

NEITHER IN NOR OUT: A LOVER OF WITCHES.
ANDROGYNY IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE. A CASE STUDY

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Although feminism abounds in different and often contradictory theories of gender, almost all of them spring from the same supposition. As Hélène Cixous puts it:

... every theory of culture, every theory of society, the whole conglomeration of symbolic systems ... is ordered around hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition, an opposition that can only be sustained by means of a difference posed by cultural discourse as "natural," the difference between activity and passivity. ... the opposition is founded in the *couple*. ... To be aware of the couple, that it's the couple that makes it all work, is also to point to the fact that it's on the couple that we have to work if we are to deconstruct and transform culture (Cixous 1981: 44).

The concept of androgyny, recurring in numerous forms and guises in different cultures throughout history, has become one of the focal points of feminist debate concerning sexual difference. The word itself derives from Greek: *andrós* (genitive of *anér* 'man') and *gyne* 'woman' (Humm 1993: 21). Some feminist scholars have perceived androgyny, conceived of as an almost mechanical fusion of traditional, socially sanctioned female and male qualities, as dangerous to the cause of women, as it might in fact, they claim, strengthen the hierarchized dichotomy of gender, and produce male-identified women rather than some angelic beings free of gender; additionally, posing androgyny as an ideal resolution to the war of the sexes, may lead to neglecting pressing needs and problems women currently face. Other feminists have praised androgyny as "a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behavior can be freely chosen" (Heilbrun 1982: ix-x), or a new, yet unknown, constantly fluctu

ating and unfolding quality (see Daly 1973 and Showalter 1988).¹ Whatever the evaluation of the usefulness of the concept itself, androgyny always indicates certain conflation or at least intersection of what is considered to be female and male.

Although this feminist discussion concerning sexual difference and androgyny remains unresolved, it has apparently leaked to the realm of popular culture of the United States, which has readily embraced and used the suggested blurring of boundaries between the sexes. Nevertheless, even though it now produces images apparently in keeping with the “androgynous ideal” it often manages to squeeze them back into the limits of traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity. At the same time, androgyny is often presented as a potentially liberating ideal. The process of reaching this ideal is painful, often impossible, forcing the androgynous self to seek final refuge in various realms (most often art) which allow the carnival of gender to go on indefinitely. Literary protagonists, in search of self-definition, are frequently no longer able to trustfully accept safe and clear definitions of masculinity and femininity, as I will try to show using the example of chosen writings by Anne Rice.

Pop stars and visual media also often peddle such images of attempted, but failed androgyny – it is enough to mention the apparent epitome of inter-sexual and inter-racial androgynous merger, Michael Jackson, characteristically grabbing his crotch and thrusting forward his pelvis, asserting some kind of maybe androgynized, but unmistakable masculinity. At the same time, Jackson evidently projects himself into the role of the universal Other, which, as feminists maintain, has in patriarchy been reserved for women, squeezed into the tight corset of femininity and assigned a clear place in the ossified patriarchal social order. “Beat me/ hate me/ you could never break me” shouts Michael on one of his video clips, “They don’t care about us” from the album “History” 1996, and then he adds: “don’t you black or white me”. His conclusion is again and again: “they don’t really care about us”, the “they” being represented by resolutely macho policemen – rigid, unmoved, uncaring wielders of patriarchal power. Who are “us”? The underdog of the world, the poor, the huddled masses Michael wants to embrace and cannot because of the brutal intervention of “them”.

¹ One of the most famous controversies illustrating the debate has been Elaine Showalter’s criticism of Virginia Woolf’s concept of the “androgynous mind”. Showalter sharply contrasts Woolfian “serene androgyny”, which she sees as a flight from the problems of gender, with troubled feminism. She transforms Woolf’s suggestion that to be truly human and creative means to embrace the whole of the universal human *spirit* (thought and emotion) into a plea for sympathetic gender separatism: mutual understanding and sympathy with the different *experience* of being female and male. She changes the focus from the spiritual and universal, to the actual and immediate. While for Woolf androgyny means facing the inner reality, for Showalter it is equal with the evasion of everyday reality. See Showalter (1988: 263-297).

“Gender influences everything but determines nothing! ... We as a modern people transcend gender, though we can never escape it. Ours is a time for which there are no precedents with regard to gender and freedom,” proclaims optimistically Anne Rice (Rice 1996). Gender is also undoubtedly one of the major concerns in her novels, her protagonists often yearning for or suffering the ambiguity of gender, though never allowed “serene” androgyny which might alleviate their pain.

Rice’s Mayfair witches series, which consists of three novels: *The Witching Hour*, *Lasher* and *Taltos*, tells a story of the witches and their familiar – Lasher – and proceeds to reveal the history of the whole race Lasher is a deviant descendant of: the Taltos.

Lasher was first called up and drawn out of nothingness by a village girl Suzanne in the Scottish Glen of Donnelaith in the 17th century. From that time on the designee of Mayfair legacy, always a woman, always the one able to see “the man” (Lasher), and possessing some supernatural powers of her own, receives the green emerald; with it, she gets the supernatural lover, who, though he is not sure of his origin, identifies himself as male. The family ends up in New Orleans.

The witches’ intercourse with their spectral male double is not without its dangers. Although Lasher appears in androgynous glory, as a delicate, almost effeminate ghost, loving, passionate and apparently devoted to his witches, helping them to build the power and wealth of the Mayfair clan, the witches soon discover that not only is there no escaping him, but also that he seems to ruthlessly pursue a purpose of his own.

The literary construction of Lasher as the male double of female witches bears resemblance to what Joanne Blum (1988) identifies as male tradition of the double in fiction.² She characterizes it as follows: “whether it be hallucinatory or realistic, the traditional double implies some kind of psychic fragmentation which is projected from the troubled mind outward into the world” (Blum

² While the history of male/female doubles in literature by women is a long and well documented one, what it describes and traces are usually instances of, in the words of Joanne Blum,

[the] image of male/female relation ... as a productive interaction in which the male and female selves overreach their culturally prescribed gender identities to relate to one another in such a way that the boundary between self and other becomes blurred. Male and female become less separate identities (though they remain this as well), more extensions of one another’s selfhood, in defiance of the divisions of gender (Blum 1988: 1).

Blum is careful to stress that her model is not androgynous, although “it partakes of some of the characteristics of androgyny”, the difference resting on the supposition that androgyny not only develops on the basis of socially sanctioned binary opposition of gender characteristics, but delicately strengthens it, instead of leading to gender identity transcendence. She contrasts the female tradition of the double in fiction with the male tradition.

See also, e.g., Gilbert – Gubar (1980).

1988: 3). Lasher is quite obviously a projection of the male principle of the witches' nature. They soon discover that the self-knowledge of the thing, claiming that it had existed before men and women ever came into being, starts with the first witch who called it up – the merry-begot Suzanne dreaming of power, which, being female and poor, she could never have. "... All that he is proceeds from us ... on its own it cannot think ... it cannot gather its thoughts together" (Rice 1990: 363). He exists only with them and through them. Lasher, their male double, is ever present, ever compelling and threatening, controlled and used skillfully by strong witches like Marie Claudette or Mary Beth, destructive for those who are weak and do not know how to use him and at the same time protect themselves from him.

Lasher in a way justifies these women's access to power, which in patriarchal societies they cannot claim for themselves as women. The first witches, Suzanne and Deborah, pay for it with their lives, burned at the stake, but the clan survives and the clan becomes a matriarchy recognizing the power of female designees because of their spectral lover, their avenger. On the one hand, the witches' interaction with Lasher is possible only because they open themselves to him as the Other, and allow themselves to be traversed by the maleness of their double. This seems to signify that they inhabit what Hélène Cixous calls the realm of the gift, connected with the libidinal economy which, for lack of a better word, she calls female. On the other hand, the male double betters these women's position in the realm of the proper, connected with masculine libidinal economy. This is the realm of property and appropriation, rigid hierarchy and classification, the realm privileged in patriarchies. Lasher's witches, however, are not the revolutionaries disrupting the patriarchal order, not the powerful figures of feminist histories. They have always inhabited the realm of the proper, they just want it for themselves. They constantly try to probe the true nature of Lasher, from whom the gift of power originates, to discover what he wants from them, how they can return the gift. In the realm of the proper the gift is perceived as creating threatening inequality, and to redress the balance it must be returned. But the reliance on the proper is destructive for women. The price for the gift is more than Mayfair witches are ready to pay.

Cooperating with the proper, using it, they strengthen it, they strengthen Lasher, who creates their power and feeds on it, who learns from the witches only to make an attempt at a merger which is to lead to separation sharper than ever. The thirteenth witch – Rowan – becomes the doorway through which Lasher enters the world again as flesh. In his fleshly form he is again a fiercely sexual travesty of androgyny – he is beautiful, delicate, loving and compassionate, easily confused or moved by poetry and music like a stereotypical woman, and at the same time he acts like a brutal and ruthless, concentrated on his purpose murderous male killing with a delicate sigh and a kiss; killing the witches

by making love to them. Through Rowan and other Mayfairs he wants his kind to be reborn: the Taltos, born knowing, the Taltos who do not know infancy. He wants a female Taltos to couple with and overcome the world, wiping out all humans, so he tries to produce her with the witches of the Mayfair clan, who invariably suffer hemorrhage and die as a result. Rowan, the strongest witch, survives and bears a female Taltos – Emaeth.

The male double, the failed androgyne, must perish if us humans are to survive; and Emaeth, too, because of her reproductive capacities and because for her the world begins with the word of Father, talking to her when she is still in her mother's womb. The mystery of the stone circle in the Glen of Donnelaith Lasher keeps talking about is revealed only when Lasher and Emaeth are safely dead, Lasher killed by Rowan's husband, and his own "father", Michael; Emaeth by Rowan herself, who mothered her. Soon Michael and Rowan encounter another Taltos, Ashlar, who has lived through centuries, and who finally tells them the story of his people.

The story of the Taltos is structured around the Taltos – human polarity, and as, to return to Cixous' words, "it's the couple that makes it all work" (Cixous 1981, *passim*) not surprisingly this dualism is a counterpart of the female/male dualism sanctioned by tradition.

The original Taltos were an essentially feminine breed. Gentle and childlike, obedient, agreeable and loving, they lived on an island, a Paradise on earth, frolicking, singing and talking endlessly. They did not know leadership or hierarchy. Their culture was based on collective memory transmitted both genetically (they were all born with basic knowledge of the history of their race, its rituals etc.) and orally. The "chains of memory" were the basic experience ordering device. Standing in a circle, volunteering the earliest memories each Taltos had, through oral exchange they were introducing some order into their collective experience. "That was a fascinating thing – a sequence, a long period of events linked by one man's vision or attitude. That was special. That was our finest mental achievement ..." (Rice 1995: 364). The linearity was not important, however, time was not important. What counted was the memory game as such, the pleasure of it. They seem to have inhabited a mythic realm where the Other was no threat, where pleasure and free exchange ruled – the realm of the gift. Stress was put on birth, the Taltos were on the side of life, the birth taking place within multiple circles formed by the Taltos gathered to watch the mystery. No wonder that when they lost their Paradise and moved to the islands of winter (the British Isles) they were rendered powerless and mute, and they were finally destroyed by aggressive humans driven by the desire to fight and defeat; humans who focused on violence and death embracing the realm of the proper.

Like women, the Taltos were silenced in history. Their speech was rendered unintelligible in confrontation with the human ear. It was too quick, and therefore deemed meaningless. As Cixous cautions:

Always keep in mind the distinction between speaking and talking. It is said, in philosophical texts, that women's weapon is the word, because they talk, talk endlessly, chatter, overflow with sound, mouth-sound: but they don't actually *speaking*, they have nothing to say. They always inhabit the place of silence ... (Cixous 1981: 49).

"It's man who teaches woman ... to be aware of lack, to be aware of absence, aware of death" (Cixous 1981: 46), she adds; and these were humans who pointed out their lack to the Taltos.

In order to deal with the human threat the Taltos were forced to infuse their own culture with human stratagems based on hierarchical organization, leadership, careful planning and finally aggression. They found themselves unable to kill indiscriminately, however, and unable to reach reconciliation with humans, so they finally made a successful attempt to pass for humans, and became known as the Picts. They developed secret writing to pass down information to their own kind, and Art of the Tongue to be able to communicate with humans. They sometimes bred with humans, and in result produced witches and the whole witch clan of Donnelaith, Mayfair witches riding astride the gift and the proper. The essential elements of the Taltos culture were still in place, however, although they were more ritualized and ordered. The ritual of birth was still the most important one, but the circle in which it took place was no longer only a circle of Taltos but also a symbolic circle of stones which in Ashlar's vision was "to imitate a circle of men and women" (Rice 1995: 379). One of the stones was an image of androgynous Good God, with both breasts and a penis.

The symbol of the circle as such is one of the oldest androgynous symbols. It suggests the beginning which is also the end, the cycle of birth, death and re-birth, the coming together of opposites. In the Taltos culture the element of death was played down, however, so one part of the necessary pair of opposites was spectacularly missing.

In his essay "Mephistopheles and the Androgyne or the Mystery of the Whole" (1965b) Mircea Eliade gives a brief account of the key role the image of an androgyne used to play for early Christians and mystics. The God figure, Adam, and Jesus Christ were all believed to have an androgynous nature – like the Good God of the Taltos.

According to Scot Erigena, division into sexes was the result of sin, but it will come to an end in the reunification of man, which will be followed by the eschatological reunion of the circle of earth with Paradise. Christ has anticipated this final reintegration. Scot Erigena quotes Maximus the Confessor, according to whom Christ unified the sexes in his own nature ... (Eliade 1965b: 104).

This androgynous element of Christian culture explains Lasher's constant references to a new beginning, new Bethlehem, and his identification with, and attachment to, the image of newborn Christ.³ It is Christianity, however, and the androgynous Christ that destroy the Taltos leading them back to their ancient beliefs in love, forgiveness, humility. Ashlar explains further that Christianity condemned ...

... the flesh, the very thing that had always been our downfall: The sins of the flesh, which had caused us to become monsters in the eyes of humans, copulating in great ceremonial circles and bringing forth full-grown offspring. ... And ... at its core Christianity not only embraced all this, but managed somehow to sacralize death and at the same time redeem the sacralization (Rice 1995: 420).

Christianity was perceived then as encouraging, indeed bringing about, the interaction of opposites, of *coincidentia oppositorum*, creating the truly androgynous pairs of birth-death, spirit-flesh, closing the circle of androgyny, which meant redemption. But once again, the image of androgyny was used instrumentally by humans/men/the proper in order to incite submission and justify their willingness to kill. The Taltos who refused to accept Christianity because they saw it for what it was were destroyed.

The image of androgyny used by the masculine to destroy the feminine (Lasher destroys witches, just like humans destroy the Taltos) echoes the worries of some feminists, who in androgyny see the threat of doing away with sexual difference altogether in the name of the logic of the Same (cf. Irigaray 1993: passim) and leading to asexuality or tokenism (i.e. male-identified women: the token women of patriarchy). Cixous posits instead the ideal of bisexuality, which "doesn't annul differences but stirs them up" (Cixous 1976: 884):

... being 'neither out nor in,' being 'beyond the outside/inside opposition' permits the play of 'bisexuality'; ... Bisexuality on an unconscious level is the possibility of extending into the other, of being in such a relation with the other that I move into the other without destroying the other: that I will look for the other where s/he is without trying to bring everything back to myself (translator's note in Cixous 1981: 55).

³ This is, for example, what Lasher says to Emaeth:

There had to be the Beginning. ... Beginning was everything. There was nothing if there was no beginning.

Prosper, my daughter.

Taltos.

No one lived in Donnelaith anymore. But they would live there – Father and Emaeth and their children. Hundreds of children. It would become the shrine of the Beginning. "Our Bethlehem," he whispered to her. And that would be the beginning of all time (Rice 1994: 3-4).

Rice does not even hint at such a possibility, although androgyny, failed androgyny again, reappears in *Taltos*, when the reader perceives that Ashlar, apparently the only surviving Taltos, has lived through the centuries learning the ways of humans but not giving up the Taltos ideal; and when through his eyes the reader takes one more glimpse at Mayfair witches, descendants of the Taltos and humans. Ashlar sees Michael the witch in all his rough, manly glory, while Rowan appears to be both alluringly erotic and frightening:

Her hair was simple, yet lustrous and alluring, around her narrow face. Her clothes, too, were seductive, calculatedly skimpy, indeed almost flamboyantly erotic. ... she possessed the eyes of a man. It was as though that part of her face had been removed from a male human and put there, above the soft, long, womanish mouth. But he often saw this seriousness, this aggressiveness, in modern females (Rice 1995: 201).

So the descendants of the "feminine" Taltos and "masculine" humans, are manly men and manly women, both essentially aggressive, although throughout the novel the author stresses Michael's goodness and Rowan's attempts to heal rather than kill. And the sympathetic Taltos does not believe in the possibility of the two races living peacefully together, even though at the end he commissions the creation of four dolls singing in a harmonious chorus and symbolizing the Family of Humankind. Finally, when two Mayfairs unexpectedly breed a female Taltos, Morrigan, Ashlar escapes with her to the sacred stone circle of Donnelaith, and the novel cycle finishes with them in the car, "the car a projectile destined for the green heart of the world, carrying them inside it, the two, male and female, together" (Rice 1995: 520). Does their union pose a threat to humanity/masculinity? That is what the novel seems to suggest, but if the Taltos overcome the world, it will certainly not mean the triumph of femininity, as the suggestion is also that both humans and Taltos have changed, so maybe a new quality will be born.

A clearer idea of androgyny, which approximates Cixous' notion of bisexuality as the celebration of difference, emerges from another novel by Anne Rice, *Cry to Heaven* (1991).⁴

The male protagonist of the novel, Tonio Treschi, springs from the most noble stock of 18th century Venice and seems destined to inherit (both literally and symbolically) the realm of the proper: the only world he knows. As taking his father's place in the Great Council is symbolically to inherit Venice, Tonio, already a teenager, is finally allowed to get to know the city and take part in the carnival festivities. It is his first glimpse behind the proper and into the realm of

⁴ The discussion of androgyny in Anne Rice's *Cry to Heaven* which follows is a shortened and modified version of Rzepa (1996).

the gift, which, to quote Toril Moi's interpretation, "isn't really a realm at all, but a deconstructive space of pleasure and orgasmic interchange with the other" (Moi 1990: 113).

Tonio's first experiences of the carnivalesque confusion, in which all the certainties of class and gender disappear under masks, *tabarros* and *dominoes*, follow the day when the first crack appears in the solid of his beliefs. He has an older brother Carlo, Tonio learns suddenly, who lives in Istanbul, banished there by his father, Andrea Treschi. When Andrea dies, the brother, to whom Tonio is uncannily similar, appears to demand that Tonio go against Andrea's will and cede all his rights to Carlo himself. To Carlo, who proves to be nothing less than Tonio's father, his mother's lover.

The father/brother embodies the threat of emasculation as he wants to become the one who can prove himself as a man, that is the one to inherit the power and property, to produce legal offspring, to assure that the family name survives. To allow Carlo to seize this right equals symbolic castration for Tonio; to defy him, unfortunately, equals literal castration, as Carlo finally decides to get what is his by force and sends his bravos to turn Tonio into a eunuch. Tonio's world disintegrates and there is no order to impose on it other than the disorder of carnival.

The narrator describes Venice as the city in which festivals are not "just the way to measure life (but) ... the way to live" (Rice 1991: 298). Most festivals are obviously connected with carnival, which is one of the well-known rituals employed by many cultures and allowing the temporary re-institution of the primaevial wholeness, with its traditional orgiastic abolishment of gender differentiation, sexual and social mores and distinctions. As M. Bakhtin has pointed out, originally carnival was the ultimate means of being with others, making peace with the world and at the same time making all the hierarchies and orders ambivalent and changeable.⁵ In the Mayfair trilogy New Orleans' Mardi Gras is the constant pulsating background of the Lasher story. In *The Cry to Heaven* carnival is the world into which Carlo pushes his brother-cum-son: the fluid, open, ambivalent realm of the gift.

On the most elemental level, the ambivalence Tonio has to deal with is the ambivalence of gender. He has to construct himself anew. Although he is now viewed by the world as less than a man, as being non-male, he is also non-female, which makes his status completely different from that of, to use Germaine Greer's term (Greer 1973), the female eunuch of psychoanalysis. While the realm of the proper has a place for women in its all-embracing hierarchy, by means of which it attempts to freeze them into a clearly defined shape, immobi-

⁵ For Bakhtin's views on culture, carnival and literature see Czuplejewicz – Kasperski (1983: 142-172).

lize them and rationalize their existence, it seems to have no clearly defined space and label for the eunuch proper.

Even when he is brought into a conservatory educating eunuch singers and composers, Tonio clings desperately to the world of hierarchies he knows. His purpose is still to prove himself to be a man and to take revenge on his brother after Carlo produces children, thus grasping one more piece of immortality for the Treschis.

Tonio perceives his own body as monstrous, unnatural. Accepting the view that a castrato is neither male nor female, he defines himself as a non-entity, a void. Even though, technically speaking, the phallus is still there, it has lost its major function. Indeed, in the world ruled by the laws of inheritance, anyone without potential access to the cycle of reproduction must be seen as at least insignificant.

Slowly, Tonio starts to fill the void he represents, to perceive his own status as the ultimate freedom. Like other eunuchs, he attempts to place himself in the wilderness of gender, at the place where maleness and femaleness, the constructs of masculinity and femininity meet, and conventional morality ceases to hold sway. He also realizes the advantages of the ability to move effortlessly from the feminine to the masculine. This is symbolized by his final acceptance of the conventional female role in sexual encounters and a female part in opera, when also physically, by means of clothes and make-up, he is transformed into a larger-than-life woman. By accepting all this, he starts to make peace with himself as an androgynous being.

The realm of art, which looms large in the novel, is frequently perceived as the proper medium for the expression of what Coleridge called "the androgynous mind", interpreted by Virginia Woolf as the mind which perhaps "is resonant and porous; that ... transmits emotion without impediment; that ... is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (Woolf 1959: 148). In *Cry to Heaven* art, especially opera, seems to function as the extension of Bakhtinian ambivalent carnivalesque element.

Eunuchs are shown as reaching the androgynous sense of wholeness through art – by singing and composing – which allows them to perceive themselves not as victims, but as authors of the mystification of gender. From this realm the confusion of gender leaks into the realm of the proper. At the same time, for those castrati who are not talented, art spells death, as it signifies the only medium through which the androgynous self can be fully realized. Beyond it there is only deep, undefined suffering.

For the majority of eunuchs inhabiting Rice's novel the passage is from apparently asexual childhood to gender ambivalence, while for Tonio Treschi, castrated at 15, it is a more painful journey from the verge of manhood. He strives now to resist the urge to free the repressed, feminine component of his personal-

ity, to free and embrace the other, to celebrate the androgynous wholeness/difference in his body and soul, instead of being overwhelmed by it. Through sexual encounters with men, castrati, women the revelation of freedom comes to him. His love mingles with cruelty and hatred, and resembles one of the carnivalised passions M. Bakhtin was writing about. The passions which, like the carnival itself, include their own opposites (Czaplewicz – Kasperski 1983: 166-170).

At the beginning Tonio aims at solving the mystery men and women have become to him; the mystery of the phallus which signifies real power and not just free access to pleasure.⁶ Then he proceeds slowly to recognize a love different from the one he used to know; a deep passion which is not based on the notion of appropriation and domestication of the other, but which matches Cixous's concept of the ideal "... free, burning love for the other, a love that respects the other's enigma, that does not want to *know* the other" (Andermatt 1991: 128).

When Tonio seems to have found peace in the ambivalent and fluid world of art and carnival, Carlo, waiting uneasily for the revenge which seems inevitable, sends assassins to kill Tonio. They arrive to murder him in the middle of Roman carnival, which in itself reeks of death.⁷ For Tonio, on the most personal level this carnival signifies both death and new life. He escapes the assassins; the attack, however, prompts him to do what he once perceived as his duty and the ultimate proof of his manhood. He returns to Venice to confront his father.

Mardi Gras functions similarly in *Lasher*, signifying the chaos of all possibilities, both death and new life. Gifford, one of the witches, dies on this night, conceiving a child by Lasher and immediately losing it, and at the same time a new female Taltos, Morrigan, is conceived, by two other witches.

Tonio Treschi arrives in Venice as an enticing, elusive lady in black, and seduces his father. Tonio's purpose is no longer, though, to kill Carlo. The world Tonio now inhabits allows him to talk, to try to understand, to let go. Carlo is unable to accept the gift of life and with it the realm of the gift, to apologize and accept forgiveness. "In the realm of the proper the act of giving becomes a subtle means of aggression ..." (Moi 1990: 112). So when faced with the logic of Carlo's unrelenting sphere, Tonio is forced to kill him in self-defence. This act seems to finally free him from the demands of the realm of the proper, although the act itself also definitely belongs to the same world of binary oppositions. By

⁶ See Luce Irigaray's brief discussion of male and female homosexuality, which constitutes Chapter 9 of Irigaray (1993: 192-197).

⁷ According to an ancient tradition, during the last say of the carnival horses are set free on the crowded streets and rush from Piazza del Popolo to Piazza Venezia in Rome, trampling people; then, in the evening, everyone carries a lighted candle, trying to blow out other tins flames and whispering "death to anyone who does not carry a candle". See Rice (1991: 479).

murdering his father, his look-alike, Tonio makes away with his unfulfilled, un-realized male self. It is the final step in the process of embracing the world of chaos and confusion. The world in which, he muses, good and evil are seen as intertwining and complex, in which the act of cutting the Gordian knot is perceived as a tragic misunderstanding, a simplistic way out of a complex problem. "Yet these are the ways of men," he says, "... the slicing through, the cutting away' and it is only those of us, perhaps, who are not men who can see the wisdom of good and evil in a fuller light and be paralyzed by our vision of it" (Rice 1991: 486).

Tonio, having killed his father, leaves Venice to embrace with pleasure the life of a great castrato opera singer, the realm of the gift in which art is the great liberator. At the same time, however, he does not give up his aristocratic name, he does not accept a stage name, and thus clings to remnants of his never-to-flourish maleness of the proper. His identity still seems to be uncertain, ambivalent, fluid.

The confusion of gender remains unresolved, and, paradoxically, the confusion itself seems to be the liberating factor, allowing Tonio to find self-realization in his art. If we accept the notion of the androgynous mind as the source of true art, the concept which Hélène Cixous also seems to espouse saying that no literature is possible without a certain degree of bisexuality (Andermatt 1991: 59 and Moi 1990: 108-110), we might conclude that the protagonist reaches, in fact, the point at which, to refer to Cixous once again, "concept and identity give way to unending metamorphoses without a stable 'I,' where there is no more opposition between world and art, real and imaginary," (Andermatt 1991: 59) and which is the prerequisite for being truly creative. What emerges is then a notion of androgyny similar to Cixous's notion of bisexuality as the acknowledgment of the other.

The journey to the shelter of art, however, leads through the immense field of codified, strict rules of artistic expression. This fact might perhaps be interpreted as a projection of the realm of the proper upon one of few spheres which threatens to escape its influence. Art, like carnival, functions, after all, within masculinised society, Or, maybe the ever-changing, liberated "I" of no gender needs some order to cling to if it is to survive.

In the four novels by Anne Rice I have discussed, the confusion of gender remains unresolved and facilitates the never-ending process of self-redefinition of protagonists. The process as Rice shows it, however, is always imperfect, unresolved and connected with immense suffering, danger, even death. Her apparently androgynous images often smack of aggressive masculinity, reinstating the conventional definitions of gender rather than challenging them. Similar images of troubled, often false androgynes seem to reappear more and more frequently in American popular culture, which from at least the mid-1970s has been seri-

ously engaged in testing the boundaries between the social constructs of masculinity and femininity. At least two obvious reasons for this phenomenon can be identified: 1) the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s, and its passionate and profound interest in the question of sexual difference; 2) the changes in social life brought about both by WWII, feminist campaigns for the rights of women, and a wealth of other significant factors. Rebecca Bell-Metereau, the author of *Hollywood Androgyny* adds one more reason to this list; the reason valid at least for cinematic productions: the almost complete disappearance of censorship within the last 20 years, which resulted in the occurrence of ...

... certainly the most dramatic change in cross-dressing films ... Female impersonation blossomed in an amazing variety of films. ... [She adds that] Almost all cross-dressing films involve the relationship between authority and freedom – the extent to which the male is free to explore his female nature and the extent to which female characters are capable of establishing their own authority. These films also explore the individual's confrontation with "the Other" (Bell-Metereau 1993: 2-3).

American popular culture seems to offer almost no images of full, successful androgyny; the characters in novels, films or video clips, even though they frequently hover in the region which is "neither in nor out" most often fall back into the trap of socially constructed gender difference.

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