

HERMAPHRODITE

Myths and rites of the bisexual figure in classical antiquity



by **MARIE DELCOURT**

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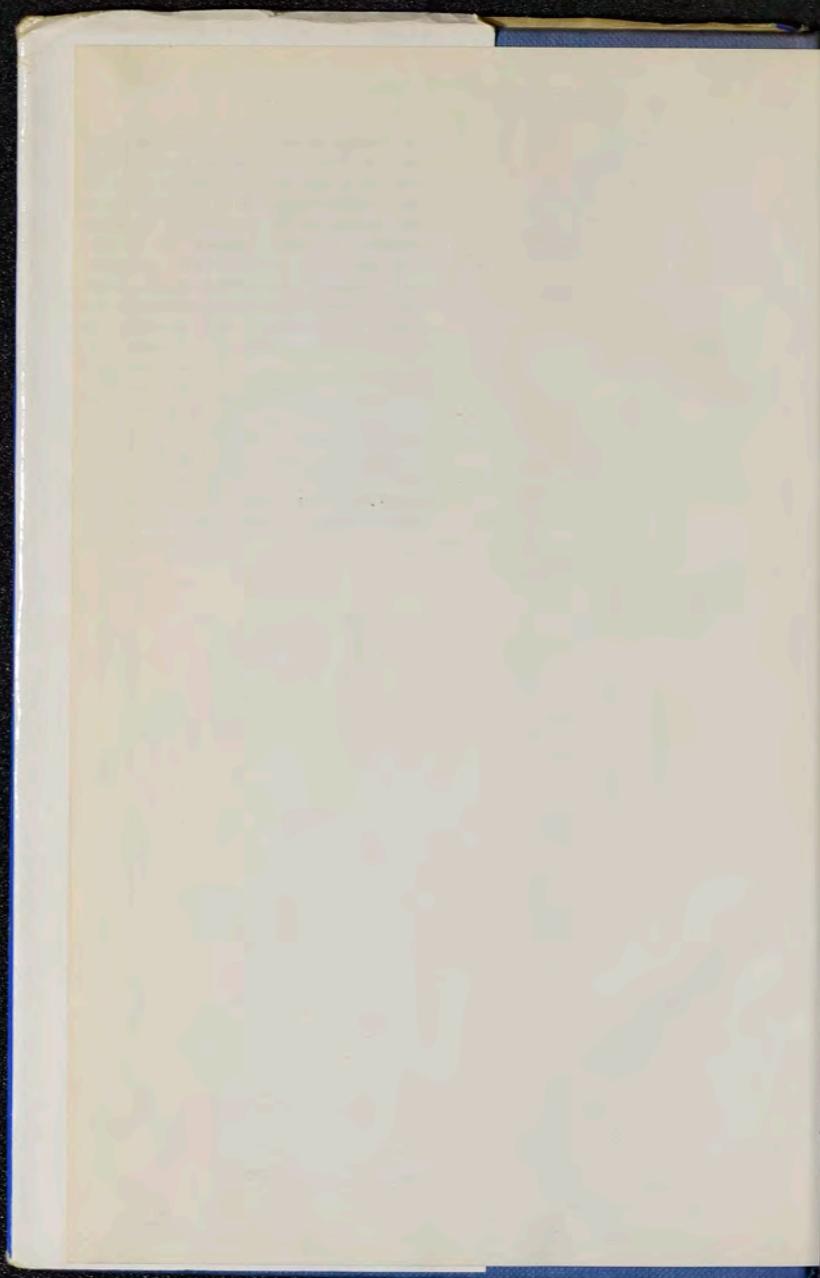
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This book is a major contribution to the understanding of Greek religion and the first to be published specifically on the subject in English. It is a highly original and profound examination of the myths and rites of the bisexual figure in Classical Antiquity. The theme is illustrated with material from classical sources and a fascinating subject is thoroughly explored from an historical and psychological aspect. Providing what is, in effect, the psycho-analysis of a myth.

Marie Delcourt, Professor of Classical Philology at the University at Liège, has written many books on the history of religion. In this inventory she shows a clear insight into the myths of Man as he groped to find his way in the world and devised in Hermaphrodite the figure best able to both sum up his origins and to symbolise certain of his aspirations.

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HERMAPHRODITE



Hermaphrodite—*Museum Barraco, Rome*

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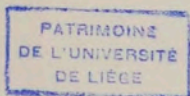
HERMAPHRODITE

MYTHS AND RITES OF THE BISEXUAL FIGURE
IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

by

MARIE DELCOURT

Translated from the French by Jennifer Nicholson



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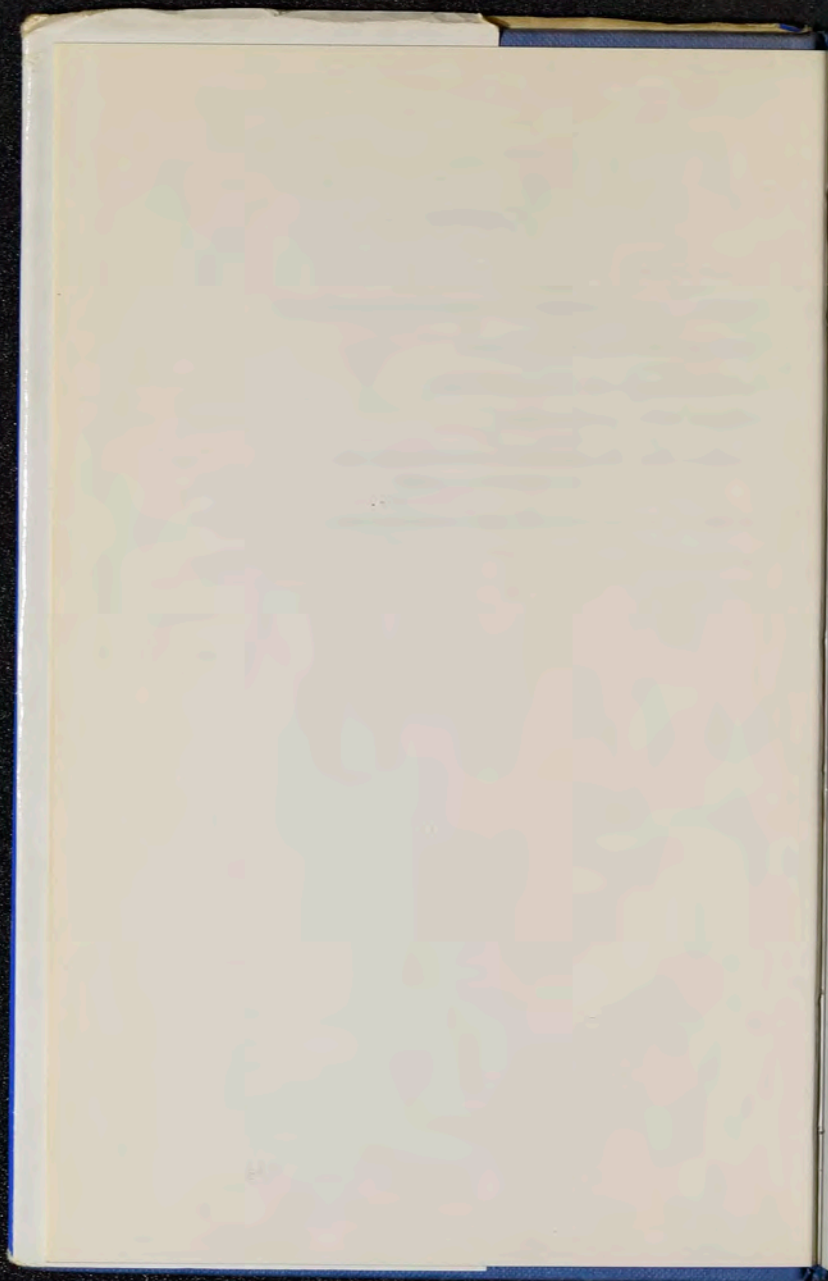
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TO P. L. COUCHOUD
a token of affectionate gratitude



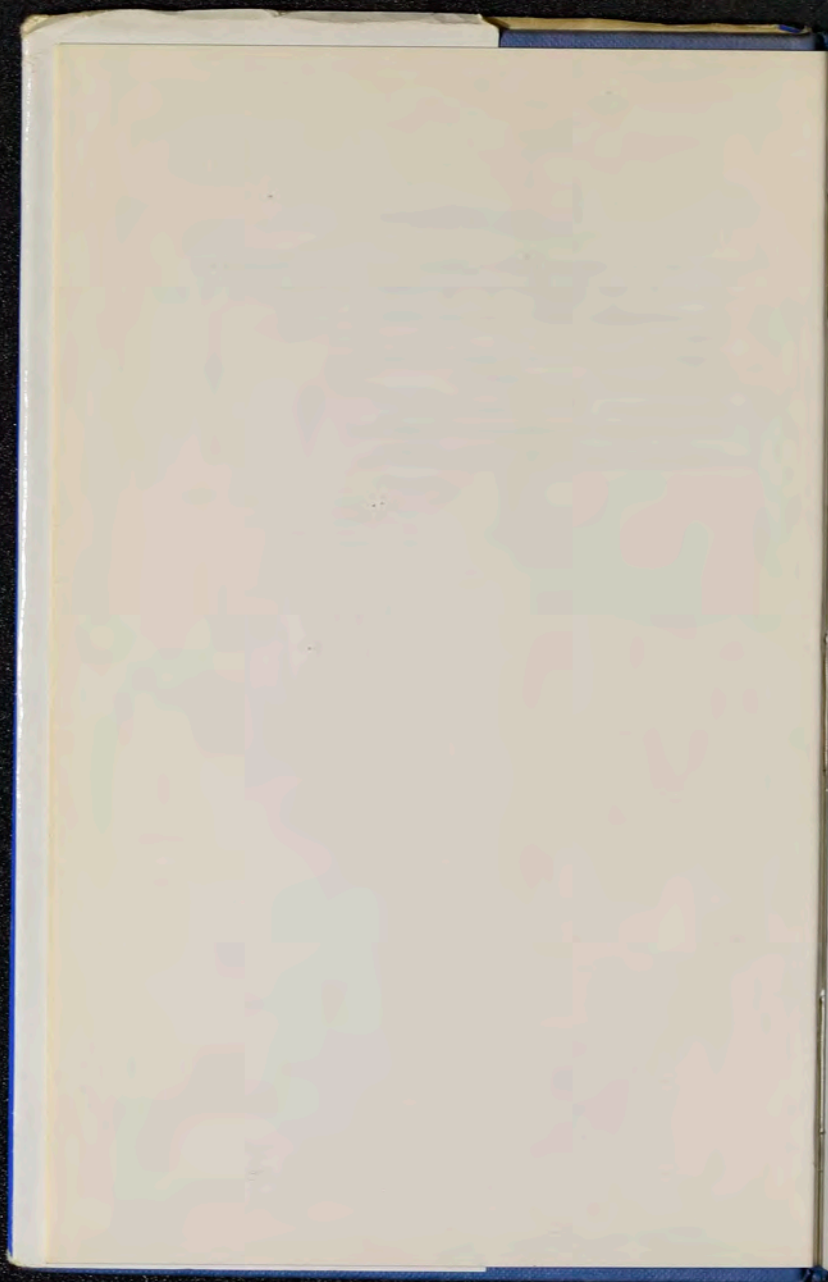
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Introduction

THE mention of Hermaphrodite conjures up a reclining figure in some museum at Florence, London or Rome, stretched out on its side, its forehead resting on a cushion, whom visitors approach from behind. They must walk round it to discover its secret. They would not be able to call to mind a single legend about this slender creature, crushed under the weight of its name. They may easily believe that, in giving it the attributes of both sexes, the sculptor was obeying a caprice, simply wishing to arouse curiosity and to make play with a theme which is guarded by the strictest taboos. Certainly they would be surprised to learn that Hermaphrodite is an example of *pure myth*, conceived in the mind of man as he groped to find his place in the world and devised the figure best able both to sum up his origins and to symbolise certain of his aspirations. This figure appeared first in ancient rites to which it may perhaps provide the key. To explain these rites, legends were invented and these became attached to divine or heroic characters which, long before the birth of Hermaphrodite, took on in this way aspects of bisexuality that were often somewhat unexpected. The strange thing is that the new myth, which seemed so suitable a vehicle for these inventions, did not attract even one. The poets do not ascribe a single adventure to Hermaphrodite, contenting themselves with embroidering a little on the story of his birth. And late cosmogonies, which were haunted by the dream of bisexuality, did not make it the characteristic of the god best fitted to be its symbol, but attributed it to a number of divine beings, as one of their several perfections. Thus it is that, in literature, Hermaphrodite is more an idea than a person.

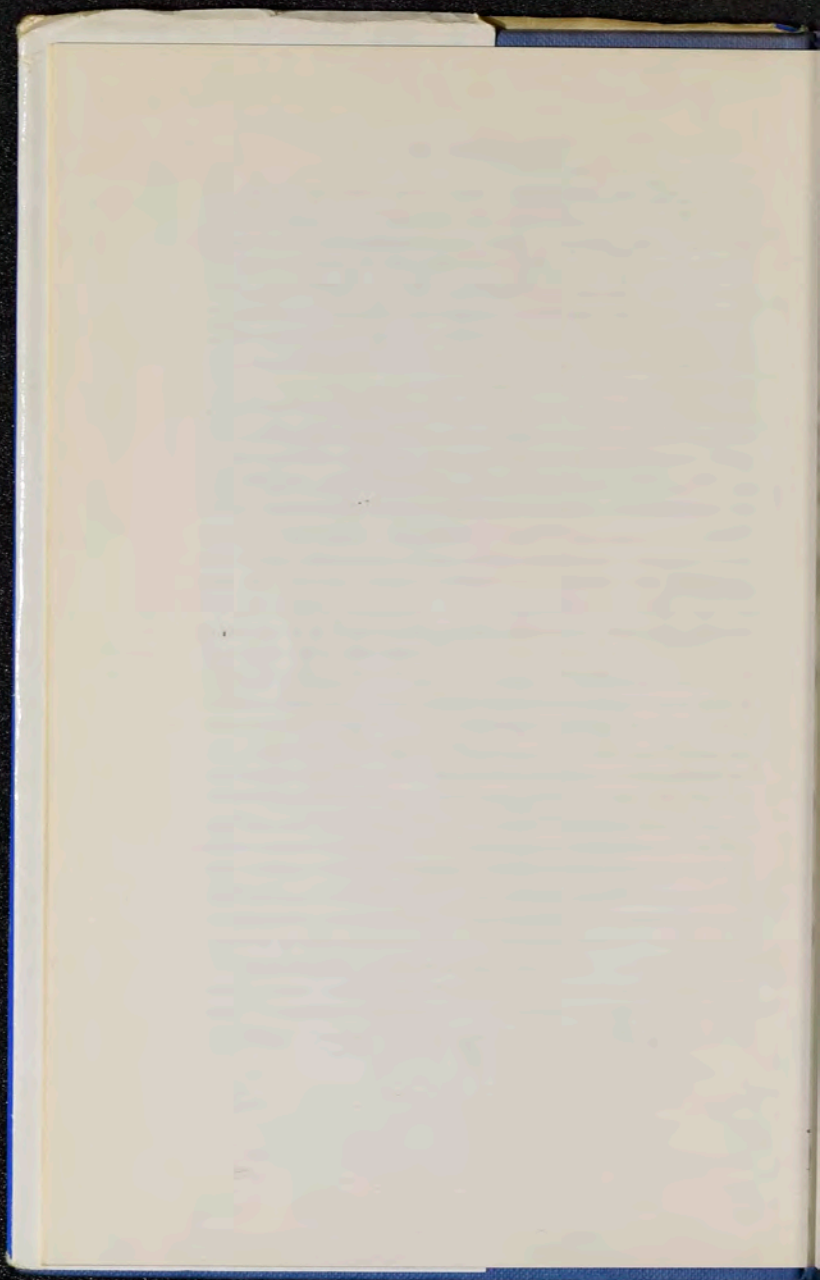
The sculptors were less discreet. They brought into the world of forms what should have remained in the world of the imagination. They strove to create a semblance of this being for whom they could find no model in reality, without understanding that in thus using their skill in his service they were lessening his significance. It is a falsification of that significance to reduce the two-fold god to an

effeminate adolescent, a curiosity in which is to be seen no more than a meaningless trifle, designed to pander to pleasures of the most limited and circumscribed kind. But careful examination of the concepts which are at the origin of the myth discovers no erotic component. Instead, they immediately suggest analogies represented variously in different beliefs, rites and legends. Then there springs to mind that majestic passage, the cosmogony of Plato's *Symposium*, and we admire the sureness with which the author sustained his creation both with his own thought and with symbols drawn from the depths of the human unconscious. Round this myth are gathered others, contributed by the heterodox schools and theologians. ('Heterodox' is an unsuitable term, certainly, in a world that had no dogma, but a convenient one to cover what is foreign both to the official cults and to classical poetry.) These myths are remarkable not only for their wealth of detail but also for their similarities to what we find in the cosmogonies of other countries. In short, it would seem that the Ancients clearly perceived the symbolism of bisexuality, without allowing it to become set in a great divine myth, but letting it be expressed in rites, cults and legends where, indeed, its original meaning is often distorted.

A study devoted exclusively to the figure of Hermaphrodite would stand no chance of elucidating the beliefs and feelings which gave it birth. But marriage customs, themselves derived from initiation rites, reveal a psychological substratum on which a study of the history of religion can be firmly based. It was the research work of sociologists which made it possible to catch a glimpse of the original significance of androgyny. Psychoanalysis followed and brought deeper understanding of it. C. G. Jung has demonstrated its rôle in the universe of the alchemists, which in broad outline reproduced the dream-world where the conscious is united with the unconscious, where *animus* is united with *anima*, to make up a balanced psyche. Affinities of this kind are an encouragement to confer on the myth of Hermaphrodite a greater importance than we are led to expect from a purely hypothetical cult, a non-existent legend, and a few statues expressive of the refinements of the studio rather than of any real religious feeling. So new light is thrown on the work of the

philologists. The psychoanalysis of a myth reveals in it man the eternal, and from it we may turn, in the hope of better understanding, to the details of a local cult, a strange custom, or a half-forgotten legend. We see that one throws light on another, and that when brought together they gradually take on a significance at first plausible and then increasingly convincing. The following chapters attempt first to sketch in, then to delineate firmly, correlations which the author wishes to bring out, with caution and deliberation, just as they revealed themselves to her own eyes.

In this inventory Greek examples are by far the most numerous. The contribution of the Latin World seems insignificant at first, but we are soon surprised to see how exactly it parallels what we find in Greece. As for the bisexual figures in Oriental religions, they are too numerous and too strange to be included here; they require a special study.



Transvestism in Private and Public Rites

THERE are many instances of men ceremonially assuming women's clothing, and women men's. It is only towards the end of Antiquity that these practices are attested, and by then they are no more than strange isolated survivals of customs that had certainly been more widespread in earlier ages. They had long ceased to be understood, and the apparent lack of motive behind them was overlaid by explanations, on historical or moral grounds, which were far removed from primitive beliefs. But poets, too, have preserved for us legendary versions which are of great value, since they are often coloured by an *affectus* which goes back to their origins.

Transvestism is sometimes reciprocal, with each sex taking the clothing of the other. Most sources speak of unilateral disguise, usually of boys dressing as girls. The converse may have happened more frequently than we know. Civilisation in Antiquity was primarily concerned with the well-being and happiness of men; the affairs of women were of secondary importance, and often passed over in silence.

A striking figure stands out from a whole series of rites and legends—that of a male being in female clothing (and, secondarily, that of a female being endued with male attributes). This figure is often curiously split into two complementary forms, on the one hand a youth in girl's clothing, on the other a woman armed for battle.

Fifty years ago a favourite explanation of disguises, of whatever kind, was that they were *a ruse to ward off evil spirits*; and this is indeed the argument used to explain mourning garb, a survival which we have not yet succeeded in sweeping away. A relative, whose kinship with a dead man exposes him to danger, disguises himself to avoid being recognised by the evil spirits still lurking about the house from which they have just chosen their victim. Why did the Lyceans wear women's clothes as mourning? Because, say Valerius Maximus¹ and Plutarch,² this shameful dress should remind men

to cut short the lamentations which women alone may indulge. There the moralist is at work. We would prefer to say that, since women are inferior beings, the demons will leave unscathed men who disguise themselves in women's clothes.

Also in danger are the betrothed, pregnant women, women in labour, and new-born infants. In every land there are rites designed to make them temporarily unrecognisable. A precaution of this kind is seen in wedding festivities in the presentation of the *substitute bride*; a small girl or, more often, an old woman acts the part of the bride, to attract the attention of the hostile spirits and allow the real bride to escape notice. But what we know of sexual disguise in the wedding customs of Greece indicates that the real explanation is very different.

In Sparta, the young bride's head is shaved by the woman in charge of her, she is dressed in a man's shoes and clothes, then laid on the bed alone and without a light. The husband comes to her secretly.³

At Argos, the bride wears a false beard for the wedding night.⁴

At Cos, the husband puts on woman's dress to receive his wife.⁵

If Plutarch draws attention to these customs, it is because they seem to him curious: isolated survivals of customs which were certainly more widespread in earlier times. The presence of masculine accessories in the bride's attire is not formally attested outside Sparta and Argos. But we are better informed about the reverse case. Oppian⁶ describes the young bridegroom approaching the nuptial room 'after the women in charge of the bride have adorned him with white clothing, crowned him with purple flowers, scented him with myrrh'. The disguising of the bridegroom as a woman appears too in some tales with a distinctive psychological colouring. The strange story of Hymenaios links the themes of *marriage followed by death* and of *sexual disguise*. In some versions Hymenaios is an ephebe, 'fair as a woman'. Others say that he assumed woman's clothing and allowed himself to be kidnapped by robbers in order to rescue the Athenian virgins whom they had ravished and hidden in a desert place. Among them was his beloved. His ruse succeeded, but Hymenaios died at the very moment of attaining felicity. Pindar

laments his sad end: 'Fate seized him on his wedding day, when he had scarcely tasted the joys of marriage.'⁷ In other versions, he dies or is struck dumb at Dionysos' nuptials.

According to a belief which has parallels in other countries, one of the two consorts endangers the other. This comes to the surface in the legend of Minos as told by Antoninus Liberalis.⁸ Minos caused the death of all his brides, one after the other, because he ejaculated snakes, scorpions and centipedes. Procris had the idea of fashioning a goat's bladder in the form of the female sexual organ, which enabled Minos to copulate with her afterwards and have children by her. Here we can recognise a rite of incorporation which involves preliminary union with an animal. There is no transvestism in the main episode, but the sequel shows Procris disguising herself as a man to win back Cephale. Elsewhere the mere sight of one of the consorts is dangerous for the other, as in the case of Psyche to whom Eros, like the Spartan bridegroom, comes only in darkness.*

Sexual disguise appears again in the story of Leucippos of Elis, as it was told by Parthenios in his *Love Romances*, and as it was current in Arcadia.⁹ Falling in love with the fair Daphne who hated men and took pleasure only in the chase, Leucippos dressed himself as a woman and succeeded in winning the favour of Daphne, who could not bear to leave him and caressed him constantly. But Daphne's maidens discovered Leucippos' secret as he bathed, attacked him with their darts and killed him. Here we can glimpse a nuptial rite with a reciprocal exchange of clothing, for the maidens, opposed to Leucippos in disguise, play the masculine part with their manly weapons and bearing. Leucippos' tragic fate, like that of Hymenaios, seems to transpose the dangers which threaten the consorts when they first come together.

Crete knew another Leucippe, whose story has odd analogies with that of the prince of Elis. Lampros, a citizen of Phaestos, was a poor man, and when his wife Galatea was pregnant he told her that he

* On Hymenaios, see Jolles' article in *Pauly-Wissowa* (1914). A trite version of the story of Minos is given by Apollodorus (III, 15, 1). On the magico-religious efficacy of coition with an animal, cf. A. Van Gennep, *Rites de passage*, p. 246; M. Mauss, *Manuel d'ethnographie*, p. 186.

would not rear her child unless it was a boy. It was a girl. Galatea could not bring herself to expose it, but dressed it as a boy and called it Leucippos. When the child's sex could no longer be easily concealed, she besought Leto to change the little girl into a boy, and the goddess granted her prayer. "The people of Phaestos commemorate the metamorphosis by sacrifices to Leto Phytia, because she gave a male organ to the girl. They call the feast *Ekdysia*, the *Divestment*, in memory of the moment when Leucippe laid aside the feminine peplos. It is the custom for the bride, before the nuptials, to sleep beside an image of Leucippe."¹⁰

The Eleaan Leucippos passed for a girl; to the Cretan Leucippe it was granted to become the boy whose garb she had worn. Their name is one of those borne by the Amazons, masculine women whose weapon was the spear. It may be added that Hyginus¹¹ knows of a Leucippe, daughter of Calchas, who, dressed as the priest of Apollo, awoke love in her own sister; that a Lycian Leucippos, descended from Bellerophon, fell in love with his sister and became her lover, after which he went into exile in Crete and returned to found a colony at Magnesia.¹² These variants illustrate some curious points of contact between androgyny and incest of brother and sister. Finally, Leucippe is the name of one of the daughters of Minyas who, with her sisters, refused to join the Orchomenos maenads, despite the urgent persuasions of Dionysos who appeared to her in the guise of a woman.¹³

The Cretan tale of Leucippe changed to a boy seems to have been invented to explain the feast of the *Ekdysia*. His image can hardly have been other than a phallic statue in woman's clothes, i.e. a symbol of bisexuality. It was by its side that the young Cretan brides passed their last night as virgins. The young Roman women who, up to the time of their marriage, wore the toga as boys did, united themselves on the eve of their nuptials with a wooden image representing Mutinus Tutunus, the phallus. These customs are related to each other, but are not synonymous. The Roman bride gave herself to the personification of virility. The Cretan girl lay beside a phallic being which had female aspects and, if we are to believe legend, a female past. The feast of the *Ekdysia* included a





2. Hermaphrodite—*Museo e Galleria Borghese, Rome*



3. Hermaphrodite—*National Museum, Athens*

sacrifice to Leto Phytia—the goddess of growing things—probably related to some Great Mother capable of procreating alone. It included a *divestment*, commemorating, says the writer, 'the moment when Leucippe laid aside the feminine peplos'; this detail can hardly be reconciled with the story since Leucippe had been reared as a boy and Leto had changed her into a boy before her girlhood had been recognised, and indeed to spare her this recognition. The incongruity is important, for it underlines the central rite. Was the clothing of the statue changed? We have no instances of such a rite. More probably a collective ceremony took place, in which boys wearing feminine clothes took them off and donned those of their own sex. This episode was important, for it gave its name to the feast.

In view of these collective rites we are reluctant to give a special interpretation to the nuptial rites of Sparta, Argos and Cos, and above all to regard the intersexual disguise of consorts as simply a method of baffling demons. Ancestral fear of the deflowering act was certainly not unknown to the Greeks; it is present still in the story of Hymenaios. But anxiety to put hostile forces off the scent cannot explain an intersexual disguise, presided over by the figure of a *twofold being*, analogous to the Cretan Leucippe. Moreover, the precautions attested in folklore are especially concerned with the young bride, who is more vulnerable and more exposed to danger. The Greek legends, on the other hand, usually speak of boys dressed as girls. This practice is characteristic of initiations. Everything leads, then, to the conclusion that first and essentially we must see here a passage-rite, applied alike to boys and girls on entering the nubile group. With the decline of emphasis on age sets the custom lost its collective character, and its social value as marking the coming of age; as it became individual, it was reduced to a nuptial custom. And the fact that masculine initiations retained their importance longer than feminine explains the one-sided character of the legends.

'The symbolism of initiations', says H. Jeanmaire, 'corresponds to the sense of an essential opposition between the male essence personified in the community of young men, and the female element. So it is not uncommon for novices, at the beginning of the initiation rites, to put on clothing resembling that worn by women, and for the

culmination of the ceremonies to be the donning of masculine garb.⁷ 'The practices of disguise and of exchange of clothing from one sex to the other express a symbolism inspired by the same preoccupation. The feminine principle in the candidate is affirmed in the initiation at the very moment when he is about to cast it aside.'¹⁴

It is clear that H. Jeanmaire gives to the exchange of clothing a negative value, which has the subsidiary purpose of deceiving malignant powers whose hostility is to be feared at a critical time,¹⁵ but which essentially deprives the boy of every trace of female essence on his incorporation in a new life. Let us accept this explanation provisionally.

Initiation rites probably existed in the Cretan *Ekdysia* (though we know nothing about them), and in the Argive *Endymatia*, the *Donning of Clothes* which, in Plutarch's day, included a musical contest, which perhaps had taken the place of earlier combat. The initiations were frequently accompanied by feats of prowess. A ceremony of the same kind underlies the story of Aristodemus, tyrant of Cyme in Campania about 500 B.C., who, says Plutarch,¹⁶ compelled boys to wear long hair and gold ornaments, but girls to cut their hair and take the cloak of a man; the custom was no longer understood and was interpreted as a form of ragging.

The disguise in the Athenian *Oschophoria* appears in a context which promises a wealth of valuable detail. The feast took place on the seventh or eighth day of Pyanepsion, towards the end of October, after the pressing of grapes. It included libations, a sacrifice, and a race of naked adolescents, then a procession from one of the Athenian temples of Dionysos to the sacred precincts of Athene Skiros at Phalera. At the head of the procession walked two boys in girls' clothing, carrying a vine-stock still laden with its fruit, the *osche*, which gave the feast its name. The procession went to Phalera because, it was said, Dionysos had landed there when he brought the vine to Attica. The ceremony as it is described to us was certainly a vine-growers' feast, but we can glimpse an older substratum, a probation test characterised by sexual disguise. The Athenians added an explanation which may well go back no further than the second quarter of the fifth century, the time when Cimon chose the figure

of Theseus as symbol of the new Athens, and had the alleged relics of the hero brought from Scyros. The Oschophoria were interpreted then as a commemoration of Theseus' return from Crete with the fourteen young people he had saved from the Minotaur. To explain the presence of the two boys in disguise, Athenians told how Theseus, having to take seven boys and seven girls to Minos, had replaced two of the girls by boys of girlish appearance, carefully disguised, who on the return led the procession with him. Thus, as is often the case, the disguise was explained by a *stratagem* which, however, has not the slightest value here since none of the existing versions of the tale records that the boys in disguise were of any practical assistance to Theseus. A similar stratagem, but better worked into the story, appears in the history of Solon¹⁷ who hoped to entice the Megarians into an ambush. At Cape Colias, east of Phalera, he saw women sacrificing to Demeter. He sent to the Megarians a man who passed himself off as a deserter, and suggested that they had a fine opportunity to carry off the pick of the women of Athens. Meanwhile the women's clothes had been given to well-armed boys, who let the Megarians disembark, and then massacred them to a man. As in the legends of Hymenaios and Theseus, *exchange of garments* is associated with a *feat of prowess* and a *conquest of women*, either intended or actually effected. The same themes appear in the story of Euthymos of Locri. Every year a phantom required that the most beautiful of the maidens of Temesa should be given up to him. Euthymos fell in love with the girl who was to die; in disguise he took her place, overcame the phantom, and married the virgin.¹⁸ The same interdependence between *sexual disguise*, *heroic action* and *marriage* appears in a story of Herodotus,¹⁹ though here the stratagem of disguise is reversed. The Minyae, descendants of the children begotten by the Argonauts on the women of Lemnos, were driven from their island by the Pelasgi. They fled to Laconia and settled on Mount Taygetos, where they kindled fires. The Lacedaemonians welcomed them, even allowing the refugees to marry Spartan women of the noblest families. So encouraged, their insolence overstepped all bounds. The Spartans, angered beyond endurance, seized them and imprisoned them in Sparta, waiting till nightfall

to kill them, for no execution ever took place till the sun had set. The wives then sought leave to visit their husbands, and the moment they were inside the prison exchanged clothes with them. As a result the men succeeded in escaping and returning to Mount Taygetos. Georges Dumézil²⁰ rightly interprets this romantic story as the pseudo-historical explanation of a ceremony which included a procession from Sparta to Mount Taygetos of men dressed as women, and a bonfire on the mountain—'one of the few evidences we have of a genuinely Lacedaemonian rite'—which probably embraced, like the *Oschophoria*, several elements which were originally heterogeneous.

The *Oschophoria*, indeed, display three strata, one over the other; a survival of male initiations, a feast of the vintage, and a commemoration of the return of Theseus. That they are so closely interfused is, as H. Jeanmaire has shown, because the legend of Theseus is itself rooted in the old social rite of initiations, of which it is, at least in part, a narrative interpretation. I should like here to stress the points of contact between the second element and the other two. Who is it, in this feast of the vine pressing, who carries the stocks carefully kept back at the time of the grape harvest, so that in mid-autumn their branches are still intact? No other than the two boys disguised as girls. We have been given an opportune reminder that the *vine-stock* and the *scrotum* are homonymous in Greek. Vase-painters depicting bacchic scenes often interpret the bunch of grapes as a sexual symbol.*

It is idle, then, to argue, with some modern writers who have discussed the name of the feast, whether the better authenticated form is *oschophories*, from *ὄσχη*, *vine-stock*, or *oschophoria*, from *ὄσχη*, *scrotum*. The first seems to have the better case. But did it occur to the Greeks themselves to discriminate between the two? They superimposed one on the other. Thus the youths in women's

* For example the black-figured crater²¹ now in New York, attributed to Lydos, where the Bacchic train leads Hephaistos back to Olympus. As always, the sexual elements are dissociated from the god and disposed round about him. He rides an ithyphallic mule. A silenus holds a vine-branch in the form of a snake, apparently issuing from his sexual organ and bearing a great bunch of grapes.

clothing, bearing the sacred vine-stock, evoke exactly the same image as does the Cretan Leucippe, the phallic maiden.

And so we are reluctant to see in the feminine garb merely the symbol of breaking with an earlier life. If it represented simply the world which the novice is leaving behind him, why is it that the sources lay stress on the clothing which he is about to repudiate, without ever underlining the change which will make him a member of the freer masculine world? In other words, why is the garb of the transitional period alone mentioned, and not that of the moment of incorporation? None of those who describe the Oschophoria says even that the Bearers of the Vine-stock throw off their disguise. It is this *divestment* that apparently gave its name to the Cretan feast. If legend fails at this exact point to follow the ritual closely, is it not because it fails to give the feminine clothing the positive importance which it had in the ceremony, and which it is now our task to discover?

Apart from the Oschophoria, exchange of clothing has left only fleeting traces in the Theseus legend. But it is said that when he arrived in Athens, just as he was passing in front of the Delphinium, some workmen who were busy on the roof took him for a girl and made fun of him. Theseus seized a chariot which was standing before the building and hurled it over the roof. The anecdote ends in a theme of folklore, the unexpected prowess of someone whose apparent weakness has been made a matter for jest; it supposes a mistake like that of the Minotaur who thought that those standing before him were only girls, whereas among them, and resembling them, were the young men who would destroy him.

The part played by transvestism in the legend of Achilles is much plainer, at least in the version of the *Cyprian Lays* and the later poets, for Homer chose to omit this episode, which probably seemed to him little to the credit of his hero. Thetis, to prevent her son joining the Trojan expedition, sent him to Lycomedes, in Scyros. Disguised as a girl, he shared the life of his playmates until one day the Greek leaders set a trap for him, and by offering him weapons induced him to betray his sex. The breaking with his life as a girl is here strongly emphasised, and indicates a passage-rite. Moreover, tradition gives several names to Achilles in his rôle as a girl; the

novice often receives a new name when he is admitted to the masculine world. Tested by fire and water, he is in the highest sense the initiate. It need certainly not surprise us that the legend stresses the feminine episode of his adolescent life; Servius²² says that there was a statue of Achilles at Cape Sigaeum which wore a jewel in the lobe of his ear in the manner of women. The later poets dwelt in their own fashion on the nuptial character of the disguise; Bion says, in his *Epithalamium of Achilles and Deidemia*, that the hero disguised himself to win the maiden, as Leucippe did to win Daphne, and Statius repeats this theme in his *Achilleid*. Such romanticising seems unnecessary; but it must be noted that it follows the same course as the legends, where initiation implies conquest and marriage.

After Theseus and Achilles we have Heracles donning the clothes of Omphale; Dionysos wearing the long robe and the girdle of a woman. The juxtaposition of these four names suggests the following observation, which does not seem to have occurred to anyone else.

The Amazons are the daughters of Ares, and Artemis is the pattern on which they model themselves. For the rest (apart from a cult of Apollo Amazonios at Pyrrhicos in Laconia, of which nothing is known), they have few connections with any of the other gods except Dionysos.

Their legend is ancient, for it is already established by the time of the Homeric poems. Their story, as told by late writers (Quintus of Smyrna, Tzetzes), had much earlier served as a theme for vase painters. There are three groups of episodes. Penthesilea resists Achilles, who kills her. Theseus subjugates another Amazon, called either Antiope or Hippolyte; she marries him, bears him a son, and dies. A third, Melanippe or Hippolyte, is conquered by Heracles.

This amounts to saying that the gods or heroes who have dealings with the Amazons—Dionysos, Heracles, Achilles, Theseus—are also those whom we have seen disguising themselves as women. Now, whatever the origin of the Amazons, the Ancients saw them as women who bore themselves like men. In other words, the pairs Achilles-Penthesilea, Theseus-Hippolyte, Heracles-Melanippe display that essential contrast which we stressed earlier between Leucippe and Daphne: on the one hand a man disguised in woman's

dress, on the other a woman bearing a man's weapons. In the stories of the three Amazons, it is the woman who dies, and the disguise is no more than an episode in the life of her adversary. These elements reappear, though reversed, in the story of Leucippe of Elis; here it is the man who bears a name derived from that of the horse, and he dies in the garment that has brought him to disaster. The evocation of an armed huntress and of a man in woman's garb creates a picture of androgyny clearer than that outlined in the stories of the Amazons, though these are painted in similar colours.

Certain ceremonies in the Bacchic feasts required the worshippers to don women's clothes. Those who performed the dance called *Ithyphallos*, in honour of the god, as well as those who escorted the phallus and were themselves known as *ithyphalloi*, all wore the dress of the other sex. In Egypt at the beginning of the fourth century, men arrayed themselves as women for the procession of Dionysos. The philosopher Demetrius of Phalera refused to do this, and so incurred the displeasure of the king of Egypt, who regarded himself as the reincarnation of Bacchus. And in the first century A.D., Apollonius of Tyana is said to have seen in the disguises of the Anthesteria at Athens an insult to the heroes of Marathon.* Neither Demetrius nor Apollonius' biographer grasped the meaning of the old custom; it shocked them because they interpreted it as a sign of effeminacy.

The Scirophories were celebrated by women at Athens, shortly before the summer solstice. The protagonists of Aristophanes' *Women in Parliament* come back from them, determined to put on men's clothes. But we have no formal proof that transvestism was included in this rustic feast.

At the great feasts of Hera at Samos, men donned long white robes sweeping the ground, their hair loose in golden nets, and wore *chlidones* which the lexicographers define as feminine bracelets and necklaces.²³

* Hesychius, under *Ithyphalloi*; Photius, 105, 9; Semos of Delos in Athenaios, XIV, 16, p. 622; Lucian, *Calumny*, 16; Philostratus, *Apoll.*, IV, 21. Unfortunately it is impossible to relate this information to an exact region or date. Philostratus alone speaks of transvestism at the Anthesteria.

Other feasts, in which disguise was assumed by both sexes and was an essential part of the proceedings, suggest fertility rites.

In the month Hermaios the Argives celebrated the *Hybristika*, where women dressed as men and vice versa. In Plutarch's time²⁴ it was said that this commemorated the heroism of the poetess Telesilla who, at the very beginning of the fifth century, put herself at the head of an army of women and defended the city against Cleomenes, king of Sparta, who was laying siege to it. This is a pseudo-historical explanation, invented after the real meaning of the rite had been lost.

In this case we are no longer dealing with a symbolic garment assumed by one or more adolescents in imitation of a legendary character, but with a real reciprocal exchange. The name of the feast suggests a riotous carnival, with its accompaniment of abuse and coarse witticisms. Unfortunately Plutarch has preserved only the most obvious episode in it; he sets it before us wrenched from its psychological context, deformed by the addition of an explanation totally unsuited to it. Was it simply one of those interludes which make a momentary break in everyday life, when customary actions are completely reversed? H. Jeanmaire has clearly shown in his *Dionysos* the psychological importance of such breaks in Bacchic rites. So it is not surprising to find Philostratus describing in these terms *komos*, that is *Feast* or *Carousal*. But the *komos* is too an element of the feasts of Dionysos. 'He is accompanied by a numerous train in which girls mingle with men, for *komos* allows women to act the part of men, and men to put on women's clothing and play the woman.'²⁵ Artemidorus says in his *Interpretation of Dreams*²⁶ that the best omen is to see oneself in a dream wearing one's usual clothes, but that a parti-coloured garment, or a woman's, is not harmful to a man if it is worn in the course of feasts or merrymaking. The custom must have been widespread, for some fifteen vases depict bearded figures in women's clothes, all bent on pleasure. Some are obviously men in disguise; others are women, recognisable by their hair knotted into a bun or gathered under a kerchief, wearing false beards. It has often been asked whether these vases represent some particular ceremony; it is probably the *komos* which characterised all the feasts of Dionysos.

Artemidorus (second century A.D.) and Philostratus (third century) read as if they were describing profane amusements, and by their time this was probably the case. On the other hand some notes on the Laconian feasts of Artemis give a hint of an archaic past in which the intersexual carnival still kept all its religious value. Men dressed as women, rigged out in grotesque masks, danced, sang, and bandied coarse jests. It is very probable (though our sources are corrupt) that over against them were women bearing the phallus. A note of Hesychius says: 'The women who lead the sacrifices to Artemis are called *lombai*, which is the name of the phallus, because of the equipment which the festivity calls for.' From the little we know of the ceremonies they seem to have involved not only an intersexual disguise, but a complete exchange of rôles, in the course of dances with a very exact significance. Artemis had been a goddess of vegetation and growth before she became a retiring virgin. She was honoured at Elis as Artemis *Kordaka*, from the name of the *kordax*, which was a ritual dance before it became a comic entertainment. Sexual union stimulates the fruitfulness of the earth. Demeter and Jason copulated in a thrice-ploughed furrow; it is not so long ago that the peasant of the Campine in north Belgium used to sleep in the fields with his wife so that the harvest should be good. And Ernst Buschor is perhaps right to see as the origin of disguise in comedy a synthesis of man and woman incarnate in demons with big bellies and posteriors. The curious point about the Laconian dances is that the sexual rôles were reversed in them. Men dressed as women, women bearing the phallus, recall yet again the figure which presided over the Cretan feast of Leucippe and the Athenian *Oschophoria*—a phallic being, wearing the feminine peplos. And in all three cases this figure is associated with a sacrifice. Finally, if we are to believe an isolated note of Hesychius (under *Gephyris*), when the Eleusian procession passed the bridge of Cephisa, it was met by a man in woman's clothes who derided the initiates, mocking the most notable among them by name.

In Rome, at the feast of the Lesser Quinquatria, celebrated at the Ides of June in honour of Minerva, the flute-players were suffered to roam through the town for three days, masked and in long motley

robes resembling women's dress. The Romans explained this as commemorating the retreat of the flute-players to Tibur; they had been brought back drunk, and had been mistaken for prostitutes.

Superimposed meanings, difficult to separate one from another, can be glimpsed in all these carnivals, in the komos of Dionysos, in the rites of Laconia, Argos and Rome. It is not impossible to see lingering in them, mingled with much else, the last traces of initiation ceremonies. In the course of such ceremonies the exchange of clothing seems to signify not only separation from one group and incorporation in another, but longevity and fertility, attributes which in the next chapters we shall consider more closely and in detail. Once the meaning was forgotten, the attribute misinterpreted, transvestism necessarily degenerated into buffoonery and licence. That is, indeed, the fate of everything that touches on the sexual life. To begin with, reverence and fear surround it with a mysterious atmosphere of taboo. When this fear is overcome it dissolves into laughter, leaving no place for any intermediate feeling. The little sexual emblems which the Ancients used to avert the evil eye were called *geloia*, *ridicula*.

* * * * *

The Cypriot historian Paeon, who lived perhaps in the time of the Ptolemies, tells this story, which Plutarch repeats in his *Life of Theseus*.²⁷ As Theseus was bringing Ariadne back from Crete to Attica, a storm drove his ship towards Cyprus. Theseus disembarked Ariadne, who was pregnant and ailing, at Amathus. While he himself was trying to save the ship, he was carried out to sea. Ariadne died without giving birth, and the women who had tended her on her death-bed buried her where she died. Since then, says Paeon, the people of Amathus sacrifice to Ariadne on the second day of the month of Gorpiaeos. During the ceremony, a young man lying on a bed imitates the cries and movements of a woman in labour.

There is no parallel to suggest any explanation of this rite. It is not analogous with the *couvade*, a private and not a public custom in which, immediately after the delivery, it is the father who is tended as he lies in bed, while the mother gets up at once and goes about her

work. In no place where it is recorded does the *couvade* include any simulation of childbirth. Late authors note it as a local peculiarity in Corsica, in Spain, and among certain peoples of the Black Sea, and this seems to indicate that in Greece and Italy it did not exist. All that we can say of the Amathus rite is, in the first place, that it was a part of the Ariadne-Aphrodite cult, and that in this same island of Cyprus there existed the cult of the androgynous Aphrodite. Furthermore, intersexual disguise was not unknown in Crete, Ariadne's native land, even if the monuments which represent it are inexplicable. Finally, if the Ancients linked this odd custom with the tale of Theseus, it was because they recognised the part played by disguise in other episodes of the hero's story.

* * * *

Leaving this isolated instance on one side, let us summarise the elements which the others have in common.

Transvestism affects whole groups. In nuptial rites their apparently individual character should not mislead; marriages themselves were at first collective, since the young people who had been initiated and passed triumphantly through the tests entered the nubile group together. So the legends which associated a disguise, a feat of prowess, and the winning of a wife are explained by archaic customs. Initiations, the feat of prowess, the donning of the clothing of the other sex, and marriage are co-ordinated phases, in an order which escapes us, of a complex ceremony; but the legends turn the second rite, whose meaning had become obscure, into a stratagem leading to victory and the possession of a woman.

It is probable that girls, grouped in their age sets, similarly at a given time put on men's clothing. The unimportance of female initiations and the indifference that the Greeks felt for women's affairs explain why the rite left no traces apart from a few nuptial customs.

Reciprocal exchange of garments, customary in annual feasts which seem to have been completely unrestrained, was quite another matter. We can see here games and dances connected with fertility rites. They are the concern of vegetation deities—Dionysos, and an

archaic Artemis. We shall find Dionysos again among the twofold gods, and reciprocal disguise in the cult of the bisexual Aphroditos.

The constant link between *transvestism* and *sexual union* prevents our considering the exchange of garments as merely a passage-rite signifying no more than the final incorporation of young men in complete manhood. Symbolic androgyny must have had a positive and beneficent value, each sex receiving something of the powers of the other.*

1. Valerius Maximus, II, 6, 13
2. Plutarch, *Consolation to Apollonius*, 22
3. Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 15
4. Plutarch, *Virtue of Women*, p. 245
5. Plutarch, 58th *Greek Question*
6. Oppian, *Hunting*, I, 138
7. Pindar, frag. 22, incert., p. 220, ed. Puech
8. Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses*, 41, 4
9. Pausanias, VIII, 20, 2
10. Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses*, 17
11. Hyginus, fable 190
12. Parthenius, *Erotica*, 5
13. Anton. Liberalis, *Metamorphoses*, 10
14. H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courètes*, pp. 153 and 321
15. *Ibid.* p. 352
16. Plutarch, *Virtue of Women*, 261 F
17. Plutarch, *Solon*, 8
18. Pausanias, VI, 6, 2
19. Herodotus, IV, 145-6
20. Georges Dumézil, *Crime des Lemniennes*, pp. 51-4
21. *American Journal of Archaeology*, XXXVI (1933), p. 97, fig. 7; *Revue des Etudes grecques*, XLVI (1933), p. 138, fig. 3
22. Servius, *Aeneid*, I, 30
23. Athenaios, XII, 525
24. Plutarch, *Virtue of Women*, 245 E
25. Philostratus, *Imagines*, I, 2
26. Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams*, II, 3, 84
27. Plutarch, *Life of Theseus*, 20
28. H. Baumann, *Das doppelte Geschlecht*, pp. 45-81
29. *Ibid.* p. 51

* H. Baumann, *Das doppelte Geschlecht*, explains ritual exchange of garments as we do,²⁸ but interprets differently the feminine disguise of men in mourning,²⁹ who, he suggests, put on feminine garb so as to be able decently to abandon themselves to grief, as women do.

The Twofold Gods

IT has long been recognised that the bisexual deities were not the creation of the Greek genius; and efforts have been made to trace an Oriental influence in the beliefs which, more or less sporadically, ascribe the powers of the two sexes to certain figures in the classical pantheon which we are now about to consider. Yet the oldest theogonies, the most authentically Greek, include *female beings who procreate without a consort*. In these cases androgyny is implicit; there is no indication that anyone ever thought of defining it. But here we come to something more definite:

First of all, says Hesiod, appeared Chaos, then broad-flanked Earth, then Love. Chaos, the Void, yawning Space, is a neuter word. Plato understands the passage¹ to mean that Earth and Eros were born of Chaos; that is, he sees the two sexes issuing from a primitive utrumque. As for Eros, whose name is masculine, artists and poets have, throughout his tradition, always imagined and represented him as androgynous, and the Orphic cosmogonies stressed this characteristic. Will Love unite beings whose powers are different and complementary? Not to begin with. From Chaos were born Erebus and black Night. . . As for Earth, she gave birth to starry Heaven, a being equal to herself, capable of covering her entirely. She gave to the world the Mountains and the Nymphs. She also gave birth, unaided by tender love, to Sea with his raging swells. But then, from the embraces of Heaven, she gave birth to Ocean with his deep eddies.² From a neuter, Chaos, proceed another neuter, Erebus, and the feminine Night. If Earth procreates unaided, it is because in spite of her dominating characteristic which is strongly maternal, she has to some degree the two natures, as has Cybele. It may be objected that Cybele belongs to Asia. But Hera too, one of the few goddesses with a Greek name, gives birth 'unaided by tender love' to Hephaistos and Typhon, and thus the goddess of marriage appears first as androgynous. If Hera engendered Typhon without the intervention of Zeus it was, so they

said,³ to revenge herself because he had brought Athena into the world without her aid.

In some legends Athena is the result of a natural mating, since Zeus first fertilises Metis and then swallows her, so that the daughter who is born from her father's head is the child of the god and of Metis. But all the monuments representing this delivery give to Zeus, surrounded by the deities of child-birth, the semblance of a woman in labour. His 'maternal' characteristics are less pronounced at the birth of Dionysos, and the Ilithyes no longer attend him; it is in fact round Dionysos that the indications of bisexuality will take definite shape. But these indications in the case of Zeus are so abundant that we are reluctant to see in the 'male and female' god of Orphism no more than a borrowing from Eastern cosmogonies.

An archaic bronze statuette found at Labranda in Caria represents a bearded deity, with several rows of necklaces, holding the double axe and sceptre, the lower part of the body wrapped in a net, the upper part bearing four rows of breasts. It might well seem to be a goddess related to the Ephesian Artemis, if it were not that the strange figure reappears, with an inscription naming him as Zeus, on another relief of the middle of the fourth century B.C. The god is bearded; six breasts are placed in a triangle on his chest. The monument was dedicated by Idrieus, king of Caria, and his sister-wife Ada.*

Here obviously we have Zeus Labrandeus whom, says Herodotus,⁵ only the Carians venerate, in a great forest of sacred plain trees at Labranda, near Mylasa; the Greeks called him Zeus Stratios. Plutarch too mentions⁶ the Zeus of Labranda, and finds it surprising that he holds not the sceptre and thunderbolt but the double axe. This axe, he says, was taken from the Amazon Hippolyte by her conqueror Heracles, who gave it to the Lydian Omphale; so it reached the treasury of the kings of Lydia, and then Gyges carried it away to Caria.

* Discovered at Tegea, where it came by some unknown way, it is now in the British Museum.⁴ Hecatomnos was satrap of Caria from 387; after him came Mausolus (377-353), married to his sister Artemisia, then Idrieus and his sister Ada.

Neither Herodotus nor Plutarch mentions what seems to us the strangest detail—the breasts, and the bisexuality which the breasts imply. The multiplicity of breasts in the Ephesian Artemis (which we know only from coins, for excavations have not brought to light any figure representing her) is *illusory*, in the sense that ‘the rows of breasts clearly appear placed on top of the material of the garment.’⁷ In the same way, the false breasts of Zeus Labrandeus seem to be worn on the clothing which covers his chest. ‘It seems that the Carians sought to make of this Zeus who, in so many aspects, resembles the Ephesian goddess (necklaces, artificial breasts, double axe), the symbolic type of bisexuality, expressing the fertility of two beings. Multiple breasts are simply a symbol of fertility and abundance, as are the tiaras with multiple horns.’⁸ In 1915 W. Déonna, studying the origin of monsters in art, again insisted on the generalised character of the symbolism: ‘The breasts of Zeus Stratios are an indication not of androgyny, but of superhuman power, in the same way that in other typical figures the repetition of an organ may express nothing more precise than the infinite power of the divine being.’⁹* This, I think, is too strong a denial of the particular and specific intention contained in the symbol of androgyny. A simple increase of power would normally be shown, on a male figure, by duplication of the signs of virility, and examples of this do indeed exist. But we must, with W. Déonna and Ch. Picard, stress the care with which the Greeks avoided any realistic representation of a female body with multiple breasts, or of a male torso covered with teats. The artists did no more than suggest these concepts—a goddess bearing the signs of fertility multiplied, a god bearing the sign of a twofold nature. These signs remain, and must remain, purely symbolical, appealing to the mind and not to the senses. An implicit aesthetic feeling prevents their becoming flesh and blood and engendering forms which would appeal to the eye, and no longer to the intelligence alone, and so at once become monstrous.

* See also¹⁰ the penetrating observations of the same author on the reversal of the theme in Christian superstitions, where witches have three breasts, and men marked by the devil have five nipples. ‘Originally a mark of the divine, multiplicity of breasts has become the mark of the devil.’

To be able to say more about Zeus Stratios we should need to be better informed on the meaning of the double axe. Is it a symbol of bisexuality, as has sometimes been thought, or at least associated with a divinity considered as being at once male and female? A few coincidences, possibly fortuitous, are too slight a foundation for the hypothesis; and to see in Zeus Stratios the Hellenic father-god, occupying the place and office of the Anatolian mother-goddess, must remain a purely intellectual conjecture.

Perhaps it would be more useful just to recall the following facts:

Plutarch links the double axe of Zeus Stratios with the story of the Amazons, Hercules and Omphale; here we have the juxtaposition of warrior-women bearing men's weapons, a hero and a queen who exchange clothing. Though he does not mention androgyny in connection with the statue, it is very near the surface here.

The bisexual god of Labranda was venerated in the fourth century by a royal house which practised incest between brother and sister.

In the first book of Statius' *Achilleid* Thetis persuades Achilles to hide in woman's clothing, arguing that Jupiter himself assumed the garments of a maiden.¹¹ A note of Lactantius says that the god, falling in love with Antiope, took on the attributes of the goddess so as to get possession of the girl. In this episode, which is unknown elsewhere, transvestism once more serves as a ruse for the conquest of a woman.

Finally, at Rome, the herm of Jupiter Terminalis bore the symbols of the two sexes.

The cults of the Greek *Heracles*, like those of the Roman *Hercules*, were everywhere characterised by strict separation of the sexes. This separation was even more essential, it seems, than the exclusion of women, which was the rule in several places at considerable distances from each other, at Thasos, Erythrae, Gades, Miletus, Cos and Rome. When women were admitted, they had to remain apart.

On the other hand, *Heracles*, the pre-eminently virile hero, exchanges his clothes with Omphale. At Antimachia in the island of Cos his priest dons a feminine robe and crowns himself with the *mitra* to proceed to the sacrifice. And at the other end of the ancient



4. Hermaphrodite—*Louvre, Paris*



5. Hermaphrodite—
British Museum, London

world, the Italiot Hercules Victor dressed as a woman, as did the men who had access to his mysteries. These facts add up to an exceptionally coherent and valuable whole.

Plutarch explains in his own way the strange attire of the priest of Cos, who appears on some of the island's coinage: Heracles, fleeing from his enemies, took refuge with a Thracian woman who hid him by lending him her garments. Later he married the daughter of Alcipios, and on this occasion wore a robe embroidered with flowers. 'That is why his priest sacrifices on the very spot where the fray occurred, and why newly married husbands in Cos put on feminine clothes to receive their brides.'¹²

The garb of the priest, then, like that of the two officiants at the Oschophoria, is here explained as commemorating a stratagem. Such explanations are so common in instances of this kind that more than once the ruse alone is presented to us, amputated from the rite of which it is the *aition*, and at which we can only guess. The disguise of the bridegroom is supposed to commemorate an action of Heracles which is apparently motiveless. Why, after all, did the hero don a flowered robe to marry the daughter of Alcipios? Was it a general custom? Certainly it was no longer so at the beginning of our era, since Plutarch mentions it, at Cos, as something exceptional. But his story implies that for him, in olden, legendary time, every marriage included transvestism, at least for the bridegroom, perhaps simply suggested by some characteristic accessory. And there is nothing surprising in this, since marriages are linked with initiations.

Plutarch does not establish any connection between the costume of the priests of Cos and the legend of Omphale. It is unanimously agreed by modern writers that the legend is the result of a ritual exchange of clothing, analogous with that attested for Cos and, in still greater detail, for Hercules Victor.

Hercules Victor was venerated at Rome, three days before the nones of April, as the *Health-giver*. John the Lydian¹³ adds that before men could take part in the mysteries they had to put on women's garments. We can learn still more from the monuments. On reliefs discovered at Reate in Sabine territory, at Tibur and Rome (at least one of them bearing the name of *Hercules Victor*), the hero

is shown in a long robe, sleeved and tied with a girdle, but still having his lion-skin on his head and his club in his hand. It was in this costume that the Emperor Commodus went into the amphitheatre at Lanuvium to slaughter wild beasts. His biographer Lampridius¹⁴ records this detail as proof that the emperor was both insane and effeminate, without realising that Commodus was claiming in this way to be the reincarnation of Hercules Victor.* Pausanias¹⁷ is equally at a loss to understand why the temple of Heracles of Thespia was served by a virgin priestess; as bride of the god, she confirmed his phallic character. The Roman Hercules has the same natural appetites; Commodus made one of his favourites, *pene prominente ultro modum animalium* (and for this reason nicknamed the Ass), a priest of Hercules Rusticus¹⁸. Thus Hercules Victor, like the Cretan Leucippe, appears as a phallic being in woman's clothing.

But we can go still further. Hercules Victor is the *Health-giver*. The Heracles of Cos is *Alexis* and has associations with Hebe. He took woman's clothing to escape the *Meropes*, the *Mortals*, whose leader *Euryphyle* bears one of the names of Death. From this, and from Commodus' pretensions, we see that transvestism is not merely a prophylactic rite, a childish ruse to baffle demons, or simply a symbol of emancipation from a half-feminine past. It certainly had a positive value; it had power to promote health, youth, strength, longevity, perhaps even to confer a kind of immortality. If Commodus put on woman's clothing, it was that he might clothe himself in power and immortality, as Hercules Victor had done by assuming this disguise.

Tradition gives to the legend of Omphale two aspects so different that some critics have tried to dissociate them. According to the early versions, Hercules for his murder of Iphitus was condemned to serve the queen of Lydia, just as Apollo, for having dared to restore a dead man to life, had to become the herdsman of Admetus. The

* Heliogabalus, who used to take pleasure in wearing women's clothes, was a homosexual.¹⁵ Caligula, who often decked himself out in women's accessories, was by no means homosexual, but had incestuous relations with one of his sisters.¹⁶ These three cases, though apparently alike, have different explanations.

hero turned his bondage to good account by killing monsters and robbers, after which the queen, by whom he had had one or more children, sent him back to Tirynthus laden with presents. Late authors dwell complacently on the shameful nature of his servitude; like the painters, for whom this arresting subject was a favourite theme, they show Heracles at the feet of the queen, dressed in his flowered tunic, while she wears the lion skin, forces him to spin and strikes him with her sandal when she is dissatisfied with his work. This version, which alters the original sense of the legend, is the only one which has preserved the key to the whole story, the exchange of garments. But if this exchange is not found in the older versions, it is for the same reason that the Homeric poems suppress the episode of Achilles disguised as a girl and living in the household of Lycomedes. Once the ethics of initiations had become blurred, it was inevitable that their rites should either be camouflaged as commendable ruses (we have had more than one example of this), or throw ridicule on a hero disguised as a girl, in the service of a woman. Just as Achilles' appearance as a woman certainly antedates the *Cyprian Lays*, so the story of Heracles' disguise was known well before Lucian and Ovid.

Plutarch maintains that Heracles gave Omphale the double axe which he had taken from the Amazon. The trophy became the sacred emblem of the kings of Lydia, until the day when Candaules was dispossessed of it, and the dynasty of the Heraclides came to an end. The usurper Gyges gave it to Zeus Labrandeus.¹⁹ It is not at all certain that the double blade was a symbol of bisexuality. But here we see it passing from a warrior-woman to a hero and a queen who have exchanged clothing; afterwards it goes to a father-god represented as having breasts; indications of androgyny are particularly abundant here.

Ovid²⁰ treated the double transvestism in his own way. The queen and the hero are resting in a grotto where Faunus, passionately in love with the fair Lydian, comes in the hope of surprising them. As he gropes in the darkness his hand meets first the shaggy lion-skin. He retreats, finds his way to the other bed, covered with fine stuffs, and is about to climb into it when he is thrown back by a

powerful arm. Here the theme which we have so often met in the stories of disguise is given a curious twist; the stratagem, deliberate in the stories of Theseus, Solon, and the Spartan woman, here comes into play unintentionally to deceive Faunus. And Faunus finds himself treated like the evil spirits of popular superstition, who are put off the trail by the substitution of one person for another.

Omphale in the Hercules legend is queen of Lydia. But students of the proper names in her story are surprised to find them all confined to north-eastern Greece, in the region of the Gulf of Malia, Thermopylae and Pelion, that is, not far from the country of Trachis where Hercules achieved immortality on his funeral-pyre. A Hellenic Omphale seems to have been identified with the Lydian, and we do not know how the episodes of the primitive legend were shared between the two of them.

According to tradition, Hercules offered to Delphi a share of the spoils won from the Amazon, and in particular the fatal baldric that she inherited from her father Ares. Now Delphi had a cult of the *omphalos*, the *umbilicus*, with an abundance of sexual connotation. A note of Servius²¹ says that in Cyprus Venus was worshipped in the form of a standing-stone or umbilicus, and Cyprus was indeed the home of a bisexual Aphroditos. The name of *Omphale* denotes the *centre* of the human body, the intersection of its two axes, the *root* of life, the *cord* which binds the child to its mother and which represents the destiny of each one of us. This constellation of metaphors will perhaps provide us with a key for the deciphering of her legend.

In speaking of the feminine aspects of Dionysos, we run the risk of evoking the slender, languid adolescent of the Hellenistic age, which often leaves us wondering whether we are looking at a Bacchus or a Hermaphrodite; the insipid distortion of an archaic conception which reveals Dionysos not as *effeminate*, but in the full power of his double nature.

Archaic vases show him bearded and lusty, wearing 'the heavy Ionian robe, Eastern in cut and appearance, brightly patterned; he is swathed in the full, thick mantle which reaches to the calves and leaves only the forearm uncovered—the costume of a king or priest,

and prototype of that of the tragic actor'.²² That is so. And yet the Greeks never recognised the god's attire as the clothing of a king or priest, but only as a woman's. The worshippers who assumed the *krokotos*, the saffron-coloured veil of a woman, to take part in the Bacchic train, did so in imitation of the god; and in the later period the custom was often interpreted as a sign of effeminacy and debauchery. But at the same time the ribald epithets applied to the god—The Testiculous, The Codded—show that his virility was not in question. So on every score he resembles the priest of Cos, the Leucippe of Crete, and the Athenian leaders of the Oschophoric procession, surrounded like these last with symbols of masculinity, ithyphallic sileni, bunches of grapes, and vine-stocks. The archaic figure of Dionysos, to which both vase painters and the costume of his worshippers bear witness, is that of a twofold god.

This same figure can be glimpsed in the tragedy of Aeschylus²³ which told of the struggle of Dionysos and Lycurgus. Someone cried out on sight of him: 'Whence comest thou, man-woman, and what is thy native land? What garb is this?'

In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the young king Pentheus scornfully calls him 'the woman-like stranger'. Hoping to overcome the god, Pentheus is to assume the dress of a Bacchante and, like Lycurgus, to learn how terrible is the vengeance of the man-woman.

When the Greeks no longer understood the deep religious needs which were met by the god's double nature, they invented legends to explain them. It was said that when Zeus had delivered Semele's child from his thigh, he ordered Hermes to carry the infant to Ino, sister of Semele, to be reared by her and her husband Athamas in girl's clothing. But Hera was not taken in by the ruse. She spared the child, but struck the foster-parents with madness so that they killed their own children.^{24*} The same themes appear, differently ordered, in the story of Minyas' daughters, Alcathe, Arsippe and *Leucippe* (it is by no means surprising to find this Amazon name in a tale of transvestism). As they would take no part in the orgies, Dionysos came in the guise of a girl to invite them to join the festivities; but in

* According to a variant, Athamas reared Dionysos as a kid, to deceive evil spirits, and himself suckled his own children.²⁵

vain. He then reassumed his mighty virility in the successive forms of a bull, a lion, and a panther, with the result that the women lost their reason. As Agave killed Pentheus, so Leucippe killed her son Hippasos and tore him to pieces with the help of her sisters. Hermes then touched the women with his wand and turned them into birds.²⁶ Pursuit; transvestism; victims, human or animal, torn to pieces—we may note in passing familiar rites for which no single explanation can be found. Some of them were designed to promote plant growth; the Oschophories too are, among other things, a feast of the vintage.

Polyaenus alone mentions a cult of Dionysos *Pseudanor*, in Macedonia, and he explains it as originating in a stratagem. Argaios, king of Macedonia, routed his enemies by sending down from the mountains Bacchantes who, thyrsus in hand, their faces hidden under their garlands, were taken to be soldiers. In gratitude for his victory the king raised a temple to Dionysos *Counterfeit-Man*.²⁷ We know nothing of this cult. Polyaenus' anecdote introduces into the story of Pentheus the kind of balance that we find in the tales of the Amazons; on the one hand Pentheus, in imitation of Dionysos, disguises himself as a woman and follows the Bacchantes; on the other the Bacchantes in Macedonia are mistaken for men.

On another occasion²⁸ Dionysos trapped the Bactrians by inducing them to pursue some Amazons and Bacchantes while he himself attacked the enemy in the rear. Dionysos is almost the only god who is associated with the Amazons. Their relations were generally hostile. At Ephesus he engaged them in battle, but spared those who fled to his altar (an Ephesian tradition, noted by Tacitus);²⁹ he pursued the others to Samos.³⁰ Finally they were subdued and became maenads.³¹ In short, the warrior-women bore themselves towards him as towards Theseus, Heracles, and Achilles, all of whom, like him, wore women's dress. Here is a double representation of androgyny: armed horsewomen contrasted with a virile god, wearing a long robe twice girdled.

The Christians scoffed at the feminine Dionysos. For the tragic poets, the saffron-coloured peplos inspired awe, then anguish, and finally terror, as the discordance grew between the outward aspect of the man and the audacity of his actions. Meanwhile, Hellenistic

art ceased to regard Dionysos as the *man-woman*, that is, a double being, doubly powerful, and saw him as *effeminate*. It stripped him of the garments that symbolised his double nature—the saffron veil, the girdle, the golden *mitra*. It left him naked, not indeed despoiled of his virility, but too frail to assert it. Ovid³² and Seneca³³ speak of him as ‘girl-faced’, a phrase that would certainly have astonished the archaic painters, who represented him with a vigorous growth of beard. And Pliny recalls a statue of him dressed as Venus. The development was gradual, and no-one noticed in its course how it was distorting the myth, robbing it of both meaning and beauty; such a loss could not be offset by a few agreeable statues that pandered to the Greek taste for adolescent beauty.

It is then hardly surprising if the Orphic poets, who attributed bisexuality to so many divine beings, gave themselves free rein in writing of him: *thelomorphos*, *arrhenothelus*, *diphues*, *dissophues*. These full-blooded adjectives from the old poets protest against the paltry art which deprives him of his manly stature and allows him only the superficial aspects of femininity. The Orphic poets look back to the long-robed and terrible Dionysos of the tragedians, who wears the *mitra* the better to dominate the Bacchantes whom he has tamed.

The people of Cyprus worshipped a *bearded Aphrodite*, called *Aphroditos*. In this island, lying between Europe and Asia, where the rite of Amathus provides an example of transvestism, we might expect to find an oriental cult naturalised by the Greeks—all the more since there was also a bearded Aphrodite in Pamphylia. A close examination, however, reveals that the Cypriot Aphroditos has links with the Greek, and especially with the Latin world, which make a foreign origin doubtful.

The androgynous deity of Cyprus had a woman's body and clothing, but the beard and sexual organs of a man; it carried a sceptre. To do sacrifice to it, men dressed as women, and women as men. The statue was certainly ithyphallic, for comic poets and lexicographers associated Aphroditos with priapic demons. Here once more, this time in Cyprus, is the figure of the Cretan Leucippe, of the Heracles of Cos. We know this figure only from descriptions;



no monuments portray it. Many statuettes of Aphrodite have been found in Cyprus; none is bearded; all are completely feminine.

The existence of a bisexual Aphrodite, which is certain in Crete, is doubtful at Athens. In his lost book on Attica, Philochorus (so Macrobius says),³⁴ mentioned an Aphrodite identified with the moon, whom her worshippers honoured after exchanging garments with the other sex. This information has come down to us in a fragmentary form, in a Latin translation, and without exact reference to Athens. Nevertheless, the conception of the Moon as a bisexual being is Greek, even Attic. So Plato describes it,³⁵ as does the 9th *Orphic Hymn*. Moreover, according to Athenian tradition the cult of Aphrodite, originating in Assyria, came from Cyprus to Ascalon in Palestine and to Phoenicia, and was then established in Attica by Aegeus, who in his sorrow at being childless believed himself to be the victim of the goddess' anger.³⁶ Philochorus' fragment might well refer to a real cult at Athens.

The little that we know of the Cypriot cult comes to us from Latin commentators attempting explanations of curious passages in the poets—a line of Virgil,³⁷ where the goddess is referred to in the masculine; a phrase of Calvus³⁸ describing her as *pollens deus*. Far from being proof of the loose application of the Greek *theos* which is common to the two genders, or of its extension to Latin, these passages recall authentic bisexual figures. Certainly Virgil, describing Aeneas leaving Troy *ducente deo*, was not thinking of the strange Cypriot figure. At the very most he may have been influenced by a fleeting memory of an old conception of the Latins, who were to some extent ready to see their gods as of *indeterminate sex*. In the special case of Venus, this belief appears in a fragment of the poet Laevius, quoted by Macrobius in his dissertation on Venus in her double rôle of god and goddess.³⁹ 'Worshipping Venus, the foster parent,' says Laevius,⁴⁰ 'whether male or female, after the fashion of the foster-mother Light of Darkness. . . .' The worshipper of this indeterminate Venus seems to have been the bird Phoenix, which Laevius, in another fragment, speaks of as feminine. Laevius was a precious writer, eager for any kind of novelty. But here he does not seem to be indulging in gratuitous whimsicality. The Phoenix (see

p. 79) was at once male and female. Moreover, the words *sive mas sive femina* are part of the ritual in a great many invocations in Latin; the cautious formula betrays some uncertainty about the sex of the divinity. Indeed, more than one deity of primitive times seems to have hesitated between the two sexes. *Pales* was masculine before definitely becoming a goddess. After the god *Pomo* came the goddess *Pomona*. *Tellumon* and *Tellurus* are recorded beside *Tellus*. Other figures are divided into two persons, one masculine and one feminine; such are *Consus* and *Ops*, *Faunus* and *Fauna*, *Liber* and *Libera*, *Ruminus* and *Rumina*, *Cacus* and *Caca*, *Caeculus* and *Caecilia*. These couples are always sterile, and do not represent wedded deities; they are pairs, invented by the human imagination to embrace all the aspects of a single power endowed with the two natures side by side; they represent the ambiguous god, as the Roman genius conceived him.

Yet the Romans did not entirely reject the image of a single being possessing both sexes, as we can see from the Italian Hercules in woman's dress and from the ancient cult of the bald *Venus*. Latin commentators have found edifying explanations in history for the baldness of the goddess. A scholion on the *Iliad*⁴¹ says—and this is of greater interest to us—that the statue, which was bearded, had male and female organs; it held a comb; 'it was said that she was the protector of all births'.

To reject this evidence on the ground that an androgynous *Venus* is Asiatic, not Roman, would be to argue from premises still to be proved. On the contrary, a number of details encourage us to consider it carefully.

The Etruscan *Venus* (*Turan*) wears the *tutulus*, the conical hat which not only is obviously the symbol of the phallus, but even seems to bear its name—that of *Mutinus Tutunus*, a priapic deity associated, as we have seen, with a prenuptial rite. It must be remembered too that in the very same note in which *Servius* speaks of the bald *Venus*⁴² he says that in *Cyprus* the goddess was worshipped 'in the form of an umbilicus or, if one prefers it, of a standing-stone'. Conversely, in Greek (*kteis*) as in Latin (*pecten*), the comb signifies the sexual organ, usually the female organ. Further,

shaving the head is a purification rite and a passage-rite which appears in nuptial customs, for example in Sparta. It is not attested in Rome, where we know practically nothing of archaic customs. A goddess with shaven head recalls the Lacedemonian bride; a bearded goddess recalls the bride of Argos with her false beard. The bald Venus is invoked to protect births, that is, to watch over the fulfilment of marriage. The cult of Aphrodite was introduced into Attica, it was said, by a king who longed for children. And the Cyprian Aphroditos received the spring offering of the *eiresione*, the may-bough of branches of laurel or olive, hung about with the symbols of fertility—cakes, figs, vials of wine, oil and honey. The emblem was borne in procession in adolescent initiation rites and nuptial ceremonies. All this forms a homogeneous background against which the bald Venus, guardian of marriage and birth, claims her place beside the *duplex* of Amathus; on both figures light is shed by the beliefs of Antiquity about the androgynous character of the Moon.

Asia Minor venerated a divinity whom the Greeks incorporated, under the name of the Great Mother, among their own maternal goddesses, Rhea and Demeter. Like Ge and Hera, who were able to procreate without consorts, the Anatolian deity had her androgynous aspect. This was far more marked in her case than in her Hellenic sisters, and resulted in some strange incarnations in Greek legend—Agdistis and Misa, both bisexual. Though the figure from which they derive is extremely archaic, the traditions concerning them are late, strange to the Classical world and drawn from distant lands. This is apparent in the 52nd *Orphic Hymn*, which addresses Misa:

'I invoke Dionysos thesmophoros, bearer of the ferrule, renowned stock of the hundred-named Good Counsellor, and the pure and holy Misa, the lady not to be named, male and female, double-natured, Iacchos the Unbinder: whether at Eleusis thou delightest in the fragrant temple, whether in Phrygia with the Mother thou presidest over the mysteries, whether in Cyprus thou dalliest with the fair-crowned Cytherea, whether thou rejoicest in the holy fields where the wheat grows, with thy mother, holy Isis, black-veiled, by the river of Egypt, among thine attendant nurses. Come, kindly goddess, and reward us after our strife.'

Here is syncretism indeed: a goddess daughter of Isis, companion of the Phrygian Mother, worshipped at Eleusis, in Cyprus, and Egypt. Male and female, she is first associated with Dionysos, and then identified with the Eleusian Iacchos. Like Demeter, she is a rural deity, whose real name is taboo, whose cult is shrouded in mystery. The first mime of Herondas (about 300 B.C.) tells us that somewhere (but we do not know where) processions in honour of Misa took place. She is little known in Greece, where she is mentioned only by some theologian or other searching out religious curiosities; and her native land is really Phrygia, where her name was one of those borne by the Great Mother, and is indeed identical with that of *Midas*, whom the Greeks made into a king, as they made Attis into a prince of Lydia. Misa, once naturalised in Greece, joined the Eleusian cycle of Iacchos and Demeter. She was said to be a daughter of the ribald Baubo, who mocked Demeter in her distress by pulling up her dress in her presence. *Baubo* signifies the belly, *baubon* the phallus, *bauban* means to sleep. Baubo's gesture, the *anasyrma*, which we know too from several statues of Hermaphrodite, was certainly a ritual act, majestic and mysterious, before it fell into vulgarity.

Agdistis is another incarnation of the Phrygian Great Mother. He was born of Earth, conceived of the seed of Zeus, and was bisexual, violent and terrible. The gods feared him, and castrated him. From the blood that fell from the wound a tree sprang; the daughter of the river Sangarios plucked its fruit and put it in her bosom, and conceived Attis, through whose adventures the theme of castration was to run like a *leitmotif*. The cult of Agdistis is known in Asia Minor, Southern Russia, Lesbos, Egypt and Attica. Moreover, at Pessinus the Great Mother was venerated under this name.

The story of Agdistis, like the hymn to Miša, bears witness to the androgynous character of a divinity which, at first glance, seems entirely maternal. Her priests, the Galli, castrated themselves; in the thought of the Ancients (for whom, fairly early, bisexuality became synonymous with a-sexuality), this made them androgynous like Misa and Agdistis, hypostases of the Great Mother. As was their way, the Greeks sought to explain this mutilation, which they found

surprising and puzzling, by precedents in legend. Perhaps at the same time they furnish us with the means of carrying further an explanation which cannot be considered satisfactory as it stands. In *Ouranos-Varuna*, Georges Dumézil has put the castration of Ouranos back in a context of beliefs that gives it a plausible meaning: the symbolic sacrifice of king or priest to promote the natural forces. How can we fail to see that the legend of Agdistis, in which Zeus behaves exactly as Ouranos in fertilising Earth and raising a monster, is made up of images which illustrate the unity of generation, the interdependence of all its elements? A god raises from the earth an androgynous being, from whose blood, and sperm, grows a tree; a girl has only to touch its fruit to become a mother. Then her son Attis castrates himself and dies; the Great Mother gathers up his scattered organs, wraps them in her robe and buries them, and violets grow over his tomb. Death and resurrection, immortality. The feminine Heracles of Cos is the conqueror of Eurypyle, Death; the Roman Hercules in his long robe is the Health-giver; Dionysos *arrhenothelus* governs the growth of trees; the Aphroditos of Cyprus receives the may-branch, token of abundance; Venus Calva is the guardian of birth; Misa rejoices in good harvests. However scanty and imperfect our knowledge of these cults, they encourage us to give a special and positive value to the idea of bisexuality. We shall find it confirmed in the legends.

1. Plato, *Symposium*, 178 B
2. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 124-32
3. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 315
4. Cf. Charles Picard, *Manuel d'archéologie grecque, sculpture*, IV, 2, 1954, p. 75, n. 2
5. Herodotus, V, 119
6. Plutarch, 45th *Greek Question*
7. Charles Picard, *Ephèse et Claros*, p. 530
8. *Ibid.* p. 531
9. *Revue des Etudes grecques*, XXVIII (1915), p. 341
10. *Revue archéologique*, XXII (1913), II, p. 336
11. Statius, *Achilleid*, 263
12. Plutarch, 58th *Greek Question*
13. John the Lydian, *De Mensibus*, IV, 46
14. Lampridius, *Commodus*, 8 and 9
15. *Ibid.* 5

16. Suetonius, 52 and 16
17. Pausanias, IX, 27, 4
18. Lampridius, *loc. cit.* 10
19. Plutarch, 45th *Greek Question*
20. Ovid, *Fasti*, II, 395
21. Servius, *Aeneid*, I, 720
22. Henri Jeanmaire, *Dionysos*
23. Aeschylus, frag. 61
24. Apollodorus, III, 4, 3
25. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, IX, 309 ff.
26. Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses*, 10
27. Polyaeus, *Stratagemis*, IV, I, 1
28. *Ibid.* I, 1, 3
29. Tacitus, *Annals*, III, 61
30. Plutarch, 56th *Greek Question*
31. Seneca, *Oedipus*, 479
32. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 20
33. Seneca, *Oedipus*, 408
34. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, III, 8
35. Plato, *Symposium*, 190 B
36. Pausanias, I, 14, 7
37. Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 632
38. Calvus, frag. 7, Morel
39. Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, III, 8
40. Laevius, Morel, frag. 26
41. Iliad, II, 820; cf. Servius, *Aeneid*, I, 720
42. Servius, *loc. cit.*

CHAPTER THREE

Kaineus and Tiresias

GREEK traditions make mention of some beings who, in the course of their existence on earth, passed through both sexes. The most striking case is that of the soothsayer Tiresias, born a boy, who was to become a woman and die a man, fabulously old. In this kind of *successive androgyny* we must not see a transposition of

genuine cases where an adolescent turns out not to be of the sex supposed at his birth. The stories of Kaineus and Tiresias do not spring from concrete experience. They are indeed *myths*, born of customs or beliefs—and, moreover, each one requires a separate explanation. Through their psychological aura we can approach the ideas which the Greeks associated with bisexuality.

It is these ideas that are the important thing for us. We will therefore leave on one side a few instances in which the person who changes sex is almost unknown:

The Cretan Siproites was changed into a woman for having seen Artemis bathing.¹ Sithon, like Tiresias, seems to have passed through both sexes; all we know of him comes from two enigmatical lines of Ovid²:

*Nec loquor, ut quondam naturae jure novato
Ambiguus fuerit modo vir modo femina, Sithon.**

As for Mestra,³ she was a virtuoso in escape and turned herself into all sorts of animals at will. If at a given moment she changed from a virgin to a young fisherman, it was because Ovid made up her story like a mosaic, juxtaposing themes borrowed from the tales of Hermes and his son Autolykos, and of Kainis; there is no useful information for us to glean there.

The legend of the Cretan *Leucippe* changed into Leucippos by the favour of Leto is a narrative in simple outline derived, as we have seen (p. 4), from a ceremony in which boys dressed in girls' clothing cast off this garb as the symbol of the childhood which had ended for them. Ovid gives a romanticised interpretation of the Cretan metamorphosis. Ligdus tells his wife Telethousa that, if the child she is carrying is a girl, he will not rear it. The goddess Isis appears in a dream to the grieving wife and orders her to save the child in any case, and to call it Iphis, a name equally suitable for boy or girl. Iphis grows up; her father, believing her a boy, betrothes her to a beautiful young girl, Ianthe, daughter of Telestes. Iphis and Ianthe are devoted to each other, to the despair of Ithis who knows

* Nor tell how once, revising nature's plan,
Sithon by shifts now woman was, now man.

only too well that he can never respond to the love of his bride to be. Ariosto took up this theme again in the episode of Fleur-de-Lis, who fell in love with Bradamante disguised as a man:⁴ he solved the problem by marrying the lovesick girl to Richard, Bradamante's brother and double. Ovid can make use of the gods. Telethousa calls on Isis; Iphis calls on Juno and Hymenaios, and becomes a handsome young man, to the happiness of everyone. The religious syncretism of the end of the Alexandrine age, the taste of that time for questionable subjects, and finally Ovid's sentimentality, make this passage⁵ a masterpiece of bad taste. The only point of interest for us in it is the context of marriage and the names of the characters Telethousa, Telestes: marriage is the *telos*, initiation in the highest sense. By what divination has Ovid, as he put this poor romance into verse, found the authentic, primitive meaning of transvestism?

The legend of *Kaineus* has the same origin as that of Leucippe, but is richer in significant detail. It was known and sung as early as Pindar, elaborated by the poets, illustrated by the vase-painters; and its psychoanalytical elements are easily distinguishable.

Kainis, daughter of the king of the Lapithae, is loved by Poseidon who buys her favours by promising to fulfil any wish that she makes. She asks to become a man and invulnerable, and he grants this. She becomes the tyrant Kaineus, plants her spear in the middle of the market-place, and orders that all shall pay it divine honours and swear by it. Zeus decides to punish this impiety and raises the Centaurs against Kaineus, whom they overwhelm with tree-trunks. Conquered though still invulnerable, he is buried alive. 'Struck down by green fir branches', says Pindar, 'Kaineus kicked the ground and disappeared in the cloven earth'.

The kernel of the story seems here again to be a rite involving exchange of garments. Storytellers have enriched it with remarkably clear and coherent symbols. The wish of Kainis implies both invulnerability in the ordinary sense and sexual invulnerability. The vocabularies of Greek and Latin, at all stages, from the style of tragedy to that of farce, assimilate the sexual act to a wound. The spear is a phallic symbol. Alexander of Pheres⁶ venerated his as a god,

calling it *Tychon*, 'him who strikes home', in gratitude to it for killing his uncle Polyphron. But *Tychon* is also a phallic demon. The aggressively masculine character of the Cretan *Leucippe* (or rather of the statue that represented him, as far as one can guess) appears here at once transposed on the moral plane and characterised by clearly distinguishable images.

But there is more to it than this. Whatever the real etymology of the name *Kaineus*, the Greeks saw in it at one and the same time *kainis*, the sword; *kaino*, to kill; *kainumai*, to excel; *kainos*, new. Transvestism is a passage-rite and an initiation rite. This youth who has renewed himself is invulnerable, and stands *erect* and *living* under the trees that have overwhelmed him. Though the story has been twisted to fit a morality foreign to its primitive meaning, the ethics of rites of adolescence are still perfectly distinguishable in it.

Ovid, alone in the whole tradition, ends *Kaineus'* career by an epiphany; he emerges from his grave of heaped-up trunks in the form of 'a bird with fiery plumage, such as has never been seen before and will never be seen again'.⁷ This bird is not named, but we know it well: it is the Phoenix. The Phoenix has at one and the same time the two sexes which *Kaineus* possessed one after the other. He dies on a pyre, but is reborn immediately, always unchanged in his successive rebirths. Ovid, as far as we know, is the only poet who has introduced into the legend of *Kaineus* an episode clearly coloured by the story of the Phoenix, but we know that the Ancients had already connected the two names. Ovid, who combines an extraordinary intuition for mythology with a taste which is often deplorable, sensed a genuine relationship between them.

The Phoenix is an image rather than a legend, and when we consider the philosophic interpretation of myths we shall come back to this curious figure, in which the thought of the waning Ancient world found strange links with the problems that preoccupied it.

The Ancients represented *Tiresias* as a blind soothsayer, fabulously old, who for part of his life was a woman. His legend seems complicated because attempts have always been made to find separate explanations for his blindness and his passage through



6. Hermaphrodite—
*National Museum,
Stockholm*



7. Zeus Labrandeus—*British Museum, London*

womanhood. The two themes spring, I think, from a single explanation, which brings out the highest qualities of bisexuality.

In his poem on the *Bath of Pallas*, Callimachus tells how Tiresias, then no more than a boy, went hunting one day. By ill fortune he passed by a river where Athena was bathing. The angry goddess deprived him of his sight. But when the boy's mother, the nymph Chariclo, interceded for her son, Athena promised that to compensate for the loss of his eyes which were now closed for ever 'he should know how to read the flight of birds, auguries favourable, indifferent, and evil; and after his death, held in honour by the god of the underworld, he alone should keep among the shades his spirit of prophecy'.

On the other hand, old poems, particularly the *Melampodia* attributed to Hesiod, tell how and why he changed his sex. One day, on a journey, he saw a pair of snakes copulating; he separated them with his staff, and in so doing injured them, and immediately became a woman. Seven years afterwards he saw the same snakes in the same act, and became a man again. A variant of the story says that on the first occasion he wounded the female, and on the second the male, each time taking the sex of the reptile he had injured. After that Zeus granted that he should live for seven (or nine) generations of men.

The old story-tellers tried at all costs to fashion the two themes into a biography. Indeed, the poets knew only the man Tiresias, the same soothsayer who, in the *Odysey*, warned Ulysses against the dangers that beset his return, and who revealed his unwitting crimes to Oedipus. Only one anecdote relates to his feminine experience. One day Zeus and Hera were discussing the pleasures of love, and consulted Tiresias, who knew both aspects. He replied that the woman experiences nine times more pleasure than the man. The writers who tell of this episode add that the goddess was so angered by this disclosure that she, not Athena, struck Tiresias blind in retaliation.

The folklore of all nations knows that there is danger in the sight of snakes copulating. There is a trace of this belief in Pliny not, as might have been expected, in his chapter on snakes, but in that *on piety*,⁸ so careful were the Latins to mingle history and moral

precepts with their tales and superstitions. The father of the Gracchi, returning home, saw serpents as Tiresias had done. The augur told him that his life would be safe if he killed the female. 'No', he answered, 'kill the male, for Cornelia is young and can still bear children.' In the Roman tale, the sight of the snakes threatened the life of the onlooker; in the Greek tale, it threatened his sexual integrity.

On the other hand, Tiresias was blinded for having seen Athena bathing. Blindness, indeed, is the usual punishment of the man who has violated an ocular taboo.

Seen from this angle, the two explanations seem perfectly satisfactory, the meeting with the snakes causing change of sex, the sight of the naked goddess causing blindness. But if we consider them more closely, it is obvious that permutations are possible, since each explanation goes beyond the limits of the episode which it is supposed to cover.

In fact, in the Classical world and elsewhere, serpents confer the gift of prophecy. The soothsayers Melampus, Cassandra and Helenos owed theirs to snakes who licked their ears; afterwards they understood the language of animals and could interpret the noises of the natural world. This occurs too, in a version of the story of Tiresias, where Athena caused a serpent which lay along the edge of her shield to lick his ears. On the other hand, a mortal to whom a goddess revealed her deepest secret knew that he was physically threatened, but did not know what part of his body would be stricken. Artemis caused Acteon's death; Siproites, who surprised her bathing, was turned into a woman. When the Trojan prince Anchises learnt that the nymph who had given herself to him was none other than Aphrodite, he begged her not to make him *amenenos*, deprived of his *menos*, inconstant as the forms of dreams. Indeed, the Asiatic goddesses, even more than the Greek, imperilled their lovers: Attis castrated himself, and the love of Aphrodite was fatal to the fair Adonis.

This is why A. H. Krappe, reversing the order of events in the ancient records, explains the gift of prophecy as a present of the serpents (but in that case we must suppose, after an Indian archetype,

a version in which Tiresias by wounding the female serpent does a service to the male and earns his gratitude); and he argues that the soothsayer became a woman (that is, impotent) as did Siproites, for having seen a goddess bathing (but the story of Siproites could very well be simply a replica of that of Tiresias). As for the blindness, he thinks that no explanation is needed, because it is the price paid for *second sight*.

We cannot but entirely agree with him on this last point. The idea underlying the many stories of blind soothsayers, of suffering or mutilated magicians, is that superiority in any one direction must be paid for, and often at a high price. When the Greeks had lost the sense of this mysterious contract whereby a god could claim from a human something of his substance in exchange for a special gift, they represented blindness as a punishment. This is clear in the story of Tiresias.

If the explanations which the Ancients found for the prophetic gift on the one hand, for the change of sex on the other, are interchangeable, as Krappe has shown, we propose, far from reversing them as he has done, to relate both to another and wider explanation in which each can find a place.

The explanation is not difficult to find. Ethnographers have more than once described the *Shamans* of Eastern Asia who, after initiation, *put on feminine clothes* and keep them all their life, assuming the rôle of a woman so completely that they have sometimes been known to take a husband. 'Transvestism, with all the changes that it brings with it', says Mircea Eliade,⁹ 'is accepted after a supernatural command has been thrice received in dreams; to refuse it would be to court death.' 'In South Borneo, the intermediaries between men and gods are true hermaphrodites, clad as women and bearing themselves as women.' Is Mircea Eliade right to see in this strange custom 'definite traces of a feminine magic and a matriarchal mythology'? It is very doubtful. He puts forward another explanation as well, which, in view of our own conclusions, we are far readier to support. 'Bisexuality depends on the fact that the priest is regarded as intermediary between two cosmological planes—Earth and Heaven—and also on the fact that they unite in their person the

feminine element Earth and the masculine element Heaven. We are concerned here with a ritual androgyny, the well-known formula of the divine bi-unity.¹⁰

Some fifty years ago, W. R. Halliday very rightly pointed out that it is in the bisexuality of the Shamans that the explanation of the mysterious Scythian Enarēes must lie. Herodotus says¹¹ that when the Scythians invaded Asia, king Psammetichus dissuaded them from entering Egypt, and offered them rich presents to return home. This they did. But some of their number pillaged the temple of Aphrodite Ourania at Ascalon in Palestine, the oldest of all the temples of the goddess. She afflicted the pillagers and all their descendants with the *feminine disease*. 'Such is the story by which the Scythians explain this disease; moreover, travellers can see for themselves the condition of those the Scythians call Enarēes.'¹² Unfortunately the meaning of this word is unknown, but elsewhere¹³ Herodotus mentions the Enarēes again, speaking of them as androgynous, and adding that they have from Aphrodite a gift of divination. Hippocrates, in his treatise *Of the airs*,¹⁴ describes the Enarēes precisely enough for us to recognise in them *shamans* similar to those of Eastern Asia, 'true hermaphrodites'.

The Scythians in general, says Hippocrates, are not prolific. 'Moreover, there are among them many who are impotent and who do women's work, speaking like women. They are called *Anarieis*. The people of the country attribute their condition to a divinity, honour them and prostrate themselves before them, each man fearing lest a similar affliction fall on him.' Hippocrates admits no supernatural cause, and attributes the disease to the fact that the Scythians are always on horseback. He goes on: 'When they go to a woman and cannot have intercourse with her, they are at first little perturbed, but then imagine that they have committed some sin against the god and put on women's clothing. They declare their impotence, live like women and devote themselves to feminine occupations. This illness attacks only rich men, those powerful by birth and wealth.'

Herodotus represents the illness as a punishment from the gods, and certainly a pious Greek could hardly see it in any other light.

Although the goddess of Ascalon whom Herodotus calls Aphrodite is a very close relation of the Greek Mother, of the Dea Syria to whom the priests made bloody sacrifice of their virility, it is clear that here there is no question of brutal castration, but of an attitude of mind, a way of life which Greek rationalists could interpret only as an illness, either physical or mental. Hippocrates does his best to explain why the poor do not suffer from it; it is because they do not ride to excess, and go on foot. Aristotle too¹⁵ treats the feminine disease as peculiar to the kings of the Scythians. The two descriptions reveal clearly an ambivalence which all ethnographers have stressed, that the 'feminine shamans' are at once *respected* and *despised*; the two Greek scholars interpret this in their own fashion, by talking of kings and lords stricken with a disease that diminishes them.

Greek mythology has kept only one trace of androgynous shamanism, in the legend of Tiresias, the prophet who experienced both sexes. The hazy memory of an archaic reality long ago left behind has been changed into a biography put together with the help of folklore themes that give it perfect cohesion. Tiresias loses his sight because he comes upon a goddess bathing; she has pity on him and grants him the gift of divination; he surprises snakes in the act of copulation; his sexual life is affected. What could be more logical, more convincing? An undertone of implied criticism runs through the story: misfortune falls on Tiresias because he has seen what should be hidden. In popular opinion the man who has knowledge of secret things is always foolhardy, and that is very near to being guilty.

What we know of shamanism explains the periodic nature of Tiresias' metamorphoses; he is seven years a woman, then becomes a man again. Students of the initiations of magicians, in Celtic legend where they play so large a part, and in the regions of the world today where they are still practised, stress the importance of the numbers seven and nine in the probationary periods. The *feminine life* is final for the Scythian shamans, and for those described by Mircea Eliade; in Tiresias' career it is a kind of retreat, lasting as long as that of Hephaistos. The stories give no details about it, for wherever the soothsayer appears in the poems it is as a man, and

* carrying a sceptre, which is a symbol easy enough to interpret. He was credited with a line of descendants, mostly daughters. Is the famous Mantô simply a hypostasis of the feminine Tiresias?

* * * * *

Like Leucippe the Cretan, Kaineus appears to us as a figure born of ritual transvestism.

The legend of Tiresias seems to be a Greek interpretation of the artificial androgyny of the shamans.

The Phoenix is a mythical figure.

These three heterogeneous stories may have completely different settings, ritual or psychological, yet they have exactly the same conclusion.

The Phoenix is the very symbol of eternity.

Kaineus is invulnerable. He lives on unconquered under the earth.

Tiresias lives for *seven* or *nine* generations. We should be making a commonplace of his longevity if we explained it by literary necessity, and argued that the poets had involved him in so many adventures that they had no choice but to make him outlive several generations of men. Ulysses in distress on his homeward journey called on the shade of the great soothsayer, who had lost none of his wisdom in the underworld, for Persephone had willed that even in death he alone should keep sense and reason among the flying shades; and he appeared to the hero, his golden sceptre in hand, still lordly, even in Hades.

Finally we must remember that Achilles, who lived at Scyros in feminine attire, received at Leuce an eternal life like that of the gods.

Are we rash in thinking that bisexuality, symbolised by the exchange of garments, had a positive value, bound up with human aspirations to perpetual life?

1. Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses*, 17
2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 280
3. *Ibid.* VIII, 739
4. Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, XXV
5. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX, 565
6. Plutarch, *Pelopidas*, 29

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7. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII, 522 ff.
8. Pliny, VII, 37
9. Mircea Eliade, *Chamanisme*, p. 317
10. *Ibid.* p. 318
11. Herodotus, I, 105
12. *Ibid.*
13. Herodotus, IV, 67
14. Hippocrates, 22 (Heiberg)
15. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 7

CHAPTER FOUR

Hermaphrodite

THE rites we have described seem to be archaic, for in all cases they are noted as survivals or curiosities. The legends we have recounted are recorded by the earliest poets. In both rites and legends the Hellenic spirit may be seen advancing towards the concept of the double man or god, then drawing back and, just as it is on the point of achieving exact representation, contenting itself with allusions or symbols. That for them hermaphroditism was an exalted state of nature and the divine is proved by the traditions in the first theogonies of goddesses who conceive unaided, and will be proved again by the myths which the philosophers elaborated.

But the ambivalence of sacred things is nowhere so clearly revealed as in the realm of bisexuality. An abnormal formation of the generative organs seemed to the Ancients the extreme of monstrosity. When a child was born bearing real or apparent signs of hermaphroditism, the whole community felt itself threatened by the anger of the gods. To avert its consequences they must first suppress the abnormal child, who was thus made to bear the sins of which he was the token. As it was repugnant to the Ancients to kill where the victim could be left to die, the new-born child was exposed.

Another case could easily arise. True hermaphroditism is extremely rare: it exists only in individuals who have both sets of organs complete or, at least, one set complete with, in addition, characteristics of the other sex. What the Ancients termed androgyny is apparent hermaphroditism, or hypospadias, where only the external organs are abnormal. A hypospadiac boy may be registered as a girl; the mistake is discovered at puberty. On the other hand, there are girls whose external genital organs resemble those of boys, and it is difficult to distinguish a little girl so equipped from a hypospadiac boy. When the Ancients (and for that matter moderns too) speak of a change of sex, they are simply describing the moment when the real sex, undisclosed at birth, is revealed. The two phenomena, sexual ambiguity and evolution from one outward form to another, are thus one and the same thing and appear equally maleficent.

Pliny, following Calliphanes, mentions in the region of Scythia 'beyond the Nasamones and their neighbours the Machyles, the race of the Androgynae, who combine the two sexes, of which they make use, turn and turn about. Aristotle adds that in all of them the right breast is that of a man, the left breast that of a woman.' In spite of these authorities, Pliny seems sceptical. On the other hand he says with much greater conviction: 'There are born beings with both sexes: we call them hermaphrodites; formerly they were named androgynous.' And in another passage, 'Cases are known of women who have changed to men. This is no fable.' Such was the girl of Cassinum, who was living with her parents when she became a boy; the augurs had her deported to a desert island.¹ Livy too relates that about 200 B.C., when Italy was just recovering from the terrors of the Carthaginian occupation, a number of deformed animals were born and, in Sabina, an androgynous child, while in another place a second was discovered, already sixteen years old. 'All these things seemed to be the result of a nature confusing and mingling the germs. Hermaphrodites especially were held in horror; they were led to the sea.'² We must understand that they were exposed on water so that they should perish without anyone being defiled by their blood. Diodorus of Sicily³ tells how at the beginning of the

Civil War, about 90 B.C., a woman in the neighbourhood of Rome became a man; the husband laid her case before the Senate, and on the advice of the haruspices the woman was burnt alive. The Athenians, some time afterwards, treated a similar case in the same way. This is an interesting point. There were certainly in Greece a good many children who were exposed, drowned or burnt because their sex was doubtful at birth or because it seemed to change at puberty. The case quoted by Diodorus, probably the only one concerning an adult, shows the old superstition persisting in Athens, a society considerably less conservative than Sparta, where *apothesis*, the exposure of deformed new-born babies, still existed at the time of Plutarch. Moreover, it relates to a time when fear was becoming simply curiosity, at least in cultured circles. 'Formerly', says Pliny in the first century B.C., 'hermaphrodites were considered as terrifying apparitions, but today only as objects for jest.' This is underlined by a pretty epigram of Evenos of Athens,⁴ who wrote about the beginning of the Christian era: 'Formerly I raised my youthful hands to Cypris, offering her pine torches to grant me a child, for already in the nuptial chamber I had loosed my virgin dress. Now suddenly I see myself revealing a virile form. They call me bridegroom, bride no longer. After the altars of Aphrodite, I garland those of Ares and Hercules. Thebes in olden time sang of Tiresias. Calchis today has seen me put aside the *mitra* to assume the chlamyde.'

The cult of the god Hermaphrodite perhaps helped to undermine gradually the old terror of maleficent androgyny. It is certain, though, that the two existed for some time side by side, for the cult seems to date from the fourth century and it is not until the Christian era that we hear the superstition spoken of as a survival of bygone days. This is sufficient indication of how far beliefs about the double gods are dissociated from experience. Androgyny is at the two poles of sacred things. Pure concept, pure vision of the spirit, it appears adorned with the highest qualities. But once made real in a being of flesh and blood, it is a monstrosity, and no more; it is proof of the wrath of the gods falling on the unfortunate group in which it is manifested, and the unhappy individuals who reveal it are got rid of as soon as possible.

This explains the reluctance of the Greeks to accept the detailed images that the East, on the contrary, welcomed. Ready as they were to suggest the possession of complementary powers, they were equally hesitant when it came to the concrete representation of bisexual beings. When we see with what care they exterminated miserable children with ill-defined organs, we wonder that a god called Hermaphrodite should have been able to appear in their midst. Or, in more exact terms, we can measure the growing strength of the myth of bisexuality which was able, by about the fourth and third centuries, to overcome a repugnance probably never completely uprooted in the conscience of many men.

A divine figure, born in historic times—it might be thought that his beginnings would be easily traced. This is by no means so. The origins of Hermaphrodite are extremely obscure, and it is indeed for this reason that we have begun by describing his psychological components. His religious existence presents a number of problems.

In this composite name, which was to meet so strange a fortune, the presence of Aphrodite is perfectly justifiable. The presence of Hermes is more of a riddle. The legend which made Hermaphrodite the child of the two divinities was a later invention, to explain the name. The ambiguous young god, brother of Eros, bears a close resemblance to his mother, but little to his supposed father, whom the ancient painters depicted as sturdy, bearded, and extremely virile.

That is why it has sometimes been suggested that Hermaphrodite was originally a herm bearing the bearded image and the erect organ of the Cypriot god Aphroditos who, it will be remembered, was clad as a woman. Not only is the existence of such a statue entirely hypothetical, but composite words of the type *Hermathena*, *Hermares*, *Hermeros*, etc., to denote a herm of Athena, Ares or Eros, date from Roman times and are practically never found outside the Latin writers. If Hermaphrodite had simply been the personification of a *herm of Aphrodite*, the god Hermes would have had no part in the creation of the new god, and would appear in his name only by favour of a kind of play on words. To exclude him thus would be unwise, and would deprive the double god of a part of his meaning.

Indeed Jessen⁵ has opportunely focused attention on the cases where Hermes and Aphrodite are found associated by the cult, where they share the same altar, where they are represented together on coins and in terracotta; and especially where they appear together as protectors of sexual union. Athens had a combined cult of Hermes Psithyristes, of Aphrodite and of Eros Psithyros.⁶ At Halicarnassus, one temple brought Hermes and Aphrodite together near the famous spring of Salmacis which played a part in the legends of the origin of Hermaphrodite.⁷ Argos honoured the two divinities together. It was said that the ancient statues of them were an offering of Hypermnestra, the only one of the fifty Danaides who refused to kill her husband.⁸ It will be remembered that at Argos the young brides put on a false beard to enter the nuptial bed; there too was celebrated, and in the month sacred to Hermes, the *Hybristika* in which the two sexes exchanged clothing.

Our information on the cult of Hermaphrodite can be contained in a few lines. At least we know that his feast fell on the fourth day of the month. Now Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*,⁹ gives this advice: 'It is on the fourth day that you should lead home your bride.' And Proclus adds in his commentary, 'This day is consecrated to Hermes and to Aphrodite, and for this reason it is excellent for setting up house.' In the poem to his *Conjugal Precepts*, Plutarch advises 'praying to the Muses that they may work together with Aphrodite, for it is their office to bring harmony to a union and to a household. That is why the Ancients joined together the images of Aphrodite and of Hermes (for the pleasure which springs from marriage can least of all pleasures dispense with speech) with those of Persuasion and the Graces, so that the consorts may agree each with the other by persuasion and without conflict.' This is a symbolic interpretation; the Hermes who with Aphrodite protected marriage was certainly not the divine discourser, but rather the god whom Pausanias saw still honoured at Cyllene in Elis¹⁰ in the form of an erect phallus.

Jessen supposes then that a phallic Hermes was invoked with Aphrodite as protector not exactly of marriage, but of sexual union. They made up a double god, similar to that figure, masculine in sex, feminine in attire, which we have at every stage of our argument

found associated with initiations, that is with the ceremonies of incorporation in the nubile group. Hermaphrodite thus appears at the close of a series which must have been very long, though we know only a few of its types from rites and especially from legends: the leaders of the Oschophoria, the Cretan Leucippe, Achilles, Heracles, Dionysos, Aphroditos, and Venus Calva. In old times this figure probably bore signs of a vigorous virility that later art attenuated. As for his name, it was created by analogy with the adjectives *androgynos*, *arrhenothelus*.

These compound words belong to a type that is very common in Sanscrit, rare in Greek, and still rarer in Latin. Indian grammarians call them *dvandva*, and modern scholars copulative compounds, for the two elements combine to make a whole in which they are the two opposite poles.¹¹ In an Orphic hymn Zeus is called *Metropator*, 'at once Father and Mother'. In the same way Christian theologians created *Theanthropos*, 'at once Man and God'; the *Huioptores* are heretics who affirm the identity of the Father and the Son. It is a striking fact that the only *dvandva* compounds current in Greek are *androgynos* and its converse *gynandros*; *arrhenothelus* which was applied to Dionysos; and *Hermaphroditos*, which was a proper name until common use made it an equivalent of *androgynos*. From this it would seem as though it was only between the sexes that a polarity existed which the Greeks were concerned to bring back to an essential unity.

As for Latin, religious and legal vocabulary have preserved some very rare copulative compounds (*ususfructus*; *suovetaurile*, the sacrifice of swine, ram and bull). There are more frequent examples of juxtaposition of terms (*condus promus*). We remember then that their religion had scarcely any double gods, but several pairs of twin gods who are in fact the equivalent of double gods. Linguistic development corresponds exactly with religious imagination.

These are the few facts that we know about a cult of Hermaphrodite:

An inscription of the beginning of the fourth century B.C., discovered in a suburb of Athens, mentions a dedication of a certain

Phano to Hermaphrodite; it is probably that of a very unpretentious chapel.¹²

Theophrastes wrote his *Characters* about 300 B.C. Here is what he says, among other things, of the Superstitious Man:¹³ 'On the fourth and seventh day of the month, he forbids his household to cook wine, then he goes to the market to buy myrrh, incense and cakes, and on his return* he spends the rest of the day in garlanding Hermaphrodites.'⁷

In the collection of Alciphron's letters¹⁴ Epiphylis confides to her friend Amaracine:

I had woven an *eiresione* of flowers which I was intending to offer to the Hermaphrodite of Alopece; but of a sudden I fell into an ambush prepared for me by some daring youths. The ambush served the desires of Moschion who, ever since I lost my poor Phedrias, has constantly pestered me with talk of marriage. For my part, I rebuffed him, both in pity for his youth and in loyalty to Phedrias. I little knew what awaited me: a marriage without ceremonies, in a ditch for a bed. In vain I drew round me my veil, whose thickness gave me as much protection as that afforded by the trees; I blush, my dear friend, to tell you what I was forced to undergo. Violence gave me a husband, very much against my will, but even so I have one. . . .⁷

Alciphron is a contemporary of the first Antonines, that is, a little later than Lucian. Like Lucian, he is an Atticist poet, and the society he described is believed to be that of Athens in Plato's time. If the young widow intended to honour the god, it was clearly so that she might find another husband. The piquancy of the passage lies in the fact that her prayer is at once answered, but quite otherwise than she wished, for Moschion, resolute lover as he is, is probably a poor match. Epiphylis brings Hermaphrodite an *eiresione* of entwined flowers: it is more than a garland, it is a composite offering by which a divinity is prayed to stimulate the growth of what is laid before his image. The complete form of the *eiresione* is the *may-branch*, a bough laden with flowers, fruit, cakes, wine and other symbols of abundance—the offering that Theophrates' Superstitious Man

* *εἰσελθὼν εἶσω στεφανῶν* is certainly corrupt, and one cannot conclude from this passage that there were several Hermaphrodites in one household.

makes, in a more or less complete form, to Hermaphrodite; the offering that the Cypriots brought to their Aphroditos. Epiphylis' letter supports Plutarch's comment on the protection that Hermes and Aphrodite accord to those about to be united. They are the gods not of marriage, but of sexual union. This confirms what we know of the images of bisexuality and of their significance in the initiations and nuptial rites of archaic times.

It has been supposed that the cult of Hermaphrodite was introduced into Attica during the Peloponnesian War by Cypriot merchants. Indeed, at the end of the century and throughout the next, a stream of foreign gods invaded Attica, entering by way of the Piraeus and spreading through the demes. The comic poets made much sport of these newcomers and the attraction they had for the superstitious. Aristophanes, in a lost play,¹⁵ mentioned Aphroditos; further, certain writers, among others Theophrastes¹⁶, identified Aphroditos and Hermaphroditos. But that his origin was foreign is a hypothesis resting solely on the important part that androgynous gods played in oriental religions, contrasting with their subordinate place on the outskirts of the Hellenic pantheon. No old tradition, no argument based on the cult, can be adduced to confirm this hypothesis. Hermaphrodite, son of two Olympians, is never mentioned among the imported deities. The only offering which to our knowledge was dedicated to him, the *eiresione*, is purely Greek. The Hellenes regarded him as a god of their own land, and this clearly appears when he is seen side by side with Priapus, with whom the Ancients often compared him.

Priapus came from the Hellespont, and seems to have reached Greece proper later than Hermaphrodite. He was simply a personification of the phallus, represented by a stump on which a head and virile organ were carved more or less roughly, and he probably supplanted more than one anonymous *daimon* who shared his characteristics. Although he was said to be the son of Aphrodite and Dionysos, and so enjoyed a certain prestige, he never became altogether a god. However, he was venerated everywhere as promoting fertility and abundance.

A fine statue in the Dresden Museum¹⁷ represents a tall veiled woman, leaning on the shoulder of Priapus, who is shown as an aged dwarf, bearded, wearing a pointed cap, and wrapped in a cloak under whose great folds one can half distinguish an organ of exaggerated size. Along his left cheek he lays the long forefinger of his right hand, as if the sculptor were using this symbol to stress the meaning of the figure. Such must have been the primitive Priapus, very different from the attractive young scamp of Hellenistic art. Yet if the sculptors made him into a pleasing figure, the writers never forgot that he was a monster. One legend attributed his deformity to the malevolence of Hera, who was jealous of Aphrodite. Another added that Aphrodite refused to rear her son, 'unwelcome, misshapen, and frightful', and exposed him. A shepherd took him in, and soon found everything prospering for him, his household, his farm-lands, and his stock. Here we see the ambivalence associated with the androgynous figure, protector of unions and births. But the child who is born with the signs of the two sexes is malignant, and condemned to death. Priapus brings fertility to gardens and cowsheds, yet parents would be horrified at a new-born child who resembled him. An idea may be translated into symbols, so long as they do not become so exact that they coincide with concrete reality.

For the rest, the Ancients have described the deformity of Priapus in several ways, sometimes making his phallus of monstrous size, sometimes placing it above his buttocks. A geographer of the second century B.C., Mnaseas of Patara, in a fragment of doubtful meaning¹⁸ confused Priapus with Hermaphrodite or, if we prefer to take the noun as an adjective, made him androgynous. This assimilation is by no means surprising. The artists at first portrayed Priapus as his worshippers saw him, that is, as the personification of virility, bearded like the archaic Dionysos, and even a little grotesque, for everything that touches on sex easily inspires laughter. Little by little they gave way to the temptation to beautify him, and at the same time to make him more feminine. He has the breast of a girl; he no longer wears the pointed bonnet or the fillet or crown of Bacchus, but the *mitra*; his long hair is drawn into a scarf. 'His nature', says Hans Herter,¹⁹ 'now embraces both sexes and contains

all the strength of a god.' That is, he has become identical with Hermaphrodite. And more than once Herter, studying some painting or drawing, has wondered whether it portrays Priapus or Hermaphrodite, and has hesitated over his answer.

Nevertheless popular belief tended to keep the individual traits of each figure distinct. The idea of the *Sondergott*, with clearly distinguished attributes like those of the saints in our own times, is an inborn part of country piety. Just because he was the phallus and nothing but the phallus, Priapus entered very much more than Hermaphrodite into the hopes and fears of the peasant, of the landowner, great or small. The phallus, which is still represented today at the door of Mediterranean farmsteads by a great yew, carefully trimmed, has a threefold quality: apotropaic, possessive, and fecund. As the principle of generation, of all abundance and prosperity, the Ancients portrayed it on tombs. Priapus was called Benefactor and Protector by the Greeks, and by the Latins Father, the Holy One, Mighty Friend. He was god of life and god of death, guardian of cultivations, enemy of robbers, and even, on occasion, protector of sailors;²⁰ and he had a place in everyday life that Hermaphrodite never attained, perhaps because Priapus had stripped him of some of his attributes. It is a fact that the two passages of Theophrastes and Alciphron which record a popular cult of Hermaphrodite are strangely isolated. And this apparent omission is all the more surprising since it occurs just when the myth of bisexuality was assuming increasing importance in Greek thought. So it would seem that Hermaphrodite, in face of Priapus who was so deeply involved in the toil of daily life, gradually retreated from that sphere, surrendered some of his offices, and returned to his original rôle as an archetype of religious thought. Priapus thus took over some of his functions, and certain aspects of androgyny.

Here is another paradox. While the concept of the double god is assuming particular importance in the philosophy of the time, poets and artists are moving in exactly the opposite direction. Refining Hermaphrodite as they had refined Dionysos, they succeeded in reducing the juxtaposition of the two natures to something so indeterminate that it amounted to a-sexuality. For the rest, in so doing

they were only following popular opinion, which found it easy enough to confuse the conditions which are now called intersexual. We find proof of this in the description of the philosopher Favorinus of Arles, a contemporary of the Emperor Hadrian who, says Philostratus,²¹ was androgynous (*diphues* and *androthelus*), beardless, wrinkled like an old man, with a high voice—in short, such as nature has made eunuchs'.

The same concept—the equation bisexual = asexual—underlies the story of Hermaphrodite as the nymph Alcithoe relates it to her sisters, in the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.²² From the love of Hermes and Aphrodite, she says, a boy was born. He received the name of his two parents and was brought up by the Naiads of Ida. When he was fifteen he began to travel, and went to Lycia, then to Caria, to the spring of Salmacis, near Halicarnassus. The nymph of the lake saw him, fell in love with him, and confessed her passion. Not knowing how to answer her, for she awoke no response in his heart, he kept her at a distance. Then, thinking she had left him, he bathed in the clear waters. At once she threw herself after him, 'seized him despite his resistance, snatched from him caresses that he would fain have avoided, clasped him in her arms, pressed herself to his reluctant breast, and, little by little, enveloped him in her embraces. . . . So does the ivy twine round the trunk of great trees; so does the octopus unfold his thousand arms to envelop his prey.' The nymph besought the gods, 'Command that nothing may separate him from me nor me from him'. Her prayer was granted. Their bodies were united in one body. In a double form, they were neither man nor woman: they seemed to have no sex, and to have both:

*Nec duo sunt, et forma duplex, nec femina dici
Nec puer ut possint; neutrumque et utrumque videntur.*

Then, in the waters he had entered as a man, finding himself now half woman, his members without strength, in a voice no longer manly he prayed his father and mother that every man who dived into that water should emerge like him, in the condition of a *semivir*; and his prayer was at once granted.

As in almost all Ovid's tales, unspeakably tedious passages overlie mythological elements chosen with surprising sureness. Bisexuality here, as one might expect, amounts not to an increase of powers but to a deprivation. Like Philostratus' Favorinus, Hermaphrodite becomes not a double god but asexual; and in retaliation he cursed the lake which was responsible for his metamorphosis.

The evil reputation of the Carian spring was not invented by Ovid. Ennius already knew of it,²³ and more than one geographer attempted to explain why it was known as *infamis*, and capable of destroying the energies.²⁴ It was probably supposed to make impotent, more or less temporarily, any man who plunged into it.

On the other hand, we do not know whether before Ovid any link had existed between these malignant properties and the origin of Hermaphrodite. Probably Ovid introduced new matter here. Greek legends unanimously represent the double god as the outcome of a birth, not of a metamorphosis; popular beliefs see him as a beneficent being, protector of sexual union, and by no means as a male diminished in his virility. A combined cult of Hermes and Aphrodite existed at Halicarnassus. The town had been transformed, extended and beautified by Mausolus, who succeeded his father Hecatomnos in 377, and to give the Caria of his dreams a worthy capital had transferred his residence there from Mylasa, where there was a cult of a breasted Zeus. Beside the spring was the tomb erected for Mausolus by his sister-wife Artemisia; we have seen more than once the affinity between androgyny and incest between brother and sister. If a Carian legend existed which linked the spring of Salmacis and the birth of Hermaphrodite, we may be sure that it gave to the metamorphosis less of a *privative* meaning than did the Latin poet. An Asiatic saw a *diphues* god with other eyes than a Roman of the classical age, for whom a *utrumque* could be nothing more than a *neutrum*, a *semivir*, something to be pitied.

Further, whatever the traditions on which Ovid drew, we are struck by the skill with which he discovered the essential themes of folklore connected with water. Like Goethe's fisherman, the young Hermaphrodite is indifferent to the song of the nixie; but Salmacis wins, as does Lorelei. Should we recall that the character of Lorelei

was in fact invented by Brentano, about 1800? It was Heine who, with his accustomed facility, made the story into a *Marchen aus uralten Zeiten*, and he was justified, for the attraction of water, especially the sexual attraction of *feminine* water, is part of the hidden depths of human belief. Ovid's innovations are of the same order as Brentano's and Heine's, and more admissible, since he at least did not make the mistake of setting his nixie on top of a rock. In the German tale, seduction was followed by death; in the tale of Hermaphrodite, by impotence, which is the litotes of death. Ovid's story includes too, an element that the others lack; a due feeling for the feminine, indeed the feminising, quality of water, into which it is delight to plunge. Nicolas Eloi Lemaire, an excellent Latinist and Professor of Latin Poetry at the Sorbonne, noted ironically: 'The whole passage is a sample of Ovidian fantasy', without suspecting that the time would come when the poet would be commended for having followed the paths both of folklore and of imagination, and for having anticipated the very significant elements that modern psychoanalysis has so well described.^{25*}

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The first studies on Hermaphrodite gave to iconography an importance that we now feel to have been exaggerated. Literary evidence was meagre, especially for authentic beliefs; on the other hand, statues are numerous, and the Pompeian paintings attest the popularity of the subject they illustrated.

And yet the study of them is very misleading. Many of these works are examples of *genre*-sculpture; the artist's aim is to please, sometimes to amuse, not to translate a religious emotion. None of the works preserved to us gives the slightest indication of what the primitive Hermaphrodite was, who was garlanded by Theophrastes' Superstitious Man, or the young widow of Alciphron. His very origins are obscure and his history, at the time when the cult is

* Much material on the images of water could be taken from the 15th book of the *Metamorphoses*, where the *obscaenae Salmacis undae* are to be found (319).

recorded, is no less so. Neither Praxiteles, who produced an Eros and a well-known Satyr, nor Scopas, ever represented Hermaphrodite. Pliny²⁶ speaks of a sculptor Polyycles who *Hermaphroditum nobilem fecit*. There were several sculptors of this name, following each other at intervals from the fourth to the second century B.C. Pliny does not specify which he means, and does not give a description of the statue to indicate which, among the types we know, goes back to an original by Polyycles.

Chronological classification of the surviving evidence tells us nothing. Most of the sculptures are copies of copies; a recent statue may go back to an original older than another statue which antedates the one we have. It is better, then, to classify them according to types, and to attach even more importance to *gesture* than to *form*. For a late work may have kept some trace of the conscientiousness which ensured that in an archaic work of art no detail was without its significance. A decadent age, whose taste is vitiated by *genre*-sculpture, tends to alter types; an attitude may preserve an ancient belief and take us back to a religious feeling that the artist himself no longer understood, though the symbolism he used was imposed on him by tradition.

Perhaps it is helpful, before we examine the types of Hermaphrodite, to extend the scope of our inquiry and say a few words about sexual dimorphism in Greek art.

The Cycladic idols often give no indication of their sex. When it is indicated (and it is almost always the female sex), this is done with a brutality that we sometimes feel to constitute caricature. W. Déonna was one of the first, I think, to give up the attempt to find a substratum of reality for monstrosities like *steatopygia* which, he says, is entirely conventional, simply a symbol of generative power. Exaggerations of the same kind, and of the same origin, are to be found in Cretan art. The Minoan serpent goddesses have small waists, and their heavy breasts swell out above their dress. The early artists were expressionists, anxious to convey every significant detail.

Greek art from its archaic period onwards, however, follows the completely opposite tendency. It dwells as little as possible on the

differences of structure between the male and female body. Certain critics have even gone so far as to claim that sculptors studied only male anatomy, that the portrayers of the *Corai* put feminine heads on draped masculine bodies (H. Lechat), that the goddesses of the Parthenon differ in no essential detail from the gods (P. Hertzl). Charles Picard, while he rightly stresses the feminine character of the *Corai* and the great classical figures, clearly points out the conventions which all tend to merge the two types.

The *Couroi* have, for men, small waists, salient buttocks, and well-defined pectorals. The *Corai* have narrow hips, hardly noticeable waists, and small breasts set wide apart; such is the Aphrodite of the Ludovisi Throne. The faces are so similar that even the best judges, confronted with a head detached from its body, are uncertain whether it is feminine or masculine. From the fourth century onwards the ideal form, which had until then been virile, becomes feminine. As for the works which go back to the time of Scopas, the mutilated statues leave much room for doubt. Modern authorities have more than once made mistakes, restoring an ephebe as a girl, or giving a beard to a feminine figure in a vase painting. What is perhaps even more curious is that sculptors and painters seem to avoid representing women as smaller than men, as would be normal practice. This is the case at all stages, and cannot be explained as an attempt of the sculptors to bring their faces to the same level; for in the *Electra* and *Orestes* of the Villa Ludovisi, where *Orestes* is a very young boy, *Electra* is half a head taller.

These conventions are diametrically opposed to those of Rubens, for example, who emphasises the contrast between the male body on the one hand, vigorous, muscular, tanned to an ochre shade by open-air life; and on the other the female body, pink and white, soft and plump. It all seems, in fact, as if the Greek artists, from the end of the archaic period to the beginning of the decadence, had had before them the ideal of a human body showing as few signs as possible of sexual dimorphism, as if an androgynous figure had haunted their imagination.

That is why, among so many youthful figures (*Satyrs*, *Eros*, *Himeros*, *Pothos*, *Hypnos*, *Plutos*, *Triptolemus*), and so many

indeterminate deities (Dionysos, Apollo and Aphrodite of Cyrene, Anadyomene whose statue in the Museo delle Terme so strikingly resembles the torso in the Louvre which is said to be of Apollo), the authentic Hermaphrodite appears simply as an idea carried to its final stage.

A number of monuments represent him: statues and statuettes in bronze and marble, low reliefs and vases and sarcophagi, Pompeian paintings, gems. Only painted vases are totally lacking, and their absence is greatly to be regretted, for the chances are that they might have provided us with early and easily interpreted evidence.

How should we classify these monuments? The virile type of the standing god is probably older than the feminine, reclining type, strongly influenced by fourth-century aesthetics. All the indications are that the first type goes back to the school of Praxiteles. 'The sculptors of this time', writes Salomon Reinach, 'aim at the realisation of a kind of synthesis in which the beauty of man and the beauty of woman blend into one. Under different names, they portray Hermaphrodites; and it is not surprising that the type of Hermaphrodite itself dates from this time. . . a pensive, sensual ephebe, similar to Dionysos and Eros.' Sometimes Hermaphrodite is simply one of these fourth-century adolescent gods; sometimes we find him surrounded by motifs which are elsewhere associated with Aphrodite, the Maenads, the Nymphs or Priapus. And then we have to decide on which side the borrowing has been: has a motif of foreign origin been adapted to Hermaphrodite or, on the other hand, has he influenced other related figures? Each case must be studied separately.

Dr. Paul Richter, who as an anatomist has devoted a scholarly and detailed study to Hermaphrodite, stresses like Reinach the androgynism which permeates all Greek art, especially fourth century works. He groups the surviving statues according to two different morphological conceptions: 'The first, which is perhaps over-simple, consists in bestowing the attributes of the male on a female body with well-developed characteristics. The second and more interesting is the merging in an extraordinary synthesis of the two types, virile and feminine.' 'The Greek sculptor must have had an extraordinary

knowledge of human morphology to realise this improbable blending of the masculine and feminine types, which was, so to speak, the culmination and the magnificent display of knowledge slowly acquired but extraordinarily complete and profound.'

This is the judgment of an anatomist, convinced that the starting-point of the sculptors was real facts furnished by experience. Our point of view is quite different, since for us the figure of Hermaphrodite is a pure symbol, transferred at a late date from the realm of imagination to that of concrete reality. In the works which chance has preserved for us we search for signs of a religious attitude of mind. That is why, paradoxically, our attention is directed mainly to what is not itself bisexuality, but surrounds it and forms its setting. Unfortunately, even the most minute study produces infinitesimal results.

The fine Hermaphrodite of Berlin (Fig. 1) is a Hellenistic or Roman replica, in marble, of an original in an admirable style, which might well go back to the beginning of the fourth century, that is to a bronze statue of Polyctes the Elder. The young god is standing, naked, his head covered with a folded piece of material. Another cloth falls over a pitcher at his side. This allusion to the bath is frequent too in representations of Aphrodite; should it remind us here of the spring of Salmacis, or the nuptial bath? The god's right hand is raised, and holds a broken handle, probably that of a thyrsus. At first sight the body would seem to be that of an adolescent boy, if the breasts were not delicately moulded. The layman might say that the Apollo Sauroctonus is hardly more virile, the Aphrodite with the apple in the Munich Glyptothek a little more feminine. The closer study of Dr. Paul Richer reveals deeper complexities:

The width of shoulders and hips is intermediate between that of man and woman.

On the broad pectoral of a young man are outlined the breasts of a girl.

The belly, especially the sub-umbilical region, is essentially feminine. On each side are the well-formed flanks of a boy, but it ends in a young woman's pubis, below which are attached male organs, broken, but indicating only a slight development. The secondary transverse fold of the groin continues into the

sub-pubic fold, which is a feminine characteristic, but the semi-circular fold of the abdomen, another feminine characteristic, is lacking.

The lumbar region is intermediate between man's and woman's.

Finally, the high, prominent buttocks could as well be those of a girl whose sexual development is still incomplete as of a young boy.

Hospitals can put at a doctor's disposal records of more or less ambiguous beings which are obviously related anatomically to the Berlin Hermaphrodite. Dr. Richer may find himself wondering whether the Greek artist really invented the type of the androgynous god, or whether he had done no more than copy intelligently examples which he had seen round about him. We can provide the answer. A Greek or Roman would recoil in horror from a living being who was genuinely bisexual, or send the monster to the stake.

The bisexual figure springs from the human mind, and is rooted deep in the unconscious. When it took definite shape, some artists succeeded in transferring it to concrete form with a skill and subtlety which are clearly revealed by Dr. Richer's analysis, but which we may be sure owe everything to observation of normal beings, and nothing to pathological anatomy.

Copies of the Hermaphrodite of Berlin still exist. In a similar style we have a fine vase fragment (marble, Museo Barraco); an androgynous youth, portrayed in low relief with infinite delicacy and perception, holds a thyrsus, and turns back towards the figure which followed him in the dance. He is preceded by an Eros holding a lighted torch.

These two figures bring together a Dionysiac symbol, the thyrsus, and a nuptial symbol. Hermaphrodite is not a god of marriage considered as a contract, but he is protector of unions; and in the archaic initiation ceremonies which marked entry to the nubile group he was represented allusively by transvestism. The only two animals that we find associated with him are the goose, a phallic symbol, and the panther. Though the panther was masculine in Greek, the female of the species was believed to be more fiery and resolute than the male, and was, in fact, regarded in some sort as an Amazon. So it is

not surprising to find the animal associated with divinities who were more or less bisexual: the Great Mother and, above all, Dionysos.²⁷

The Roman fragment may give us the key to the attitude of the god in another statue, the charming Epinal Hermaphrodite, who turns his head over his shoulder to look at his bare back. This is the same gesture as that of the Aphrodite Callipygos of the Naples Museum. Salomon Reinach points out that this statue of Aphrodite is unique, whereas the Hermaphrodite *respicens* is preserved in numerous replicas, among others a crude low relief on the funerary monument of a Gallo-Roman family, now in the Museum at Sens. W. Déonna made the opportune suggestion that this is not an example of mere vulgar sensuality, but of a magic act whose meaning still escapes us. It may be supposed with Reinach, however, that the motif passed from Hermaphrodite to Aphrodite. And I can myself easily believe that its origin is simply a Bacchic dance, like the one depicted on the Barracco vase, where the god turns round to the figure that follows him in the dance, with a gesture that is often used by satyrs. In fact, the Hermaphrodite *respicens* of Sens, standing in a forced attitude on a base of leaves, does seem to be holding crotala. His gesture would seem, then, to have no religious significance; but, on the other hand, to be evidence dating from a fairly early period, the mid-fourth century, of the important kinship between Hermaphrodite and Dionysos. Statues, reliefs, gems, and above all the Pompeian paintings, are proof of the popularity of the subject. Satyrs, Sileni, Fauns, and Priapus himself, surround the androgynous god, surprise him sleeping, and unveil him. The brutal and vulgar eroticism of some pictures has perhaps distracted our attention from the primitive meaning of the subject. The thyrsus-bearing Hermaphrodite of Berlin, and the Barracco relief, expressively emphasise the affinities between the two gods, one essentially androgynous, and the other, overflowing with virile strength, whom the old poets call the *man-woman*.

Beside these adolescent figures, the Hermaphrodite of the Villa Albani is an adult. Though the artist keeps the nobility of the type, we feel that he has juxtaposed the two natures with the smugness that was soon to ruin the subject. Nothing that has survived allows

us to form an exact picture of the primitive Hermaphrodite. But it is probable that in the beginning he was vigorous and full of meaning, like his father Hermes and his brother Priapus, and forcefully represented the richness of the two natures superimposed in him, before he became merely good-looking like the Berlin Hermaphrodite, then graceful, then more and more feminine. This is the road followed by all Hellenistic art. The Paris Hermaphrodite, resting one hand on a phallic herm and stroking the hair of a young Pan with the other, is purely feminine. The same can be said of the reclining Hermaphrodites and, at the end of the series, of the sleeping Hermaphrodites, well known from the famous replicas at Paris (Louvre, from the Villa Borghese), Rome (Villa Borghese, Museo delle Terme), the Hermitage (from Hadrian's Villa), the British Museum, Florence (Uffizi), not to mention the one discovered at Florence in 1879, in the ruins of a Roman house. It is probably, says Reinach, a variant of a theme well-known in literary tradition, of the Bacchante exhausted by running and falling on the ground. In the same way, the sleeping Hermaphrodite surprised and unveiled by a curious Pan—a subject which appears on engraved stones, low reliefs and paintings—may be simply a transposition of the Maenad taken by surprise. The borrowing would be yet another proof of the abundance of affinities between the androgynous god and Dionysos.

The popularity of the sleeping Hermaphrodite has led several critics to see in him the *celebrated* statue of Polycles, who would thus be one of the artists of that name who worked in the second century. This identification cannot be accepted without question. In the passage where Pliny mentions the Hermaphrodite *nobilis*, he quotes only ancient artists and bronze-workers. The sleeping Hermaphrodite is a work full of sensuality which, as we see it, must have been conceived in marble, and for the taste of a decadent age. And *nobilis* is not just a synonym of *notus*, but stresses the *distinguished* character of the work, its outstanding beauty. Why should we not follow Furtwängler, who nevertheless hesitated before adopting this theory, and recognise the Hermaphrodite *nobilis* in the Berlin statue, whose author may well have been Polycles the Elder?

Among the numerous Hermaphrodites engaged at their toilet—a favourite theme in the Pompeian paintings—we must make separate mention of a curious work in which, behind a naked Hermaphrodite attended by two servants and a little Eros, a bearded figure, in long feminine clothes, offers him a looking-glass.²⁸ It has been suggested that this is the Cypriot Aphroditos. But a god would have been given a more prominent place in the composition. I would prefer to think that we have here one of the worshippers of Aphroditos who celebrated his feast by donning the clothes of the opposite sex.

On some monuments Hermaphrodite, in the manner of Priapus, carries fruit in a fold of his tunic or offers a fruit to a bird.²⁹ In the symbolic winnowing-basket, besides cakes in the shape of sexual organs, were placed fruits to represent fertility and abundance. Behind the trivialities of a decadent art we come here upon an archaic significance.

The same may be said of an attitude of Hermaphrodite which was considered immodest until careful studies showed the meaning of *unveiling*, or of a gesture which is in a way its litotes, since it serves to focus attention on the part of the body which is unveiled. The revealing of the sexual organs had a double purpose, both positive, to stimulate the powers of life, and prophylactic, to ward off evil forces. 'The gestures that cover or reveal', says Charles Picard, '—sometimes both covering and revealing at the same time—are in keeping with the old taboos and superstitions of belief in Mediterranean lands. Renewing them, and interpreting them freely in the different spirit of each successive age, the Greek classics made them into constantly changing beauty; nevertheless they ran a serious risk of helping to bury the primitive sacred purposes in oblivion.'³⁰ We should remember these words when we see a Priapus, an Atys, or a Hermaphrodite in the attitude of *anasyrma*, pulling up his tunic to the waist to reveal his nakedness. Was the sculptor of the figure still aware of the magical value of the gesture—the grave and pious gesture of the mysterious Lady of Auxerre whose right hand points to her breasts? In view of the lascivious expression of some figures of Priapus, it would be easy to believe that this does not come into the question at all. And yet look at the Hermaphrodite of Paris or of

Stockholm, who are both pulling up their tunic.³¹ The second especially has a strange nobility. The full, broad torso is not that of a girl, but of a matron. The head is crowned by a high *calathos*, or carries a basket of fruit. A term takes the place of the legs, and this accentuates the symbolic character of the gesture. The two hands lift the peplos up to the waist to reveal the sexual organs. The figure has the form and gravity of a Demeter. Nothing is more disconcerting than to see it using the most impudent gesture of the shameless Baubô—a gesture particularly offensive in the Paris Hermaphrodite whose legs are not sheathed in a term but sculptured and, says Dr. Richer, admirably modelled.

It is not impossible that the Ancients themselves, once they no longer understood the gesture, found it offensive. A marble statuette in the National Museum at Athens, now mutilated, shows a Hermaphrodite who unveils himself by letting his garment slip from his right hand; the material, partly caught up on the left shoulder and arm, leaves the torso bare as far as the upper part of the thigh. It is a fine work; the head, now missing, must have been serious in expression. A falling garment must have seemed to the Ancients, as to us, less shocking than a garment that was pulled up; and the inventor of this variant did not know that he had no reason to be shocked. Yet he still kept the essential part of the gesture, the *unveiling*. 'It seems', says W. Déonna,³² 'that pagan art in its decline was nearer to the primitive symbolism than the art of Greece at the height of its maturity: perhaps we must admit that oriental influences to some extent brought back to their origin the old themes whose meanings had become somewhat obscured in classical art. . . .' 'Gallo-Roman art restored to their original meaning the motifs that it received from Greece and Rome; Eros, Psyche, and Aphrodite once more became fertility gods.'

Perhaps this is the case with Hermaphrodite. Contact with the East, where understanding of the bisexual gods was kept alive by numerous images, perhaps preserved some degree of exactness in values which would have been quickly degraded by the excessive ingeniousness of the artists, if they had been left to themselves. Priapus is the god of gardens. His worshippers were aware of the

immediate archaic significance of the *anasyrma*. Hermaphrodite seems to have remained a protector of sexual union. Beyond the indications furnished by rites and legends of transvestism, we have evidence in the letter of Alciphron, and in the Barracco relief, where he is associated with a torch-bearing Eros. We should know more about it if we were better informed about the places where these statues were erected. Certainly some were out of doors, enclosed in small chapels. An epigram in the *Palatine Anthology*,³³ by an unknown author, is supposed to have been inscribed on a statue serving as a sign for mixed baths:

For men I am Hermes, and Cypris for women; I bear the symbols of my two parents. That is why I have been set up, a child of equivocal nature, in these baths where come both men and women (*androgynois loutrois*).

These establishments had a bad reputation, and the patronage of Hermaphrodite probably had ironical value. But the mere allusion implies a connection with physical union, even if morally reprehensible.

To what extent did the Greeks' conception of love influence the idea of the androgynous god? The god seems to us to result from a concept and a body of aspirations in which eroticism played no part. But things take on a different aspect if we pass from the genesis of a religious creation to its elaboration. All the evidence is that paedophilia strongly influenced all Greek art, from its archaic phase to the turn of the fourth century when Praxiteles created 'the ideally graceful type of the ephebe, Apollo, Dionysos or Eros, indefinite in form, beautiful with the double beauty of man and woman', says Louis Couve. Of this type, as we have pointed out, Hermaphrodite is simply the final development. A homosexual dream expresses itself without shadow of doubt in these ambiguous forms. In the past which men were forgetting, the image of the double being had been a symbol of abundance, richness, a promise of eternity. At the very moment when Greek thought was finding its way back to these meanings, the artists, it would seem, lost interest in them, and were concerned only with gratifying a kind of sensuality that was universal and unquestioned by the morality of the age. Their statues and

paintings are marked, to a greater or lesser degree, by a certain complacency. The Pompeian frescoes often sink to the depths of vulgarity. The *respicientes* (from the satyrs to Hermaphrodite, from Hermaphrodite to the Callipyge of Naples) convey more than one meaning in the glance. In the reclining figures, an all-enveloping sensuality displays itself without discretion. As for the figures of the standing god, they are the more disturbing as the opposition of characteristics normally felt to be incompatible is the more stressed. The very insistence of the artist betrays the frivolity of his art; for him, the subject is no more than a game of skill, an opportunity to gratify unhealthy fancies and to pander to tendencies in his public completely foreign to primitive feeling, for which the union of the sexes was the survival of the race.

1. Pliny, *Natural History*, VI, 15 and 16, 35 and 36
2. Livy, XXXI, 12; see also XXVII, 37
3. Diodorus of Sicily, XXXII, 12, fragment preserved by Photius
4. *Palatine Anthology*, IX, 602
5. Jessen, *Hermaphroditos*, col. 718
6. Harpocration, under *Psithyristes*
7. Vitruvius, 2, 8
8. Pausanias, II, 19, 6
9. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 800
10. Pausanias, VI, 26, 5
11. H. Usener, *Zwillingsbildungen*, *Kleine Schriften*, IV, 334-56
12. Kirchner, *Ath. Mitt.* LXII, 1937, p. 7
13. Theophrastes, *Characters*, chap. 16
14. III, 37; II, 35, ed. Schepers
15. Aristophanes, frag. 702, Kock
16. Hesychius, under *Aphroditos*
17. Herter, *De Priapo*, pls. II and III
18. *Fragmenta Historiarum Graecarum*, III, p. 155, frag. 35
19. Herter, *De Priapo*, p. 21
20. *Palatine Anthology*, X, 1
21. Philostratus, *Sophists* I, 8
22. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 285-388
23. Ennius, fragment 11
24. Strabo, XIV, 2, 16; Vitruvius, II, 8; cf. Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXI, 36
25. Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves*, especially pp. 123, 171
26. Pliny, XXXIV, 80 and 52
27. O. Keller, *Thiere des griechischen Altertums*, pp. 149, 151, 289
28. Couve, *Hermaphrodite*, fig. 3822
29. Reinach, *Statuaire*, I, 367, 4; VI, 16, 1, 2, 3; Herter, *De Priapo*, 128

30. Charles Picard, *Manuel arch. gr.*, 4th century, Part I, p. 567
31. Reinach, *Statuaire*, I, 372, 4 and 6; 371, 2 and 7; cf. V, 79, 3, 4, 5
32. W. Déonna, *loc. cit.* p. 32
33. *Palatine Anthology*, IX, 783

CHAPTER FIVE

*The Symbol of Androgyny in the
Philosophical Myths*

Musaeus, it is said, was the first to make a theogony and a sphere. He taught that all things come from one, and are resolved into one and the same.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Proem*, 3

WE must now pass on from the rites and cults to the speculations on cosmogony which, at the end of Antiquity, interpret a common aspiration towards unity, a dream of regeneration and eternal life, an attempt too, to reconcile the idea of a God who is necessarily perfect with a reality which is not. In Stoic philosophy, and then to a much greater extent in gnosticism, in the revelations of Hermes Trismegistus, in the mystical commentaries on the writings of the classical philosophers, in magic, and finally in the teaching of the alchemists, the figure of Hermaphrodite frequently appears, with values ranging from an exact image to pure abstraction. The very cursory summary with which we end this volume can only be a sketch of this vast subject.

I. ORPHISM

The poets whose works claimed to be a revelation of Orpheus seem to have been the first to take the idea of the androgynous being in a half-real, half-symbolic sense. Unfortunately these texts are

difficult to date, and their authenticity is often suspect. Besides a collection of hymns, dating probably from about the third century A.D., by a single, unknown poet, the texts consist largely of quotations from various sacred books by Neoplatonic writers and Christians eager to support their own doctrines by the authority of Orpheus who, at this time, was regarded as pre-eminently the sage, earlier than Homer and Hesiod who were thought to have plagiarised him. Commentators reading the texts in this spirit will have no hesitation in making the freest possible use of them, or even on occasion interpolating them.

Yet however corrupt the surviving versions may be, the ideas are old. A dream of primordial unity, of regeneration and return to unity, is expressed by the image of the bisexual being divided into two, of the egg breaking to give birth to the world, of the cauldron-matrix in which the members of Zagreus, hewn in pieces by the Titans, are boiled to be born again, of the pyre which consumes the Phoenix: all symbols which were to dominate the mysticism of waning Antiquity.

Aristophanes in the *Birds* (415 B.C.) celebrates a cosmology which, of course, establishes the pre-eminence of winged creation:

At the beginning were Void and Night and Erebus and Tartarus. But Earth was not, nor Air, nor Heaven. In the abysmal womb of Erebus, before all things, Night produced a clear egg, whence, in due time, sprang Eros the longed for, pinions of shining gold on his back. . . . It was he who, commingling with the dark, winged Void, brought forth our race and gave it before all else to the light of day.¹

We have noted in Hesiod traces of primordial androgyny, though they are by no means expressly stated; the existence of neuter beings (Chaos, Erebus), and of feminine beings (Night and Earth) who procreate unaided before the series of divine marriages begins. There are the same implications in the myth of the *Birds*, in which the poet has adapted Orphic traits to suit the perspective of his play. Chaos and Erebus exist before the world. Night creates unaided an egg without germ (the exact significance of this escapes us), whence springs Eros, whom the Greeks of all ages represented as herma-

phroditic. The ancient poets shed no light at all on the archaic value of this representation of him; yet to us it is clear that it expresses an aspiration towards a divine *Urkind*, whose powers are not as yet differentiated. Later the dream of a primordial unity is expressed with more exactitude, and there appears at the beginning of life, a pledge of eternity, a double being born from an egg, symbol of growth and totality. In an Orphic cosmogony summarised in the fourth century B.C. by the Peripatetic Eudemus, an egg is the embryo of the world, and the two fragments of its broken shell become Earth and Heaven.²

'According to Orpheus' says the Christian Rufinus, writing in the fourth century A.D. (frag. 55, 56), 'in the beginning was Chaos eternal, immense, uncreated, from whom all is born; neither darkness nor light, nor damp nor dry, nor hot nor cold, but all things mingled, eternally one and limitless. The time came, when, after infinite ages, in the manner of a gigantic egg, he caused to emanate from himself a double form, androgynous (*masculofeminam*), made by the conjunction of opposites.'

This picture resembles at first that drawn by Anaximander of Miletus, about 550 B.C. Religious poet and philosopher—which influenced the other? Or are they both expressing a common *archi-type* of the human imagination? The confused state which they describe is a perfect picture of the unconscious.

The Androgynous Being which issued from the egg has various names, all synonymous: Phanes, Protogonos, Erikepaios, Metis, Dionysos. We have quoted Hymn XLII, in which Dionysos is identified with Mise, both androgynous. Erikepaios, like Phanes, is said to be 'woman and begetter and mighty god'.³ In Hesiod, Metis is the first of Zeus' lovers, whom he swallows when she is pregnant with Athena. A poem quoted by Proclus⁴ identifies her with Phanes, both of them being male and female, as also is Adrasteia,⁵ *causa genatrix* of all things. Phanes is of wondrous beauty. He has four eyes and two faces; on his back he has golden wings, his voice is that of the bull and of the lion. At his birth, the abyss below was sundered from the ether. He created sun and moon, mountains and towns, and the mansions of the gods whose first king he was.⁶ There came a time when Zeus swallowed the bisexual god, and this episode

reconciled an Orphic theogony with the current belief in the supremacy of Zeus. So Zeus became the great One, such as he appears in the *Orphic Hymn* which we know from several quotations, among others the *De Mundo* attributed to Aristotle:

Zeus appeared first, Zeus will continue last, lord of the thunder.—Zeus is head and middle, all things come to pass through him.—Zeus is the bed of the earth and of the starry heaven.—Zeus is male, Zeus is the immortal wife.—Zeus is the breath of whatever breathes, impulse of the unwearying fire.—Zeus is root of the sea, Zeus is sun and moon.—Zeus is king, director of all things.⁷

From this point onwards we have to follow, with varying degrees of confidence, three roads where we shall find different aspects of a single problem—the problem of the relationship between Orphism and other currents of thought.

1. The Orphic cosmogonies are so laden with symbolism that it is a temptation to regard them as lacking popular beliefs. But a papyrus of the third century B.C.⁸ names Erikepaïos, apparently in association with Demeter and Dionysos; a dedication to Dionysos Erikepaïos⁹ was discovered in Lydia. Moreover, Suidas has a curious note on Phanes and Erikepaïos:

In the Orphic poems these two names appear with several others. Phanes had his sexual organs placed above the buttocks. He was said to rule over the power of procreation.

This brings Phanes into close relationship with a popular conception of Priapus, who was himself often identified with Hermaphrodite; and his rôle is that of the androgynous Venus Calva of the Romans, the rôle which we can guess to have been that of the Greek Hermaphrodite too.

2. Critics who have studied the Hymn to Zeus have found in it, side by side with older elements, the *influence of the philosophers* and especially of the Stoic allegories which translate a conception of the world and the gods into biological terms.

But we must make a distinction. Unlike the ancient poets who set Ouranos over against Ge, the Stoics saw in Zeus the synthesis of the fertilising God-Heaven and the fertilised Earth, or of Helios and

Selena; in other words, they considered Zeus as co-extensive with the whole universe. About 100 B.C. the poet Valerius Soranus wrote:

Juppiter omnipotens regum rerum deumque,
*Progenitor genitrixque deum, deus unus et omnis.**

That means, says Varro, that Jupiter is the world, that all seed comes from him and returns to him.¹⁰ Chrysippus (third century B.C.) said that Zeus-Ether is all things and that, remaining ever the same, he is at once Father and Son. There was a danger that these metaphors might be taken literally, for at this time, after having seen a little cosmos in man, thinkers were beginning to look for a magnified projection of man in the world around. So Chrysippus and his disciples cautioned their readers against too literal an interpretation of allegorical bisexuality; it is ridiculous to give a human form to gods and, what is more, impossible; there are no male and female gods; masculine names are given to the powers of action, feminine names to the powers of increase. And if it is said that some gods have the two sexes, it is because they are regarded as male in action, as female in potentiality. Many commentaries have repeated this explanation, without succeeding, in all probability, in uprooting the picture of physical bisexuality which Orphism had helped to popularise; for example this late oracle which Father Festugière quotes, in which Zeus is thus addressed:

'Thou art father, and lovely mother, and tender flowering of children, idea among ideas, soul and breath, harmony and number.'¹¹

An image of autogenesis derived from Orphism by way of gnosticism, allusions to Plato's *Ideas*, to the Stoic *pneuma*, to the mathematical harmonies of Pythagoras—all these are associated with the combined and, indeed, synonymous symbols of bisexuality and reversion: the double being fertilises and engenders himself. The bird Phoenix is to become the chosen image of this: androgynous,†

* Gods potent Jove both *sire and mother* call,

Of all things, kings and gods, god one and all.

† The literature of the philosophers always uses the terms *male and female* or *male-female*. The adjectival use of the word *hermaphroditos* is only secondary. As for *androgynos*, it was early degraded to the pejorative sense of *gynandros*. By the same process that we have seen in the legend of the double god, it slipped from *utrumque* to *neutrum*.

autopator, at once father and son and therefore eternal, because always capable of re-engendering himself. These are exact images, similar to those of Orphism, which define something quite different from the symbolic bivalence of the gods of Stoicism.

3. Those who consider the double gods to be foreign to Greece (K. Beth, Norden) have no difficulty in finding analogies in the *oriental cosmologies*. Every religion has played with the idea of primeval confusion like that of the beginning of *Genesis*, where God separates before he begins to create. A primordial androgynous being symbolises then the union of what is complementary, and the original unity to which the world will perhaps one day return. The Chinese synthesis of the *yang* and the *yin*, the two principles held in balance; the Hindu couple Purusha-Prakriti, 'as big as a man and woman enclasped'; the bisexual character of infinite Time (and perhaps even of Ormuzd) in the teaching of the Zervanist magi: all these parallels suggest possible influences less than unchanging elements of human dreams. A Chaldean cosmology of which Berosus gives an account,¹² places at the beginning of things water and darkness, whence were born monstrous beings, men half animal and others who were double, with a single body but two heads, one masculine and one feminine, and with both sexes. Then came Bel who created Heaven and Earth by separating the mingled elements. Similar images are to be found in Empedocles, whence they passed to Lucretius.

Philo came upon them both in Greek tradition and in the two versions of the creation of man which are given in *Genesis*. That is why he distinguished man, fashioned from earth, composed of body and soul, male or female and mortal,¹³ from man in the image of God,¹⁴ pure intelligible who combines the ideas of the two sexes but is not androgynous. As the Stoics did for God, so Philo for the human archetype passes from the *utrumque* to the *neutrum*. From the verse of the Bible, 'Male and female created he them', the Talmud, on the other hand, drew the doctrine of primitive humanity as bisexual, which passed into Jewish mysticism, as well as into Arabic esoterism, in which the unity Adam-Eve represents universal man.

II. PLATO

We must now go back to a great myth which has both date and signature.

About 385 Plato wrote the *Symposium*, which is thought to have taken place in 416. Some friends are attempting a definition of love, and five speakers describe it, not inaccurately but incompletely. Aristophanes then intervenes and tells an extraordinary story which must be read in its entirety,¹⁵ but which may be summarised in these terms:

In the beginning, humanity consisted of double beings, spherical, with four arms and legs, and two identical faces, back to back on a circular neck. They had double sexual organs too, either masculine or feminine, or one male and one female. The first kind proceeded from the Sun, the second from the Earth, the third from the Moon, which shares something of the nature of the other two heavenly bodies. These beings were of extraordinary strength and vigour, and their pride was such that they took it on themselves to find fault with the gods. To bring them to their senses, Zeus decided to cut each one through the middle, charging Apollo to turn their face with the half of the neck in towards the cut, so that man might be more restrained, having ever under his eyes the sign of his punishment. So Apollo brought the skin back on what is now called the belly, tying the edges in a knot at what is now the navel.

Thus the cut had divided each natural being into two. Then each half, sighing for its other half, sought to rejoin it; enclasped one with the other, aspiring to become a single being once more, they ended by dying of hunger, without succeeding in uniting, for the sexual organs were on the outside; then Zeus, yielding to pity, placed these organs where they are today, and so allowed human beings to unite and to procreate.

Each of us, therefore, is the half of a single thing; as a result, each of us is constantly searching for our complementary fraction. Those men who come from a mixed being are lovers of women, and the women of men. As for the women who are a section of a feminine being, they pay no attention to men, but their inclination is towards women. Finally, the man who is a section of a male being seeks out males. . . . If one of them

chances to find the half from which he has been separated, he is possessed by feelings of intimacy, kinship and love, so much so that he refuses to let himself be parted from the other, desiring to mingle with his beloved so that their two beings may again make one.

Percival Frutiger¹⁶ has convincingly shown that the fable of double men is by no means a genesis myth to explain the origin of humanity, or the origin of love; it is rather 'simply the projection into an imaginary development of the different kinds of eroticism considered as a given fact'. Yet the apologue rests on an image so deeply rooted in the unconscious that it is impossible to deny it a cosmological value of its own. This value is proved by the error of Eusebius of Caesarea,¹⁷ who thought that Plato had read *Genesis*, but had misunderstood it, and had as a result attributed to Aristophanes a fictitious story corresponding to the severance of Eve from Adam. Another piece of evidence comes from Maimonides (twelfth century), who says that Adam and Eve were created together, back to back, then separated. He explains thus *Genesis*, II, 23: 'Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'; but it is Plato who provides him with the image. For Greeks of the Classical age, the apologue woke still other echoes. In the Orphic poems, an egg is broken in two to form heaven and earth; what is true of the universe may well be true of the microcosm. Phanes and Priapus have their sexual organs where the satyrs have a horse's tail. Gods unknown to Homer pass for male and female, particularly the Moon,¹⁸ which is here the origin of mixed couples. These spherical beings, moving by rotation, remind us of the formless, circling world described by Anaximander. Empedocles too¹⁹ imagines nature groping and raising from the earth monsters, 'beings with two faces, two breasts, men with bulls' heads, mixed beings with a man's form here, a woman's there, with sexual organs concealed in darkness', who die out because they cannot unite. In this system Philotes rescues life, as Eros in Plato's system, by causing men and women to accomplish together the work of reproduction. Lucretius has the same image (though he owes it to Empedocles, not to Epicurus) of the earth throwing up monsters with strange limbs, some androgynous, some lacking arms or legs,

or dumb or blind, their limbs stuck to their sides, incapable of movement. After their disappearance came beings capable of uniting to perpetuate their race.

Konrat Ziegler has attempted to draw up a genealogical table of these cosmogonies. According to this, a Babylonian Genesis of which traces are found in Berosus is the origin of both the Hebraic and Orphic versions. The Orphic influenced both Empedocles and Plato. Ziegler's derivation assumes *a priori* that the religious texts influenced the philosophers; yet the contrary is quite as possible, and sometimes more likely. Further, he considers the myths that we have reviewed as inventions whose origins can be dated; today we see them rather as sequences of images which are the heritage of all of us and make up our common unconscious.

III. GNOSTICISM AND HERMETISM

The theme of androgyny plays an increasingly important part in mystic literature. The Stoics stressed the purely allegorical character of divine bisexuality, for isolated teachers like Philo reminded men that the conception of the superhuman can only be asexual; yet a strong movement of the imagination, which had long been held in check by rationalism, substituted dreams for reasoning. The spirit of mythology no longer created legends, but instead cosmologies in which the image constantly reappears of the One and Complete Being, capable of dividing into two complementary parts which come together to procreate. The divine marriages in the theogonies of the poets were something quite different; a god procreated, with the help of a partner either immortal or human, a new being who lived his own life while his parents went on to fresh unions. In the philosophic mythology of gnosticism, it is the world that constitutes itself, represented by cosmic Ideas, half incarnate. Magic and alchemy make use of the same symbolism, directed towards concrete realisations. Alchemy is a double system, a regeneration realised through the purity of the soul, matter and world all united. Jung has clearly shown that the alchemists were guided by the same images that direct our dreams when we try to bring order into the confusion of the unconscious. Mystic literature of the time of early Christianity

could be examined in the same way. Symbols abound in it; they have been closely studied for the conscious ideas they claim to interpret, but it is questionable whether these ideas are not, after all, of less interest than the unconscious which can be traced like filigree behind them.

The theme of androgyny appears with values ranging from the translation of a concept into simple allegory to a real evocation permeated with sexual affectus.

'The pythagoreans' [says Iamblichos], 'call the monad not only God, but Intelligence and male and female. Inasmuch as it is the germ of all things, they define it as male and female, because it is conceived as being mother and father. . . . As for the germ which, once sown, can produce males and females, it shows indivisibly the nature of both, up to a certain point in its evolution; only when it begins to become the fruit of animal or plant does it admit of separation or differentiation, for it has then passed from potentiality to action. They call it too the receptacle of all seminal reasons or Chaos, that is, Hesiod's Chaos the first-born, from which all else springs, as from the monad.'²⁰

So an image borrowed from the classical theogony is given an 'Orphic' value, designated by a Platonic term (receptacle), and associated with an Aristotelian formula and an observation of nature. This last point is unusual. The Ancients wrote of the hyena, one year male and the next female, of the mandrake, the unicorn, and the one-horned scarab, self-generating like the serpent and dragon, and of the sex of stones. Far from drawing inferences from reality, they project symbols on to it. Even the bisexual character of most plants does not seem to have contributed anything to their symbolic representation of the double being.

With the Neoplatonists, the representation remains allegorical. The god makes use of the four elements to create a cosmos that is male and female, i.e. complete, as is also the divinity. Commenting on a passage in which Plato advises simply that women's nature should be harmonised with men's, Proclus admires this concord between the sexes, and adds that 'in the case of the gods, they are so interfused that the same being may be said to be male and female,

like the Sun, Hermes, and others'.* But in gnosticism symbols cease to be the servants of reason, and it was in part as a result of this that oriental influences found their way in. Father Festugière sought in the past of Greece the origin of the key representations. In the case of androgyny we have already discovered this, and in very different contexts. Asiatic parallels may confirm it, but we have no reason to think that the Greeks ever considered it as an importation.

The god of gnosticism is the generator, not the maker as was the god of the *Timaeus* and the Neoplatonists. The starting point of generation is not a first couple, but one Principle, intelligible or above intelligence, whose emanations descend in a series of steps to the multiple and the sensible. At the top of the ladder is a male and female power, dividing itself into a syzygy which in its turn procreates.

Such a picture stands out from the fine gnostic text (the oldest we have, and the best known) with which Father Festugière prefaces the *Corpus Hermeticum*,²¹ although the revelation is there attributed not to Trismegistus but to the sage Poimandres. An androgynous *Nous* sends forth a demiurge *Nous*, god of air and fire, which have already become separated from the rest of the *Physis*. The demiurge creates the spirits of the seven spheres which in their heavenly courses encircle earth and water and determine Destiny. Then the first *Nous* produces its favourite son, the First Man, like to itself, that is, bisexual. Man detaches himself from his father, and passing into the world of the demiurge, leans out over earth and water and delights in them and in the reflection of himself. *Physis* embraces him passionately and gives to the world seven androgynous beings corresponding to the seven planets. These men become the leaders of the peoples, whose gods are the lords of the planets and of destiny. When the time was accomplished, the *Nous* decided to divide the double beings into male and female, whom he ordered to unite and multiply.

Does this final image come from Plato, as Father Festugière thinks,

* Hippol., *Refutation of Heresies* (ed. Wendland, 1916, IV, 43, 8) considers this doctrine to be Egyptian; Proclus, *Comm. on Timaeus*, 18c.

or from Genesis, as Reitzenstein believed?²² Similar questions arise for other gnostic cosmologies.

Simon Magus admits an *arrhenothelus* Dynamis which divides itself into upper and lower, procreates alone, increases alone, seeks for and finds itself; its own mother, its own father, its own brother, its own consort, its own son, Mother-Father, Unity that is root of all.²³ It is tempting to think of the Heraclitan polarities which make God Day-Night, Winter-Summer, War-Peace, Superfluity-Hunger.²⁴ But Heraclitus conveys totality by the synthesis of opposites, without attaching any particular importance to the images of generation which, however, obsess the gnostics.

For the Ophites or Naasenes, a first being unites in himself the Spirit-Father and maternal Matter, whence proceed the Cosmos and the Man Adamas corresponding to it and likewise androgynous. The castration of Attis symbolises the journey towards the eternal, superior essence where is no longer male or female, but a new creature, male and female.²⁵ The Perates, who follow the Ophites, consider the sea as male and female.²⁶ Valentinus admits at the beginning an *autopator*, which includes an All in a state of rest and unconsciousness; it is called Eon, eternally young, androgynous.²⁷ Marcion has the same vision of a Father who is neither male nor female.²⁸ The Docetae saw all Eons as male-and-female.²⁹ In the *Perfect Discourse*, of which we have only a Latin translation wrongly attributed to Apuleus, Trismegistus instructs Asclepius:

‘God has no name or rather he has all names, since he is at once One and All. Infinitely filled with the fruitfulness of the two sexes, he gives birth to whatever it pleases him to procreate.

—You say then that God possesses both sexes, O Trismegistus?

Yes, Asclepius, and not only God, but all living beings, and vegetables. . . .³⁰

Such a God, eager to procreate, dominates the XIth treatise too:

‘God has one work only, which is to bring all things into being. . . . If thou wouldest understand him through thine own experience, mark what passes in thee when thou desirest to procreate. Truly, God experiences no pleasure of the senses and has no partner. As he works alone, he is always immanent in his work, being himself what he produces.’³¹

We have come a long way from the abstract, rational androgyny of the Stoic gods. Here a pantheist is dwelling with satisfaction on the image of a double god, whose carnal and sexual importance he understands with an exactitude which is lacking in the Orphic poems.

IV. THE PHOENIX

Both pagan and Christian mystics in the first centuries A.D. share the same aspirations, translated by the same symbols and images. Some of them prefer to the word *arrhenothelus* more involved but nevertheless equivalent expressions: *autopator*, *autometor*, *autogonos*, *suus pater*, *suus heres*. Whether affirmed or suggested, bisexuality, the power of infinite self-perpetuation, is synonymous with *ananeosis*, the perpetual youth associated with the image of the Great Year. Lactantius expresses this in his poem on the Pheonix bird, which dies only to be reborn on the pyre he has prepared for himself:

'O fortunate fate, O happy death that God gives to the bird to be born of himself! Happy being, whether male or female or neither one nor the other, who knows nothing of the bonds of Venus! His Venus is death; death, his only love. In order to be born, he aspires to die. He is his own son, his heir, his father. He is he and not he, the same and not the same, winning through death an eternal life.'

The androgynous character of the Pheonix was well known to the Ancients, since the poet Laevius, in the time of Sulla, gives to Venus (of whom he speaks in the masculine) a feminine Phoenix as companion. But the leaven of mysticism in the last years of Antiquity was needed to give full value to this legend, in which immortality has a double meaning: the Phoenix has both sexes, and receives the regenerating baptism of fire. Either one of these two traits would have been enough. The presence of both of them, with the symbolic beauty of the image—a bird flying out of the earthly pyre towards the Sun and the East—combined to make the Phoenix the symbol of the dogma of individual resurrection. His androgynous character came to symbolise for the Christian doctors a state similar to that of the souls destined to rise from the dead, set free from the flesh, 'who

know nothing of the bonds of Venus', as Lactantius says, expressing in his own manner an idea which he shares with Philo and more than one gnostic. It is an image accepted by the Pelagians and by some orthodox scholars, such as St. Zeno of Verona, but fiercely rejected by St. Augustine.³²

The rationalist doctors made every effort to dissuade Christians from taking pleasure, 'in the manner of Orpheus and Hermes', as Lactantius says,³³ in the representation of the deity as male-female, autopator and autometer; yet more than one pious effusion retains traces of it. Firmicus Maternus in the fourth century wrote a great treatise on astrology, and the fifth book, on *The Horoscope*, begins by this appeal to God:

'Whoever thou art, who day by day dost uphold the earth in its swift course and dost govern the sea . . . thou father and mother of all things, thou who art to thyself father and son in virtue of the one bond of necessity, we raise our hands to thee as suppliants, even as we expound the effective courses of thy stars. May strength to interpret them come to us from thee.'

Firmicus was still a pagan when he wrote this work. Yet his prayer would not have offended the Christian Lactantius, author of the *Phoenix Bird*, or Bishop Synesius, the converted Neoplatonist who, at the beginning of the fifth century, wrote hymns in which he addressed God thus:

'Thou art father and thou art mother,—thou art male and thou art female,—thou art voice and thou art silence,—nature begetting nature.—Thou art Lord, age of ages,—hail, root of the world,—hail, centre of all things,—unity of the divine numbers, hail to thee, hail to thee, for joy is God's.³⁴

Unity and totality,—unity of totality,—unity existing before all things,—seed of all things, root and terminal branch, nature among intelligibles, male and female nature, . . . of thee I sing, monad,—of thee I sing, triad.—Thou art monad, yet triad; thou art triad, though monad.³⁵

V. MAGIC AND ALCHEMY

The aim of magicians is to bring into their service a synthesis of forces representing a powerful totality. That is why they so frequently invoke god-goddess couples, often artificially composed, or why they

attribute the quality of androgyny to the god they invoke: Cronos, Hecate. The alchemists' system is more coherent; spiritual heirs of gnosticism, they look for the regeneration of the world not from God, but from their own *opus*; this *opus* has two aspects, one material, the other psychic, each a representation of the other. By dint of constant meditation on the creative process, their thought has found its way back to the archetype of androgyny, which yet has no part in the Christianity which they all practice, and with which they are not in conflict.

The *prima materies*, corresponding to the synthesis Heaven-Earth, Spirit-Body, is hermaphroditic; it contains all metals and all colours, and engenders itself. That is why the Philosopher's Stone, which is often identified with it, is represented by a crowned Hermaphrodite. The *Adam philosophicus* too is bisexual, even though he appears in masculine form, for he carries with him, hidden in his body, his wife Eve. That it may be realised in the mystic alembic, the work requires the synthesis of contraries, fire-water, sun-moon, high-low. The union of brother and sister symbolises this return to primordial unity; that is why the *artifex* who seeks to realise it is often helped by his *soror mystica*.^{*} Hermetic literature considers the three superior planets as masculine, the inferior as feminine, except Mercury, who is hermaphroditic. Hermes is the Very Great god of waning Antiquity, one of the poles of attraction of the currents of monotheism. The seventh planet appears, then, at the centre of the six others, symbol of the Psychopompus and of the *filius hermaphroditus*. Born in the alembic, or issuing from the mystic flower,

^{*} Here we cannot fail to call to mind the many points of contact we have noted (pp. 4, 18, 20, 22, 54) between androgyny and incest of brother and sister. In his *Manuel d'ethnographie* (re-ed. 1947), Marcel Mauss, after proving that in primitive societies marriage does not create kinship, but derives from it, adds this: 'Incest is often the rule between king and queen; the king marries his sister to preserve the purity of his blood. The king and queen are at the beginning of things; at the beginning there is the incest of Earth and Heaven, and this must be reproduced.' Two explanations are superimposed here; the first implies a line of reasoning, the second the magic of an original totality which must be reconstituted. Jung, *Wurzeln des Bewusstseins*, p. 81, note, derives the theme of incest from the archetype of Hermaphrodite.

or from the blue sapphire of the hermaphrodite, Mercury admirably represents the alchemists' androgynous being. Dissociated as brother and sister, he is reconstituted by their union; he is quick-silver, the liquid metal which dissolves gold and has the virtue of regenerating it; he is the play of colours in the peacock's tail, and the division into four elements. He is the serpent devouring his own tail, and dies to find rebirth as the *lapis philosophicus*. He is sometimes represented as a tall youth with feminine breasts, sometimes as a naked girl called *Mercurius philosophorum*. Two symbols are associated with him, the Phoenix and the *Rebis*.

The Phoenix comes from classical Antiquity and, says Jung, symbolises increase and growth; eternity too, we might add, since he is autopator. In a fine woodcut illustrating the *Alchymia recognita* of Andreas Libavius (Frankfort, 1601), the processus of the alchemists is represented as a pyramid. Dominating Mercury, Water and Fire, the mystic animals, is the Sphere, which includes the King-Gold and the Queen-Silver, the whole construction topped by the Phoenix burning on his pyre, while gold and silver birds fly out from his ashes. A synonym of the Phoenix is the androgynous Ouroboros, begetting himself, sacrificing himself.

As for the *Rebis*, it was invented by the alchemists to signify the two-headed hermaphrodite, made up of the Sun and the Moon, directing the planets, and Chaos too, which he tramples underfoot.

C. G. Jung has authoritatively described in this primitive hermaphrodite an archetype of human dreams; but it is not clear why he took the name of Hermes. Was the prestige of the Trismegistus coloured by the images which the name of Hermaphrodite suggests, while in the background something still survived of the old worship of the magical and phallic Hermes? The evolution is very far from clear.

I cannot trace here, as Halley des Fontaines attempted to do in his *Contribution à l'étude de l'Androgynie* (1938), the story of an image through the works of medieval and modern thinkers. Their dreams, no longer concerned with gods but with humanity, follow in the wake of Jewish mysticism, imagining chosen beings, like the

bisexual Adam before the Fall, in whom at the end of time the unity of the days of Eden was to be restored. It was for thinking thus that Amaury of Chartres was burnt at Paris in 1205. Similar doctrines are to be found in the works of Paracelsus (1493-1541) and Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), of a mystic like Antoinette Bourignon (1616-1680), in an irreverent Utopia like the *Terra Australis* of the unfrocked Franciscan Gabriel de Foigny (1676), in several German romantics, and in Auguste Comte. Some could influence others of them, and be familiar with rabbinical doctrine. But Antoinette Bourignon, who was quite uncultured, had read nothing beyond the Gospels. It was in her own unaided imagination that she found the architype of an androgyny at once primitive and final, regretted and desired. As for Boehme, he described Adam in Paradise as a *männliche Jungfrau*, so bringing us back again to the image of the *virile girl*, the Cretan Leucippe, who was the starting-point of our study.

1. Aristophanes, *Birds*, 693 f.
2. O. Kern, *Orphicorum fragmenta*, 28
3. *Ibid.* frag. 81 and 98
4. *Ibid.* frag. 85
5. *Ibid.* frag. 54
6. *Ibid.* frag. 72, 76, 78, 79, 89, 91
7. *Ibid.* frag. 21a, cf. 168
8. *Ibid.* frag. 31
9. Guthrie, *Orpheus*, p. 99
10. Augustine, *City of God*, VII, 9
11. Porphyry, *De philosophia ex oraculis Haurienda*, II, 164
12. Eusebius, *Chronicle*, I, 14
13. *Genesis*, II, 7-22
14. *Ibid.* I, 27
15. Plato, *Symposium* 189E-193D
16. Perceval Frutiger, *Mythes de Platon*, p. 196
17. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel*, XII, 12
18. Orphic Hymn, IX
19. Empedocles, frag. A72, B57-63
20. Iamblichos, *Theological Principles of Arithmetic*, 4, 17; see Father Festugière's commentary, *Révélation d'Hermès*, IV, p. 43
21. See too *Révélation d'Hermès*, III, introduction
22. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 1904
23. Hippolytus, *Refutation*, VI, 17, 3; 18, 2-7
24. Diels, frag. 67
25. Hippolytus, V, 8, 1-5; V, 6, 5; V, 7, 12-15
26. *Ibid.* V, 14, 3

27. *Ibid.* VI, 29, 35
28. *Ibid.* VI, 42, 4
29. *Ibid.* X, 16, 1; VIII, 9, 2
30. *Corpus Hermeticum*, II, 20, 21, trans. Festugière
31. *Ibid.* I, XI, 13
32. Hubaux and Leroy, *Mythe du Phénix*, p. 5, n. 5
33. Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, IV, 8, 4
34. Synesius, II, 63
35. *Ibid.* III, 80

APPENDIX

Female Saints in Masculine Clothing

ON October 8 the *Acta Sanctorum* celebrate the feast of St Pelagia, whose story is told in these terms:

Pelagia, a dancing-girl at Antioch, was a beautiful prostitute whom the people called Margarito, from her jewels. She was converted by Nonnus, an ascetic in the rule of St Pachomius, was baptised, and with the consent of Nonnus assumed a garment of haircloth. She went to Jerusalem where, in a narrow cell on the Mount of Olives, she did penance under the name of *frater Pelagius monachus et eunuchus*. Worn out by her austerities, she died after three years.¹

One has only to glance through the *Acta Sanctorum* to find parallels to the legend of Pelagia; the stories of Margarita and Marina are very similar.

Margarita, the daughter of noble parents who had already betrothed her, held marriage in such horror that she fled from the nuptial chamber in man's dress, her hair cut off, and took refuge in a monastery under the name of Pelagius. Such were her qualities that she was elected prior of a nunnery. The portress became pregnant and accused the prior, who was expelled. Margarita went to live in austerity as a hermit in a cave where, before she died, she revealed to the abbot her true sex and her innocence.²

Marina was the daughter of a Bithynian called Eugenios who, being widowed, wished to enter a monastery. Marina persuaded him to cut off her hair and take her to the monastery where, under the name of Brother Marinos, she remained after her father's death. From her high voice and beardless chin the monks assumed that she was a eunuch. An inn-girl in the neighbourhood found herself pregnant and accused Marinos of seducing her. Driven out of the monastery, Marina led a life of penitence, and at the same time brought up the child which the girl's father had thrust into her arms. Finally the abbot was moved by pity and readmitted her; she performed the humblest tasks until the day when she was found dead in her cell; the girl confessed her lie.³

Hermann Usener was much struck by these stories. He added to them the legends of Anthusa and Porphyria, and pointed out that the names of all these saints were reminiscent of the Greek or Latin epithets applied to Aphrodite—Sea-born, Pearl-bearer, the Flower-decked, the Purple. These names, together with the theme of transvestism that runs through all the stories, convinced him that in the female saints disguised as men traces survived of the bisexual Aphroditos of Cyprus, to whom women sacrificed in men's clothing and men in women's. He sees too a memory of Aphroditos in the bearded female saints, Galla, Paula and Wilgeforte, who are attested all over Europe.⁴ It is an attractive theory, but open to several objections.

In the first place, the names which attracted Usener's notice are only rare literary epithets of Aphrodite, and the dates of the feasts correspond very loosely, though they should be exact if the legends really sprang from the Cypriot cult.

Moreover, rites of bisexuality involve reciprocal transvestism. We have noted above

- (a) several legends of boys dressed as girls (Achilles, Leucippos, Hymenaeus, Dionysos);
- (b) some legends of girls dressed as boys (Leucippe, Procris);
- (c) a number of rites in which priest and worshippers put on women's clothes, supposedly in imitation of their god (Heracles of Cos, the Roman Hercules Victor, the Dionysiac train);

(d) a few questionable traces of rites where the officiating women assumed masculine attributes (Lacedemonian feasts of Artemis).

In fact, apart from 'carnivals' which included a reciprocal exchange (Hybristika of Argos, Cypriot cult of Aphroditos), the most frequently recorded case is that of men in women's clothes.

Hagiography, however, presents a very different picture. Here we find only women dressed as men, never the reverse. This encourages us to seek an explanation in the images of bisexuality, certainly, but not at the same level as the rites of Classical Greece. A complete list of female saints in disguise confirms us in this approach.

As early as 1916, L. Radermacher pointed out that the 'theme of Pelagia' reappears in the legend of Thekla, who left her mother and her betrothed, cut her hair, and dressed in man's clothing to follow St Paul. There is nothing to connect Thekla with the Cypriot Aphroditos. Unfortunately Radermacher restricted the problem by considering the saints in disguise as replicas of a heroine of the *Ephesiaca*, Thelxinoe, who loved Aigialeus but was being compelled to marry another suitor. Aigialeus took advantage of the Lacedemoian marriage rite in which the *nympheutria* shaves the bride's head and lays her on the marriage bed, where the bridegroom comes to her in darkness. He disguised himself as the *nympheutria* and abducted Thelxinoe, who was disguised as a man. On the same basis Father H. Delehaye thought that the story of Pelagia had been invented to give piquancy to the tale of a courtesan of Antioch mentioned in John Chrysostom's Homily, LXVII. After her baptism this woman lived for many years in a hair-shirt, allowing no one to see her. According to Father Delehaye this voluntary prisoner became Pelagia, and all the others are but literary copies of her.⁵

But how can a theme of such rich and sustained psychological value be reduced to the dimensions of a mere literary contrivance? It is surprising that Hippolyte Delehaye, quite independently of Radermacher, should be content to dismiss the women saints in men's clothing as a theme of Eastern folklore, a romantic variation of the story of the converted courtesan. If that were so, should we see the theme appearing in history with exactly the significance that attaches to it in legend? Usener, Radermacher and Delehaye were primarily

concerned to discover the origin of a strange theme; they did not stop to examine its significance; even less would it have occurred to them to mingle history and legend by a comparison of Thekla and Pelagia with real women nearer to our times, such as Joan of Arc or the French mystic Antoinette Bourignon. And yet nothing better brings home the value of certain symbols than to see them recorded in both legend and history, and showing psychological characteristics that vary neither with the centuries nor the setting.

These characteristics can be brought out by a straightforward inventory. Besides Pelagia, Margarita, and Marina, we must mention:

- ATHANASIA OF ANTIOCH.⁶
- EUGENIA OF ALEXANDRIA.⁷
- APPOLLINARIA.⁸
- EUPHROSYNE OF ALEXANDRIA.⁹
- MATRONA OF PERGÉ.¹⁰
- THEODORA OF ALEXANDRIA.¹¹
- ANASTASIA OF CONSTANTINOPLE.¹²
- PAPULA OF GAUL.¹³
- HILDEGONDE OF NEUSS NEAR COLOGNE.¹⁴

In the legend of Thekla¹⁵ and Glaphyra,¹⁶ the disguise is only temporary, designed to further their plans for escape.

Finally, let us consider the historical figures.

Joan of Arc assumes a man's clothing, and it is an understatement to say that she keeps it till her death. *It is the cause of her death.* When we see the importance of this transvestism in the act of accusation, we feel that her judges would have been sadly embarrassed if she had proved less obstinate and had deprived them of the grounds for this charge.

The mystic Antoinette Bourignon, born at Lille in France in 1616, was still very young when she experienced ecstasies in the course of which she fainted. The Lord said to her: 'Be more manly; I am pure spirit, insensible to the flesh.' Her parents wished to force marriage on her, and so on Easter Day 1636 she left Lille in a hermit's habit which she had made herself. As she journeyed on painfully, her feet bruised by her heavy peasant's shoes, some soldiers recognised her

as a woman. She was lodged in a village, in the mayor's house, where an officer tried to violate her. The village priest concealed her in his house, and summoned the archbishop, who pointed out to her the dangers of a hermit's life and the mistake she had made in assuming that garb. Later she wandered through Belgium, Holland, and the north of Germany, preaching wherever she went, but never giving her adherence to any form of orthodoxy. Her many religious works were published at Amsterdam soon after her death in 1680.

Joan of Arc, burnt and then canonised, and Antoinette Bourignon, the poor unsuccessful saint, certainly had sisters too who behaved like Thekla and Pelagia. These two examples are enough; taken in conjunction with those we have already noted, and with the tales of the bearded female saints, they provide grounds enough for an analysis and some conclusions.

* * * * *

Are the Greek legends based on reality?

That they appear so highly improbable might well be the fault of the storytellers who have over-embellished them. In an age when there were eunuchs, when some Christians mutilated themselves in an excess of fervour, it would be possible in an extreme case for a woman to be mistaken for one and as such to live the life of an anchorite; in any case she would quite as well be able to do so if she claimed to be more than she was. In this case, there is no motive for the transvestism. It is just as pointless where it is a question of monastic life, and, what is more, unimaginable in the real world. The legends show some hesitation over the connivance of the superior. Sometimes the saint conceals her true sex from the abbot, and is welcomed by him; sometimes she misleads him, then undeceives him and persuades him to yield to her arguments. The authors' efforts to give a reasonable explanation of the transvestism vary in proportion to their romantic treatment of the subject. One penitent takes refuge with the monks because her parents would search for her anywhere else. Another is fleeing the pursuit of the emperor, or escaping from her husband. Only once does the abbot rebuke the penitent and recall the injunctions of St Paul: 'Every woman praying

or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head: for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. . . . For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels. . . . Doth not even nature itself teach you that . . . her hair is given her for a covering?¹⁷ She exculpates herself by saying that she always avoided letting her hood fall back when she went to communion.

None of these abbots seems to remember the injunction in Deuteronomy: 'A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the Lord thy God.'¹⁸ Unhappily for Joan of Arc, the doctors of Rouen had better memories.

There is no hint of blame in any of the stories for the women who behave with such complete disregard of discipline. Despite their apparent humility, they all consider themselves to be above the law. Several of them pay dearly for rejecting their femininity, but none regrets her choice to the extent of revoking it. The oldest stories certainly concern hermits, and not monks. And it is true, as Louis Duchesne has said, that the anchorite is in himself a living criticism of ecclesiastical society. But the compilers of the *Lives*, who were too close to see the position in perspective, failed to realise this. On the other hand they could, and logically they should, have censured the imprudence of the abbots who were ready to accept these women in disguise, and have judged still more sternly the women who led their superiors into error and the brethren into temptation. Not only do the compilers never do so, but in three of the legends the false eunuch attains a high position in the monastery: Margarita is given charge of a convent of nuns, Eugenia becomes provost, Papula is elected abbot. In comparison with these stories, the legend of Pope Joan seems both the development of the theme to extremes, and a satire on the whole *genre*.^{*} But here we leave the monastery for the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and that is an entirely different world.

^{*} The first literary versions we know date from the middle of the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth century the story was accepted everywhere, and at the beginning of the fifteenth the bust of Pope Joan was included among those of the pontiffs in Sienna cathedral. Pius II, Pius III and Marcellus II,

In all these stories, the transvestism denotes *breaking with a former existence*, which may be a life of sin, as in the case of Pelagia; or a man's shameless pursuit; or a marriage already consummated; or a betrothal on the point of being solemnised, as for Thekla; or, finally, the pressure of parents wishing to marry their daughter against her will, as in the stories of Eugenia, Euphrosyne, Joan of Arc, and Antoinette Bourignon.

This breaking with a former existence is underlined by a greater or lesser degree of hostility in family relationships. Thekla has no bitterer enemy than her mother. The judges of 1431 rebuked Joan of Arc for her *impietas erga parentes*: she had known nothing but misunderstanding and ill treatment at home. Antoinette Bourignon had a hare-lip, and her mother could never overcome the repulsion she felt for her ugliness.

In a number of the saints' lives a change of clothing bears a

all of Sienna, took no exception to it, and it was Clement VIII who had it refashioned into the likeness of Pope Zachary. The legend probably derives from a misinterpretation of various customs and monuments, chief among them the *porphyretica*. This was an ancient chair with a notch in the seat, which was used for enthronements, and to which an imaginary use was attributed: *ubi dicitur probari papa an sit vir*. This invention produced another, namely that the test had been made necessary by the imposture of a woman. The arguments of Döllinger on this point and several others are convincing.¹⁹ But the elaboration of the story can only be fully explained by reference to the legends of female saints in disguise. These women entered monasteries, from which eunuchs have never been excluded. But eunuchs are and always have been excluded from the *secular clergy*, where the slightest physical defect entails exclusion. Thus a woman-abbot is, strictly speaking, imaginable; a woman-pope is not. So her adventure has to end in failure; but for the failure to meet the requirements of our moral judgment, blame must attach to the woman. So the narrator makes her leave the monastery to follow a monk, and at the end give birth to her child in the street and die in shame. Here we find the themes of the *Lives* again, but now *reversed*: guilty passion takes the place of chastity, and Pope Joan, far from escaping from her feminine state for ever, is overcome by nature, and in the most shameful fashion. And yet, in spite of her sins and the final retribution, Joan appears in most of the stories as pious and learned, going to Greece in her search for education, founding schools, gathering disciples. She is throughout a kinswoman of Eugenia and Catherine, their sister in spite of her presumption and her condemnation.—I do not think that her legend has ever been brought into line with those of the female saints in disguise, which are, however, designed to throw light on it both by analogy and contrast.

symbolic value. At the time of her conversion Thaïs burns the finery that was the price of her body. Baptism of fire and stripping, both initiation rites, appear together in the legend of St Catherine of Bologna. St Perpetua in a dream sees herself borne into the amphitheatre, stripped of her clothes, and changed into a man; here the symbolism is particularly clear, even though secondary themes mingle with it.

Of all the instances of change of clothes, the most striking suggests a change of sex. There hagiography has rediscovered an archaic rite, even though strangely distorting its meaning. In ancient initiation ceremonies, boys cast off a feminine garment and so renounced whatever in their childhood had been feminine. Here, young women renounce their own sex to become, as the biographers smugly put it, *eunuchs*. We cannot find this surprising, since already in Ovid we have seen that androgyny and a-sexuality are synonymous.

A similar renunciation is explicitly formulated in the stories of bearded female saints. Several studies have been devoted to the origins of this tale, which was inspired by figures of Christ in a tunic, in crucifixes such as the *Volto Santo* venerated at Lucca since the twelfth century.* For anyone to have seen a woman's figure here, there must have been a very strong contrast between this archaic fashion of representing Jesus with impassive face and open eyes, crowned and wearing a long robe, and the increasingly realistic and pathetic forms of Christ naked but for the *perizonium* round his loins, his expression tortured, his eyes closed, and his forehead lacerated by the thorns. The interpretation of the *Volto Santo* as a woman gave rise to several legends, which are listed here, in ascending order of romantic elaboration:

1. Galla, daughter of Symmachus, was a Roman widow who was unwilling to marry again. The doctors warned her that the excessive heat of her body, deprived of outlet, might cause the growth of a beard, and this in fact came about. *Sed sancta mulier nihil exterioris*

* Bibliography in H. Delchaye, *Légendes hagiographiques*, 3, p. 103, n. 4; J. Gessler, *La Vierge barbue, sainte Wilgeforte*, Brussels 1938, considers that the legend originated in the Low Countries in the fifteenth century.



deformitatis timuit quae interioris sponsi speciem amavit. She died of a cancer of the breast.²⁰

2. Paula, a virgin of Avila, who was being pursued by a suitor, threw herself at the foot of a crucifix and implored Christ to disfigure her. Her prayer was immediately granted: *barba agrestis enata, frons distorta, genae foedatae.* Her suitor passed by without recognising her.²¹

3. Wilgeforte (*virgo fortis*) was the daughter of a pagan king of Lusitania who threatened to marry her to the king of Sicily in spite of her desire to remain a virgin. At her prayer Christ caused her to grow a beard. Furious at her resistance, her father had her crucified. Thenceforward she was called *Liberata*.²²

The cult of the bearded woman saint spread through western Europe, but its value was everywhere preserved unchanged. The beard, like the masculine dress, denotes renunciation of sex. In the stories of Galla and Paula the aetiological theme of the crucifixion has not yet appeared, and the renunciation is symbolised by the cancer of the breast and by the altered face which went unrecognised by the suitor. The crucified bearded saint is the *Liberated*—St *Livrade* in France, *Librada* in Spain (altarpiece and tomb in the cathedral at Sigüenza), St *Débarras* at Beauvais, *Ohnkummer* in Germany, *Ontcommere* in Flanders, *Uncumber* in England—and these names were responsible for extensions to the legend; in England it was said that the saint helped women who wished to disencumber themselves of their husbands. Disfigurement by a beard has the same value as the leprosy with which St Enimia prayed to be stricken *ob virginitatis custodiam*,²³ or the mutilations undergone by St Lucy who tore out her own eyes or St Eusebia who cut off her nose. Further, the transformation is accompanied by bitter hostility towards the family, a hostility still more marked in the superstitions of popular hagiography.

* * * * *

Antoinette Bourignon was uncultured, but she might have read stories, or heard them told from the *Golden Legend*, of Margaret,

Thekla, and Eugenia, who put on the garb of a hermit to escape from their family. She must have found pleasure in them. Her father was a brutal despot. Her mother did not love her, and ill-treated her. Psychoanalysts are only too familiar with the neuroses which an anti-maternal complex can produce in a daughter. They are often manifested in a rejection of sexual life; C. G. Jung summed them up in a striking phrase—*Alles, nur nicht wie die Mutter*.^{*} For Antoinette to disguise herself as a hermit was the height of absurdity, if it is considered as a ruse to pass unnoticed. But for her it was a great deal more than that: it was a symbol, whose vital significance and importance are proved by her subsequent career. She taught later that God created man at once male and female, capable of self-reproduction like the plants; it was sin that brought about our fall from that ideal state, and inflicted on us copulation and woe. Her biographers say that she saw in a trance the beauty of the world and of Adam before the Fall. These dreams go beyond the meaning implicit in the other legends of saints in disguise, for in them rejection of sexual life is seen as an aspiration to an androgyny transcending sin. As we have seen above, a similar image, and with the same value, re-occurs in gnosticism and in Jewish mysticism.

* * * * *

Is it permissible to think that the last word has not yet been said on Joan of Arc, and that Thekla and Pelagia can still throw some light on her?

In the rehabilitation suit, in 1455, her former comrade Jean de Metz declared that it was he who, in January 1429 at Vaucouleurs, had suggested that she put on men's clothing, and she accepted, whereupon he gave her the clothes and shoes of one of his *famuli*.[†] On her

^{*} C. G. Jung, *Von den Wurzeln des Bewusstseins*, Zurich, 1954, p. 109. On Antoinette Bourignon, see Salomon Reinach, *Cultes, mythes, religions*, I, p. 421, and the thesis in Swedish of John Björkhem, Uppsala, 1940, pp. 38 and 390.

[†] Supporting evidence comes from Poulengy: J. Quicherat, *Procès . . . de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1844, II, p. 436; the rehabilitation suit fills Vols. II and III; for the Rouen trial, see P. Champion, *Procès de Condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1920-21; Vol. I, text, Vol. II, translation (often somewhat free).

return from Nancy, some of the inhabitants of Vaucouleurs had masculine accoutrements made for her; she cut her hair short and Baudricourt gave her a sword, later replaced by the one from the church of St Catherine at Fierbois, when she went into Touraine.

Ten times at Rouen she was questioned on this point. She never put forward the simple commonsense argument that masculine garb was more practical, but wrapped herself in mystery, giving answers, on 22nd and 27th February and 12th and 14th March, which the charge translates accurately enough: 'The said Catherine and Margaret commanded this woman in the name of God to take and wear the dress of a man; and she wore it and still wears it, obstinately obeying the said command, to the point of declaring that she would rather die than give up the said dress; sometimes saying that and no more, and sometimes adding: unless God commands it.'²⁴

Joan's answers about her resumption of feminine dress while she was in prison are very indefinite. At the beginning of the trial she asked to hear mass, and had been refused in view of the crimes of which she stood accused and the unseemliness of her attire. On 15th March she was presented with the alternatives: to put on women's clothes and hear mass, or to keep her masculine clothes and not hear mass. She wavered: 'Assure me that I shall hear mass if I am in women's clothes, and then I will answer you.' 'I assure you.' 'And what say you if I have sworn and promised to our king not to abandon this dress? Nevertheless, have a long dress made for me to go to mass and then when I return I will put on again the garb that I have.' The act of accusation of 5th April and the admonition of 2nd May state an exact fact when they say that Joan gave up mass and Easter communion rather than change her dress. Her refusal was perhaps engineered by her judges, who set store by this major charge. But one thing seems certain: never once did Joan put forward the utilitarian argument—that masculine dress, more practical for a woman-soldier, was also better fitted to protect a woman prisoner, guarded by men, although in truth the complicity of her warders was such that anyone might have done her violence, whatever her costume. Everything indicates that the dress was for her purely symbolic,

but of the highest importance. At her abjuration she put on a woman's dress brought by her confessor; on 24th May, at the revocation, she resumed her former costume which had been left with her in a sack, probably to tempt her; it is only then that she gives as her reason *sibi magis conveniens habere habitum virilem dum erat inter viros*.²⁵

Three of the members of the 1431 tribunal, the notary Guillaume Manchon and the Dominicans Isembart de la Pierre and Martin Ladvenu, testified in 1450 to having heard her complain that she was outraged while in prison. This is only too probable. But if the argument did play any part in Joan's decision, it would only have been in the last few days of her life.

At the beginning of the trial she could not assess the seriousness of the accusation. In Lorraine she had been surrounded by priests; her kinsman Henri de Vouthon, parish priest of Sermaize; the parish priest Jean Fournier who assured himself by the formula of exorcism that she was not inspired by the devil; her confessor Jean Colin who, at the end of February 1429, was present when she set out with Bertrand de Poulengy and Jean de Metz—none of them had rebuked her for her accoutrement, and nor had the clerics who questioned her on her arrival at Chinon, before she saw the Dauphin. The charge says that Baudricourt disapproved of the disguise *cum magna abominatione*, though this does not appear from any interrogatory; but if Joan took such care not to implicate him, it is perhaps because she had met with some opposition from him. For six weeks at Poitiers she was examined by theologians who, among other things, wished to know why she had changed her dress. These doctors were Armagnacs, and had no right to insist so much.

Did she know that the theologians of Poitiers, backed by Jean Gerson whose last written work this was, had decided in her favour that the prohibition in Deuteronomy had no absolute value? She could not guess the importance that the problem was to assume in her own life, and these discussions, if in fact anyone said anything to her about them, must have seemed to her idle enough. The doctors recalled the Synod of Gangra in Paphlagonia where, about 340, Basil of Caesarea attacked the excesses of the ascetic Eustathius of Sebaste who imposed strange costume on his followers, men and

women. The Synod condemned Eustathius, and recalled that women must not wear men's clothing nor cut off their hair.* The doctors set against this decision the example of the women saints who, inspired by an extraordinary motion of the Holy Spirit, had hidden their sex under men's garments; such was St Euphrosyne of Alexandria, venerated at St^l Jean near Compiègne. Gerson, who cited Vergil's Camilla and the Amazons—rather unconvincing precedents—had not thought of St Euphrosyne. He saw Joan as a soldier, not as a saint, and the idea never occurred to him that she might have been influenced by the legend of penitents in disguise. Like the doctors of Poitiers, he restricted the prohibition of Deuteronomy to indecent dress. None of them made full use of the decisive argument in support of their thesis which is provided by the lives of the saints in disguise, though tradition already considered these women exemplary, and the centuries to come continued to approve them unreservedly. The *Golden Legend* lavished on them the same whole-hearted praise that we find in the *Acta Sanctorum*. But the *Legend* goes further still. If Paul prevents Thekla from cutting off her hair, it is not because of the genuine prohibitions he formulated on this subject, but because she was very beautiful; this argument, worthy of a novel-writer, would no doubt have infuriated St Paul as much as it astonished him. How should a girl brought up on such stories be prepared for the intransigence of the Rouen judges?

Like Antoinette Bourignon, Joan belongs psychologically to the family of penitents in disguise. She was the only one of them for whom transvestism had any practical value. But it meant much more for her—exactly what it meant for the others, and a great deal that for Joan herself remained more than half subconscious.

Comparison of the legends reveals the symbolic sense of transvestism: *breaking with the feminine past, hostility towards the family and authority, renunciation of sexual life*. Joan left Domrémy without thought of return. She was determined never to marry, and she never doubted that she was right on this point. But there was one

* Gerson's opinion can be found in Quicherat, III, pp. 298-306; the text of the Synod and the interpretations of canon 12, becoming progressively more categorical, are in Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio*, II, 1095 ff.

painful spot in her experience—her relations with her family. As a child she had been taught: *Honour thy father and thy mother*, and she might well feel herself at once injured and guilty, for there seems to have been no affection between her and her parents.

When her uncle Laxart took her to Vaucouleurs on the first occasion, Baudricourt said to him: 'Box her ears and take her back to her father.' Jacques d'Arc declared further that if Joan started again he would have her drowned by her brothers—a typical reply from a cowardly bully. She then spent a fortnight at Neufchateau where a Domrémy boy summoned her before the magistrate for breach of promise of marriage. Naturally her parents took the boy's part, for he represented the normal life in which they wanted to see their daughter settled. It was in defiance of their protests that she answered the summons and appeared before the magistrate. After the second departure to Vaucouleurs, Jacques d'Arc seems to have taken no more interest in his daughter. None of her family asked to bear witness at the trial. The imposture of the Dame des Armoises, five years after Joan's death, would have been impossible without the complicity of the d'Arc brothers and perhaps of Joan's mother, who was still alive, as was Jean, provost of Vaucouleurs, and Pierre, taken with his sister at Compiègne and set free after a long imprisonment. All had been ennobled on 29th December 1429.

As in the Greek legends of the woman hermit, horror of marriage and hostility to the family are bound up together. There is nothing surprising in Joan's declaration, at the time of the first interrogatory, that her Voices commanded her to set out without her father's knowledge. She acted like Euphrosyne and Papula, who loved their father and yet caused him suffering that they might follow their vocation. Joan might well hear talk of Euphrosyne at Compiègne where she stayed after the coronation in August 1429, and of Papula at Tours. The identical story of Eugenia is in the *Golden Legend*, with those of Marina, Theodora, Pelagia and the two Margarets.

Joan's historians, talking of the Voices that guided her, quote St Michael, St Catherine and St Margaret as if all three had been constantly at her side from Domrémy to the stake. St Michael, patron saint of the Duchy of Bar, was in a fair way to become patron

saint of the whole kingdom. Joan felt herself guided by him throughout her campaign. But when she was a prisoner at Rouen he played no part in her life, and she declared that she had seen him no more after the Battle of Crottoy (end of November 1430). On the other hand the other two saints had helped her constantly.

She knew their story through the *Golden Legend*, which sings the praises of two Margarets.

The first *lived apart from her father*, a pagan priest, *kept sheep*, was pursued by Olybrius, fought the devil and said to him: 'Tremble, proud enemy, thou liest under the feet of a woman'; she survived all kinds of tortures before dying beheaded. The second escaped both from *her parents* and a *marriage* she did not desire. Disguised as a man she took refuge in a monastery.

As for Catherine, she was victorious in a disputation before the emperor who summoned fifty orators to defend the cause of false gods against her. At her word they were converted and received the baptism of blood. The tyrant was dazzled by her and offered her the first place after the empress. She refused, emerged unscathed and triumphant from unimaginable tortures, and ended by being beheaded. This form of execution, the usual conclusion of the legends, was in fact humane and swift enough, and appears almost lacking in reality after the atrocities it follows. Catherine was venerated at Maxey near Domrémy, where Joan, whose sister was called Catherine, must have heard her story.

For Joan St Michael was the transfiguration of her martial dreams. Margaret and Catherine represented Joan herself, as she would have wished to be, able to win over by her arguments the haughty doctors who treated her with frightening contempt. They were both women freed from family ties, eloquent and self-confident, strong enough with God's help and in his cause to make men respect them: exactly Joan's *Wunschbild*. Thinking of them fed both her courage and her illusions, for up to the last she hoped to be beheaded like them and not burnt. Her attitude at the trial was extraordinarily bold. Her replies are a little in the manner of the martyrs of the *Acta Sanctorum* who treated magistrates and emperors with the same arrogance. One might expect to find sometimes, in the literature of

the *Acta*, some shy girl who proves her faith by going silently to her death. 'Les dernières à l'échafaud'—there must have been some under Diocletian, as there were in the Terror. No writer seems to have felt either the psychological or the dramatic interest of the contrast. The persecuted Christian women are terrifyingly eloquent and always triumphant. In them, the poor child, under the growing threat of each day, found an ideal on which she tried to model herself, until the day when grievous reality gainsaid all her dreams.

* * * * *

The adventures of the virgins who put on masculine dress to escape persecution may have been influenced by the Greek romances. In the figure of a woman saint in a monk's habit one may perhaps faintly glimpse the memory of a bisexual divinity, but this is very doubtful. The cult of bearded women saints finds its immediate explanation in the misinterpretation of a crucifix. But beyond Christian sentiment, possible pagan relics and images that can be traced back to archaic initiations, it is in the *psyche* that we must seek for the roots of an association between masculine disguise on the one hand, and on the other hostility towards the family, breaking with a former existence and the established order, renunciation of sexual life, and refusal to accept organised disciplines. Comparison of these legends with a few historical episodes which are curiously similar proves the autonomous value of symbols strong enough to force themselves on a story almost without transposition, and then to dictate its structure. Even more—so to assert themselves that they make one body with the woman of flesh and blood who lives the adventure.

* * * * *

In the early stages of *anchorite* life, when hermits in Palestine and Syria lived each at a considerable distance from the other, with no superior to direct them, it would strictly speaking have been possible for a woman penitent who had made up her mind to this life to mark by her masculine dress her repudiation of the very cause of her sins.

But as soon as *monastic* life comes into the question, 'change of sex' is impossible without the positive connivance of the community. And how can we imagine an abbot allowing a woman to live in a monk's habit surrounded by monks or, even more, once he had discovered the imposture letting her continue so abnormal an existence? The story of Pelagia can be considered as starting from a genuine fact, which is then carried to extremes. The other stories are more or less romanticised legends. Where shall we look for the origin of their central theme?

It is, I think, in the doctrines and rigorous practice of early Christianity, which preached total renunciation of material possessions and all sexual life, even in marriage. St Paul opposed this asceticism, which seemed to him excessive (1st Epistle to Timothy). But gnosticism, whether pagan, Jewish or Christian, took up and stressed the same tendency, by its teaching that matter is essentially evil and was created by a demiurge destined to be overcome by a god of good. Without being gnostic, the apocryphal Acts of Paul (in which the story of Thekla is only one episode), of John, Peter, Andrew and Thomas, required sustained asceticism from the Christian, and turned him violently against marriage. This austerity reached its height with the Encratites, the supreme examples of *continency*, who refused any part in the work of the demiurge. In the course of the second third or the fourth century, Eustathius of Sebaste took up their doctrines. He withheld any hope of salvation from the rich who did not get rid of the last of their possessions; he counselled his followers to leave their family and to flee from towns; he imposed on them a curious garb, the same for men as for women who cut off their hair; above all, he banned marriage. The Council of Gangra censured these practices, which it considered a criticism of the religious life of the Church. Indeed, many of Eustathius' rules seem inspired by a deliberate intention of breaking with established custom: he discouraged offerings to the Church, and recommended fasting on Sundays and eating on fast days.

He was condemned shortly after the Council of Nicaea (325), which, in many respects, represents the triumph of the West over the hellenised East. It was the Council of Nicaea which forbade the

conferment of orders on voluntary eunuchs, though about 200 Origen after his self-mutilation had been ordained priest by two Palestinian bishops.

The ascetic tendency, which survived all the censure of the Councils, inspires all the legends which we have studied. Taken as they stand, they formulate nothing but orthodox opinions. Examined with patience, they reveal traces of the ideology which had been condemned at Gangra. For a woman the assumption of masculine dress is, like the growth of the beard in the legend of St Liberata, the equivalent of castration. To understand the prestige of castration in religion, we must call to mind the part played by the concept of the androgynous beings in all forms of gnosticism, Greek or Hebrew. Androgyny both initial and final. In the perfection of Eden, man had the two powers; he will regain them in his supreme ascension. It is in this conception that lies probably the explanation of the mystic masculine surnames which are sometimes found on the graves of women: the dead woman may well aspire to have the two natures, like her god. But to this it must be objected that no instance has been found of mystic feminine surnames on a man's grave. The bisexuality of the philosophers amounts to asexuality: spiritual man is completely freed from the bonds of flesh. Even if it is impossible to confirm the hypothesis of Usener who sees in the disguised woman saint a reappearance of the Cypriot Aphroditos, yet it remains true that the key to the legend is the gnostic image of an ideal androgyny, and that these strange tales have a right to be included on the fringes of a study of the myths of bisexuality.

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- P. Hermann, art. on Hermaphroditos in the *Lexikon* of Roscher (Vol. I, 1896-1900), believes the bisexual divinities, incompatible with the Greek genius, to be of Eastern origin. Hermaphrodite is an invention of the Hellenistic artists, followed by the poets; 20 out of 25 col. are devoted to figures on monuments.
- F. Dümmler (*Sittengeschichtliche Parallelen*, posthumous article in *Philologus*, Vol. LVI, 1897, included in the *Kleine Schriften*) puts the god into his setting of customs and legends, and shows that he is a Hellenic figure, linked on one hand with popular usages and on the other with philosophical speculations.

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- Jessen (art. on Hermaphroditos in the *Real-Enzyklopädie* of Pauly-Wissowa, 1912), puts the legend back in its place among the customs which attest the same constellation of images. The list can be extended today, thanks to the work of Frazer, Van Gennep, Hubert and Mauss, Jeanmaire, Mircea Eliade, on *passage-rites*, initiations, and pedagogy of the magicians.
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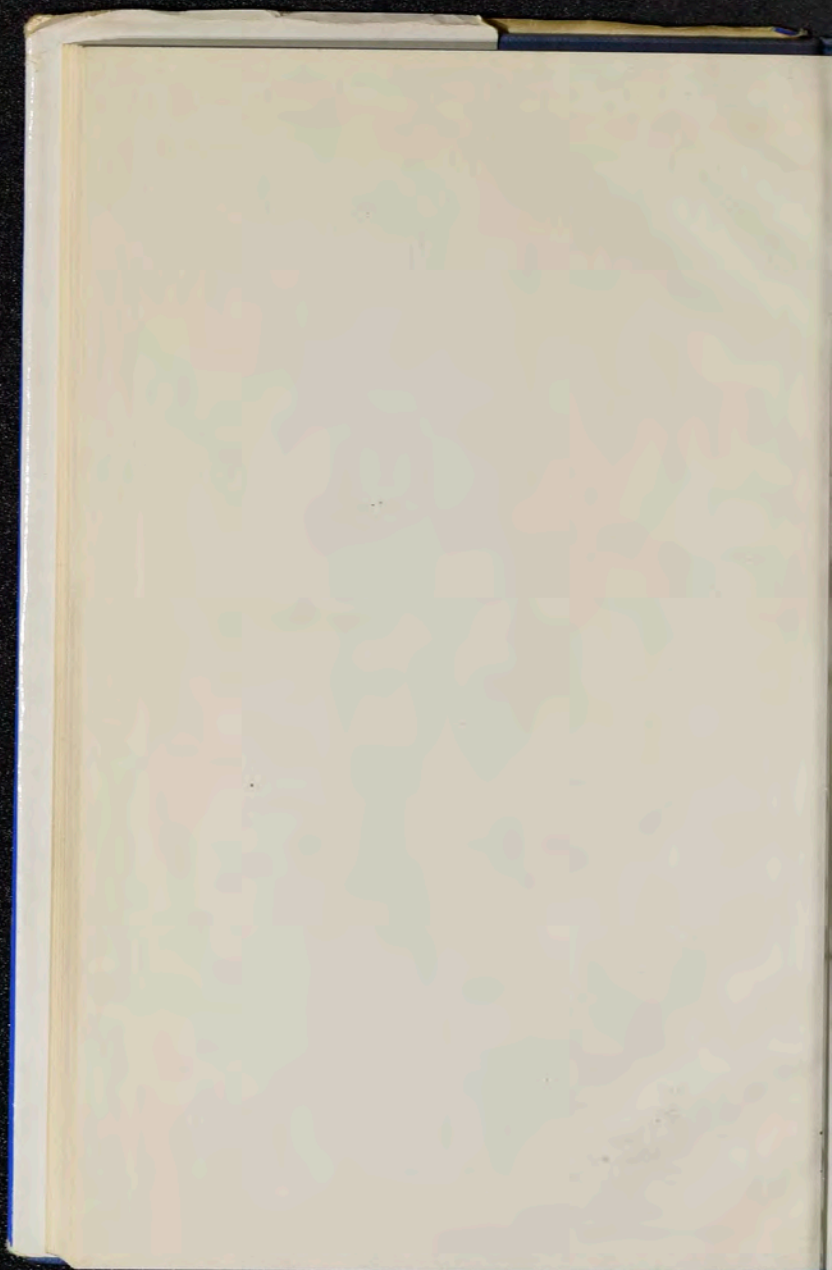
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