transcend the dualistic culture and the sex roles we have inherited, but feminists must clarify that the androgy nous society can exist only if women as well as men can live their lives in accord with the androgy nous ideal. Moreover, many before us have demanded the “feminization” of their male-dominated societies, but now feminists must clarify what they mean by “feminization,” how that will change economic and social structures. If we rout sexism from the idea of androgy nous and enrich it with feminist ideals, we shall have a vision to guide us in the struggle ahead.

A bibliography on androgy nous is necessarily interdisciplinary, and it must cover the numerous topics involved both in understanding the past dreams of androgy nous and in developing an androgy nous vision which incorporates within it our own heightened consciousness. Rather than list all the material together, I have grouped similar kinds of readings. This is a bibliography which will grow and change to reflect our own struggle. I hope those of you who go on to read or write in this area will send me further references, so that a more definitive bibliography can be provided for us all at a later date. Please send your discoveries to me at the English Department, Scott Hall, Rutgers College, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903.

Background reading


“In America neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force—at most as sentiment. No American had ever been afraid of either.” “An American Virgin would never dare command; an American Venus would never dare exist” (385). His insights help clarify the lack of the “feminine” as a force in American society.


Eliade, Mircea. *Myth and Reality* (1963). Trans. Willard Trask. New York: Harper, 1968. Good background on the role of myth in healing and the desire to recover the original state of wholeness, variously described as the “return to the origin,” the “return to the womb” or the “return to the cosmic Great-One.” Also discusses “myths of cosmic cataclysms.” These are part of the creation-destruction-re-creation pattern. The Androgynous Vision is the re-created whole.


Martin, P. W. *Experiment in Depth: A Study of the Work of Jung, Eliot, and Toynbee*. New York: Pantheon, 1955. Martin describes Toynbee’s hypothesis “that, when a civilization comes to a ‘time of trouble,’ such as we are now in, individuals here and there turn from the outer world of political and social chaos to the inner world of the psyche; there come upon the vision of a new way of life; and, returning to the outer world, form the nucleus of a ‘creative minority’ through which that civilization may find renewal.” He examines the techniques of this “mythical method” and examines whether or not it can be used for better ideological purposes than it has in the past.
Mosse, Eric P. *The Conquest of Loneliness*. New York: Random House, 1957. Mosse articulates the anti-androgy nous point of view: "The biological differences between men and women have their counterparts in psychological differences. When either sex tries to compete with the other and take over its characteristics, difficulties will inevitably arise. The more 'masculine' the women become, and the more 'feminine' the men, the harder it is for each to build the bridge to the other. A bridge does not link two particles which are indistinguishable from one another; it links two separate, distinct and different entities. Each needs the bridge to gain from the other that which he cannot supply himself. Why bother to construct it in the first place if it does not lead to something different from the self?"


Sampson, Ronald V. *The Psychology of Power*. New York: Pantheon, 1966. See esp. 45-50 and 93-102. He defends human equality as the ethical principle against which all policies must be judged. He shows the damaging effects of the inequalities in power.


Misogyny/Fear of women

Readings in this section clarify why women have been and are oppressed; they clarify why the androgy nous vision has not been realized in the past.


first wife, created from the same dust as Adam. "But she remained with him only a short time, because she insisted upon enjoying full equality with her husband" (65). Then we read, "The woman destined to become the true companion of man was taken from Adam's body, for 'only when like is joined unto like the union is indissoluble.' The creation of woman from man was possible because Adam originally had two faces, which were separated at the birth of Eve." There follows the story of why the rib was selected for making Eve; other more interesting parts of the body might have made a troublesome woman. "Nevertheless, in spite of the great caution used, woman has all the faults God tried to obviate" (66). The reason for Lilith's departure is then reversed: "Indeed, God had created a wife for Adam before Eve, but he would not have her, because she had been made in his presence. Knowing well all the details of her formation, he was repelled by her." This time instead of a feminist he has a ready-made feminine woman who would "carry her point with man either by entreaties and tears, or by treachery and caresses" (68).

He shows that "male attitudes toward women and the images of women created by men are strongly influenced by deep anxieties."

He says that men deny and repress their fear of women. Lederer believes that "awareness of this denial is therapeutically indicated" (viii).

Quotes misogynists from all periods of history.

See parts IV and V, 191–204. According to Roszak, he "shows how Freud's hostility to women underlies his psychoanalytic theory."

Sterns sees that individuals as well as society are sick because of the absence of the Feminine, but he does not see the need to eliminate sex roles. Instead he accepts the traditional view that women embody the Feminine principle. Although his concept of androgyny is not the same as a feminist's, his discussion is unusually helpful.

The history of androgyne


See the introduction. Ballanche dreams of an andrognous unity although he mistakenly identifies the Masculine principle with men and the Feminine principle with women. He believes God created inequalities and divisions so that society could then evolve towards equality and perfect union by the interaction of the opposites: “Dans les sociétés humaines, le mouvement s’explique par la lutte du principe stationnaire ou fatal contre le principe progressif ou volitif; du principe initiateur contre le principe initiable; du principe dorién mâle contre le principe ionien femelle; du principe patricien contre le principe plébéien” (III, 178).


On bisexuality in “primitive” ritual and myth.


See this anthology for the opinions of Jacob Boehme and other seventeenth-century theosophists, esp. J. G. Gichtel and Gottfried Arnold. They are the source of the revaluation of the androgyne in German Romanticism, according to Eliade (*The Two and the One*, 102).


Busst discusses the two types of androgyne images found in the nineteenth century. One is associated with the hope for social revolution; the other is associated with decadence and despair. Busst stresses that “the androgyne is a myth; and that, like all myths, it is constantly reinterpreted, since its meaning or value must agree with the widely varying preoccupations and experience of different eras and individuals” (85).


Good for the andrognous, mythic experience of the hero. On andrognous gods, see 155 (plate 10), 152–154, 162–163, 169–171.


An important source, for he identifies the andrognous impulse throughout mythology.


Comte presents “his notion of the future androgyne of woman,” “The Grand-Être of Comte’s religion: Humanity considered as an individual, is of course andrognous like the individual Adam of the occultists, who was later divided into myriads of men and women” (Busst, 3–4).
Creuzer, F. Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker (1810). (Trans. by J. D. Guignaut as Religions de l’antiquité [1851].)

She notes that the androgynous being has double power (8). Delcourt discusses the Hermaphroditic god and aims to explain the psychological roots of the adoration of this god. It is one of the most rooted archetypes in the human psyche, she says. She studies two types: the Hermaphrodite and “l’Eros androgyne.” She includes photographs of statues of both types. On page 48 she writes: “Capable de stimuler toute les forces vitales, Hermaphrodite est apparenté à Aphrodite, à Dionysos et, encore d’avantage, à Eros.” In many monuments the three appear together.


See the section “Mephistopheles and the Androgyne or The Mystery of the Whole.”


Zuntz says that Giedion has collected “various palaeolithic representations of the bisexual concept of the primary creative force.”


See 43-45 on hermaphroditic gods.


Discusses the hermaphroditic Venus—a veiled man-woman.

Leroux, Pierre. *De l'égalité*. Boussac, 1848. Also, see his work, *De l'humanité*, 1840.

Busst describes his belief that "all barriers which divide mankind in time or space and prevent mutual communication and improvement detract from the life of the individual. And in all cases of oppression, the tyrant is hurt just as much as the victim" (Busst, 28).


See 236-255, 306 on the hermaphroditic Venus. She symbolizes "conflict resolved" as does the snake which binds her legs together, "its head and tail 'fast combyned'" (241). "She is the binding, generative power that holds together mother and child, man and woman, friend and friend, subject and sovereign, the diversity of a nation, the great globe itself" (255).


A basic book.


See sections entitled "The Creation Myth" and "The Original Unity."


In Book III see "The Story of Tiresias" and in Book IV see "The Story of Salmacis." The nymph of the lake Salmacis falls in love with the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. She clings to him so tightly that they become one being. The new being still speaks as "he" and feels he has been made "weaker/By the touch of this evil water"!


See Aristophanes famous story of the origin of the sexes. That story is reprinted in Alan Watts' *The Two Hands of God."


See Chap. I entitled "The First Human Being a Man-Woman?"


Sayers speaks of the brain as "that great and sole true Androgyne, that can mate indifferently with male and female and beget offspring upon itself" (146). She also discusses Jesus' attitude toward women.

A fascinating, basic book for understanding the concept of androgyny. He gathers together the "myths which deal with the conflicting dualities of life and their reconciliation."

This book examines archeological evidence of goddess worship in Sicily and Malta. See Symbolism (bisexual) in the index.

The Dionysian and the Apollonian

The Dionysian is related to the Feminine, the Apollonian to the Masculine.

"Dionysus is a woman's god in the fullest sense of the word, the source of all woman's sensual and transcendent hopes, the center of her whole existence. It was to women that he was first revealed in his glory, and it was women who propagated his cult and brought about its triumph." Yet Bachofen claims that Dionysus is the great opponent of matriarchy; he recognizes "the glorious superiority of his own male-phallic nature" (100–101).

Similar in concept.

The most complete account of Dionysus is in Vol. I, 384–392. For other pages, see index.

See his defense of using Apollo versus Dionysus to discuss the psyche and the Dionysian possibilities for therapeutic psychology (266). He says we must not only shift our consciousness in regard to the feminine, we must also reimagine Dionysus.

See 18–21 for a discussion of Pater's concepts of the Apollonian and Dionysian and his interest in rebirth to achieve wholeness.
His interesting discussion of the Apollonian and Dionysian helps illuminate the masculine–feminine dichotomy.


He says Dionysus is "the appropriate symbol for the forces unleashed" by the four founders of modernism: Freud, Nietzsche, Frazer, and Marx. Dionysus is the best symbol for modernism because "he suggests the dynamic energy and profound disruptive force of the revolution" (39–40).

The myth of femininity

A study of the "myth of femininity." She uses "myth" in Roland Barthes' sense: "a statement which bears no direct relationship to the object it describes (woman) and evokes a range of suggestions which is culturally determined" (2).

See Part III entitled "On Psychological Femininity."


The masculine and feminine principles

Custance, a manic-depressive, identifies the manic experience with the Feminine and the depressive experience with the Masculine.

In the chapter entitled "Dialectics of Cultural History" she speaks of two "cultural responses" which she terms "Aesthetic" and "Technological." She asserts that "the correspondence of these two cultural modes with the two sexes is unmistakable" (175).

See, for instance, the following:
Vol. 5, *Symbols of Transformation*

The Feminine in Jung is associated with creativity as well as the unconscious. "The self, as a symbol of wholeness, is a *coincidentia oppositorum*, and therefore contains light and dark simultaneously" (368). "The hero is the ideal masculine type: leaving the mother, the source of life, behind him, he is driven by an unconscious desire to find her again, to return to the womb. Every obstacle that rises in his path and hampers his ascent wears the shadowy features of the Terrible Mother, who saps his strength with the poison of secret doubt and retrospective longing; and in every conquest he wins back again the smiling, loving and life-giving mother" (389–390). See chapters entitled "Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth," "The Battle for Deliverance from the Mother," and "The Dual Mother."

Vol. 6, *Psychological Types*

See chapter entitled "The Apollonian and the Dionysian."

Vol. 7, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*

This volume includes "The Psychology of the Unconscious" and "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious." The latter is divided into two parts: "The Effects of the Unconscious upon Consciousness" and "Individuation." "Individuation" includes the chapter on "Anima and Animus."

Vol. 9, Part I, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*


Vol. 9, Part II, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*


Vol. 10, *Civilization in Transition*


Vol. 11, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*

Vol. 12, *Psychology and Alchemy*

See the index under androgyn and hermaphrodite. Chapter 3 deals with "The Symbolism of the Mandala."

Vol. 13, *Alchemical Studies*

Includes "Commentary on 'The Secret of the Golden Flower'."

Vol. 14, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*

See androgyn, androgyn in the index. Chapter 5 is on Adam and Eve.

Vol. 16, *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of Transference and Other Subjects*

See index under anima, androgyn, and hermaphrodite.
Androgyny and the body


This book deals with the biogenetic, physiological, and psychosocial aspects of hermaphroditism.


Includes an autobiography by Vita Sackville-West interspersed with a commentary on her love relationships. Her androgynous being was the subject of Virginia Woolf's fantasy-biography *Orlando*.


The androgynous moment

The moment of wholeness or ecstasy provides an inkling of what the prolonged experience of wholeness would be like in an androgynous society.


See esp. 282–285. According to Busst, Bakan tries to restore the mystical experience rather than psychological factors as the source of the notion of androgyny.


See especially Chapter II, "The Spherical Vision."


An excellent book. The “still point” is “the spiritual center where all opposites are reconciled, the complete vision perceived, complete reality experienced, and complete being attained” (4).


Important for understanding the androgynous moment and its relation to the androgynous society. “Adamic ecstasy” is the name she gives “to ecstatic experiences principally characterized by feelings that life is joyful, purified, renewed, but which lack feelings of knowledge gained or contact made” (103). Adamic ecstasies involve “feelings of unity, eternity, heaven,” also feelings of “kindness and love” (295). One gets a “feeling of self and environment transformed.” Then the wish of the ecstatic is “to attain the unitive state in which the feelings of ecstasy may be continuously enjoyed.” Laski suggests that it is “the postulation of a continuous state of adamic
ecstasy that has led to so many constructs of communities where the lives, values, and surroundings of the inhabitants symbolize the feelings of adamic unitive states" (296).

See the chapters entitled "Madness" and "Integration and Isolation." For androgyny, see 40, 101, 112.

**Need for the “feminization” of society**

According to Ulanov, he “describes the high price humanity had paid for its neglect of the feminine and its sometimes exclusive reliance on the male viewpoint.”

Freire advocates what can be called a “Feminine” (non-hierarchical) way of teaching which lets the oppressed “discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

Harding asserts that the psyche is both male and female. When “all the male is in the man and all the female is in the woman, it follows that each of them remains one-sided, for the unlived side of the psyche, being unconscious, is projected to the partner.” “In Western patriarchal society ... the feminine principle has not been adequately recognized or valued in our culture” (123).

“What our society lacks is opportunities for us to complete our processes of growth, in terms of *being* by human contact, by love and sympathy, by creativity and modes of the ‘feminine element’” (39).

Kellen advocates the “feminization” of societies and believes that the rise of “woman power” in both capitalist and communist countries will contribute to a “world detente.” He believes that “woman power will be the source of a better life for both sexes.” Although confused ideologically, Kellen is, in his own limited way, advocating an androgynous society.

“The vision of a non-repressive culture ... aims at a new relation between instincts and reason” (197).

He recognizes the need for a "new" human being. He sees a link between domination or oppression and the prevalence of the "phallic personality."


Woolf saw a relationship between the tyranny of fascism and the tyranny of the patriarchal state.

**The androgynous ideal and literature**


This is a novel based on Swedenborg’s theories of the perfect man. Séraphitius-Séraphita, the protagonist-androgyne, loves and is loved by both a male (Wilfred) and a female (Minna). “He” is a “complete being.”


Chapter I discusses how one teaches literature to enable students to move closer to the androgynous ideal. Chapter II clarifies what is meant by the androgynous vision. The remaining chapters will apply the “androgyrist” approach to the selected works (by Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf, Forster, Eliot, and Lessing) and show the cry for androgyny in them.

Blake, William uses the idea of androgyny especially in *Jerusalem.*


Good on the balance of the feminine and masculine qualities in Shakespeare’s characters.


See esp. Chap. X, "Male and Female.”


A major work both in scope and quality. She begins with Greek literature and ends with the Bloomsbury Group. Androgyny, writes Heilbrun, “defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned” (x). “Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women,
be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom" (x-xi). “It is in those works where the roles of the male and female protagonist can be reversed without appearing ludicrous or perverted that the androgynous ideal is present” (10). “In androgy nous novels, the reader identifies with the male and female characters equally; in feminist novels, only with the female hero” (58). “Wuthering Heights . . . is an androgy nous novel; the sense of waste, of lost spiritual and sexual power, of equality of worth between the two sexes, is presented with no specific cry for revolution, but with a sense of a world deformed” (59). Heilbrun also sees Clarissa, Vanity Fair, and The Scarlet Letter as androgy nous novels. Nearly androgy nous are certain feminist novels by male writers like Thomas Hardy, Wilkie Collins, George Gissing, and George Meredith. Finally she writes of Bloomsbury “not as the apotheosis of the androgy nous spirit, but as the first actual example of such a way of life in practice” (115). They lived “as though reason and passion might be equal ideas” (118).

A science fiction novel that J. J. Wilson had her students read in a course on androgy nous at California State College, Sonoma. The Gethenans “do not see one another as men or women.” “There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on [the planet] Winter” (93–94).


Péladan, Sar. L’Androgyne (1891). This is the eighth volume in a series of novels entitled La décadence latine.
In 1910 Péladan discussed the topic again in a brochure entitled De l’androgyne. However, his heroes are discussed in terms of a perfect sensuality; the metaphysical sense is lost. (Eliade, The Two and the One, 99–100).

For the decadents’ concept of the androgynous.

From “The Stranger”:
if they ask me my identity
what can I say but
I am the androgyne
I am the living mind you fail to describe
in your dead language
the lost noun, the verb surviving
only in the infinitive
the letters of my name are written under the lids
of the newborn child
From “Diving into the Wreck”:
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

Shelley, Percy Bysshe also works with the theme of androgyny. Barbara Gelpi mentions “Laon and Cythna,” “Prometheus Unbound,” and “Epipsychidion” in particular.

Part IV (196–266) of this literature anthology is entitled “The Androgynous Mind: The Marriage of Self and Soul.” It presents “some images of the androgynous mind—of men and women who are in touch with the feminine and masculine elements of their natures.” The pieces included seem wisely chosen.

A discussion of Shaw’s attitudes toward women and androgyny.

Williams, John Michael. Androgynous Child. Androgyny is a central theme in this booklet of Williams’ poetry found in the Boston bookstore, 100 Flowers. No address or date in the booklet.

This is a fantasy-biography of her androgyneous friend, Vita Sackville-West. Virginia Woolf felt that, like writers, periods in history seem either predominately masculine or predominantly feminine in character. In accord with this idea, she has her hero-heroine change sex as she lives through several centuries.

Essential for understanding Virginia Woolf’s concept of androgyny.

Feminist consciousness/ Marxist consciousness


Important for understanding the virgin–whore dichotomy and its relation to the incest taboo and overpossessive (because oppressed) mothers.


An excellent article which analyzes the role of women (including housewives) in the economy.


Good on the psychology of the oppressor and the oppressed.


Sontag is aware of the power struggle women have to face and of the radical changes needed to eliminate patriarchal oppression.


The androgynous ideal and teaching

As Richard Shaull says in his Foreword to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and brings about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”


Read especially the article by Meredith Tax, “Culture Is Not Neutral, Whom Does It Serve?”


Among other topics she deals with “phallic criticism” and “feminine stereotypes” in literature.


See especially the introduction and the articles under Section I.
Androgyne related to contemporary life


Bem, Sandra. "Sex-role Adaptability: One Consequence of Psychological Androgyne." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1975. An experimental study which demonstrates that an androgyneous orientation gives a person the ability to adapt to diverse situations. She also has an unpublished article, "Psychology Looks at Sex Roles: Where Have All the Androgyneous People Gone?" Bem is at Stanford University.


Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973. An important book. Her ideal is the androgyneous human being and the androgyneous mode of living. She speaks of "striving toward psychic wholeness, or androgyne."


MacKinnon, Donald W. "What Makes a Person Creative?" *Saturday Review* (10 February 1962), 15-17, 69. Tests showed that creative men have a "balance of masculine and feminine traits."


is divested of its sex-typing and categorization and is brought together into a new reality of being, a new wholeness of personhood.”


An excellent foreword shows the damaging effect of sex roles. Theodore Roszak’s article “The Hard and the Soft” suggests the link between sex roles and violence; the term for global annihilation is “wargasm.” Alice Rossi’s article “Sex Equality: The Beginning of Ideology” suggests the need for an androgynous world: “With the hybrid model of equality one envisages a future in which family, community, and play are valued on a par with politics and work for both sexes, for all the races, and for all social classes and nations which comprise the human family” (186). The final piece entitled “The Androgynous World” is a selection from the Conclusion of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.


Many thanks to Cynthia Secor and to others who have shown an interest in the development of this bibliography. I hope I shall be hearing from everyone working with the concept of androgyny.