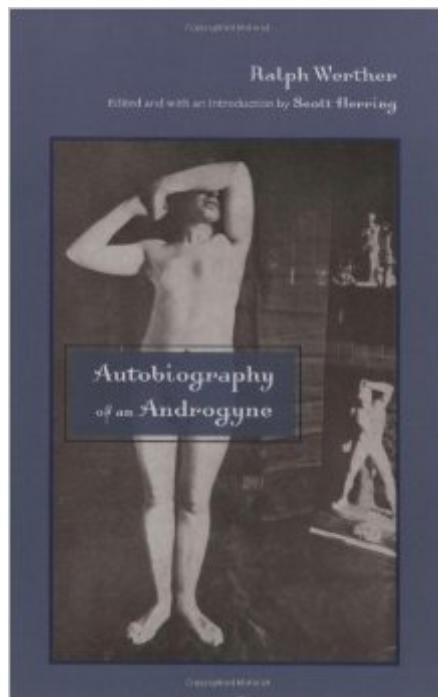


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Autobiography Of An Androgynous (Subterranean Lives)



Synopsis

First printed in 1918, Ralph Werther's Autobiography of an Androgyne charts his emerging self-understanding as a member of the "third sex" and documents his explorations of queer underworlds in turn-of-the-century New York City. Werther presents a sensational life narrative that begins with a privileged upper-class birth and a youthful realization of his difference from other boys. He concludes with a decision to undergo castration. Along the way, he recounts intimate stories of adolescent sexual encounters with adult men and women, escapades as a reckless "fairie" who trolled Brooklyn and the Bowery in search of working-class Irish and Italian immigrants, and an immersion into the subculture of male "inverts." This new edition also includes a critical introduction by Scott Herring that situates the text within the scientific, historical, literary, and social contexts of urban American life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Tracing how this pioneering autobiography engages with conversations on immigration, gender, economics, metropolitan working-class culture, and the invention of homosexuality across class lines, this edition is ideal for courses on topics ranging from Victorian literature to modern American sexuality.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mal Schoen (the other reviewer of this text at present) is right about the intensity of this book. Werther is repeatedly beaten, raped, and humiliated; what is even more difficult for the modern reader is Werther's complex relationship to these experiences. He does not actually enjoy these horrifying experiences -- he is not actually a masochist -- but he admires the men who are violent

towards him, as he sees it as a demonstration of their masculine strength. I wouldn't suggest this book to someone looking for a light read. However, I think that calling these events "gory details" and expressing horror at his response to what he goes through is missing the point. Werther was attempting to survive during a time period when his sexual desires, his gender, and even his sexual self-understanding were subject to violence. He describes the way that passerby and policemen would ignore him, or worse, would blackmail or arrest him. Would it be better if Werther were wholly a victim? I saw his response to the men who raped and beat him -- if, yes, incredibly uncomfortable to read -- as his means of resistance. It was much like his autobiography more generally; by making himself a medical curiosity (since the book was published only for doctors and specialists), Werther also was able to speak for himself. It is not an ideal means of self-representation, obviously, but he was not living in an ideal time. (Does anyone?) Speaking more generally: the book is written in short, sometimes tangentially-organized sections. The Latin translations in-text are not great, but suffice. (Latin was often used in 19th-century texts to limit the readership of sexual content.) Werther's style is clear, funny, vain, and sharp.

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