

Introduction

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Myths feed and reveal both our ideologies and our psyche, and are thus fundamental to any socio-poetic approach. Reflecting this, the issue of gender is involved with language and ontology. The hiatus created rather than gathered in by this question structures in a profound sense human beings' relations with the world and themselves.

Societies are constrained by invariants, great schemata that shape consciousness and behaviour. The dichotomy between male and female goes way back, like the cosmological opposition between day and night, as the fact that is most likely to alter profoundly individuals' differentiated attitude and perception. And androgyny attracts the complementary ideas of fusion and confusion. Indeed the permanence of myth, in its ability to define any community in both hemispheres, is equalled only by its tendency constantly to reformulate the gender conflict.

All the contributions to this issue look to the journal's founder Roger Caillois, who was passionate about stones and myths, and would have responded to the words of Hesiod when he recorded in his *Theogony* that the Earth alone created the Heavens before uniting with them. For at the beginning of the world and of myths lurked the archetypal schema of a twofold unity, broken then reconstituted.

With one foot in an immemorial past, a mirage of origin, the androgyne – the embodiment of the tensions between the sexes and their improbable reunification – also moves around in our contemporary universe. Attentive to succeeding generations' enthusiasm for this topic, this issue presents a range of articles following a diachronic approach, moving from antiquity to modernity. Concerned to open fresh avenues for exploration, it interrogates both literary texts and science; it tackles questions of bi- and homosexuality; it deals with ancient India as well as with Edwardian America; it compares positions that resolve into the notion of neuter. The discourse of the plastic arts, music and cinema are also dealt with, since the principle of sex difference or non-differentiation can be treated in very many ways.

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At a time when the political world is tackling gender problems in order to construct a discourse aimed at promoting the virtues of mixing the sexes, the gulf between men and women is getting dramatically wider in some parts of the globe. We therefore felt it was important to give a forum to researchers from all backgrounds and disciplines with the aim of returning to the founding texts, the sources, and considering the matter in its most universal, most explicitly humanistic form.

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell