“Sandism in reverse: the strange, marmorean beauty of Julia Ward Howe’s The Hermaphrodite”

Sandism in reverse: the strange, marmorean beauty of Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite*

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Abstract

The transvestic protagonist of Julia Ward Howe's novel is studied here as a transcendentalist fictional embodiment of the Saint-Simonian phenomenon of Sandism. Continuing Gary Williams's investigation of the cultural contexts in which the narrative originated, I show how, in the allegorical model adopted by the author, the ambiguous beauty of this mythical hermaphroditic figure is also one of the most interesting representations in American literature of Margaret Fuller's "two-fold" gender construct. Julia Ward was introduced to this odd sexual construct by the sexual ambiguity of Thomas Crawford's early American sculpture and the breeches performances of Charlotte Cushman in Rome, with both contributing to the elaboration of a powerful metaphor of Christ's dual nature, which Howe later developed in her Trinitarian and interfaith vision of the transcendentalist project of Protestant reform.

Directions

Where possible, bibliographical information appears in the form of in-text citations, which refer to the bibliography in the left column.

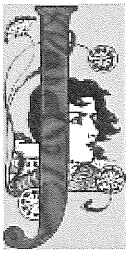
Clicking on superscript numbers brings you to notes — endnotes in the original book — which will appear at the top of the left column; hitting the back button on your browser returns you to your place in the body of the main text.

Notes

1. In "The celestial inspiration of Genius," Caroline W. Dall points out that, though unwilling to assume the Amazon-like transvestism and the male pseudonym of the French writer, who wanted to be addressed as mon frère, Fuller was one of the few American women that Sand welcomed to her home (6). They shared a hermaphroditic sensibility which represents a consistent homage to the Saint-Simonian legacy in transcendentalist thought.

Introduction

For Tom Smith



ulia Ward Howe's unfinished novel *The Hermaphrodite* is still a matter of speculation and an intriguing gender case for nineteenth-century scholars. This long ignored manuscript, found by Gary Williams at the Houghton Library of Harvard University in a folder with a sheet bearing the name Joseph Willard and the date Feb. 1851, was probably written during Howe's last holiday in Rome (*Reminiscences* 202).

It features a sexually ambiguous creature called Laurence or Laurent, who is highly representative of the Dionysian roots of transcendentalism, being one of the most powerful symbols that Concord's reformers reelaborated from Greek mythology to celebrate the American Republic. Resistant to any distinctive sexual category, Howe's character also reflects the transnational phenomenon of Sandism, which, in its dual nature, interpreted the intellectual ambitions of a new generation of determined women seriously engaged, like Howe, in the supposedly "manly" activities of art and publication. They identified with "a third, distinct sex," which was Théophile Gautier's way of naming the odd condition of inhabiting "the body and soul of a woman, the mind and power of a man" (*Mademoiselle de Maupin* 282). This transvestic position, as Flaubert wrote of George Sand in a letter of Sept. 19, 1868, represented indeed the only chance for a woman to access the art world, and well describes the sexual ambiguity that Margaret Fuller attributed to the woman of genius.

An admirer of Fuller, Howe – who was called "the Diva" (Tharp 93) – hamletically claimed a man's power as an intellectual, while preserving a womanly and unsurpassed love for reform, thus inhabiting the self-divided, "Sandian condition" of the talented woman. It might be argued that her cross-dressed character twice portrayed "in feminine masquerade" (130) hides, in reversed sexual terms, the aspirations of the author herself, who was intent on a unique fictionalization of the dual fate of women forced to adopt a male alter-ego in order to freely experiment with the "dangerous" fluctuations of the Sandian woman "who had roamed the world so wildly, and with such a luxury of freedom" (131). As Williams explains in his thorough introduction to Howe's unfinished text, it was the influence of books like *Jacques* and *Consuelo* that, by blurring the distinction between male and female identities, led the author toward the conception of "the story of a strange being" (XI).

In many ways, in this essay I develop Williams's suggestion that "the hermaphrodite is somehow an expression of the mental liberation Howe attributed to her reading of Sand around 1836" (XIV), male transvestism being the strategic disguise of women artists and writers resisting the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. Ziegler also argues that Howe's hermaphrodite functions "as a model of the exceptional 'woman' who dared to take as her own attributes of men [....] to achieve greater heights for humanity" (70). As a Sandian self-portrait of the author as a young man, Laurence's story represents her efforts to reconcile male genius and female passion, that is, the public and private roles which, in her time, were respectively considered male and female features. Torn as she was between her womanly moral values and the "manly," intellectual skills she amply demonstrated as an "aesthetic philosopher," like other notable transcendentalist women in her time, such as Elizabeth Peabody, Caroline Dall, and Margaret Fuller, Howe often privileged reason over instinct and knowledge

over desire, identifying with the ambiguous figure of the hermaphrodite.

Sandism in America

The "many-sidedness" of their genius and the "intense and energetic temperament" of the remarkable minds of the "Brain Club" — which included the long-neglected Elizabeth Peabody, Caroline Dall, Lucretia Mott, Ednah Cheney, Lydia Maria Child, Elizabeth Ellet, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith— were venerated and respected by eminent transcendentalists like Emerson, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Agassiz, Sumner, Parker, and, above all, Bronson Alcott, who was the most fervent supporter of women's education in Concord, and treated women as his peers. Howe regularly attended Alcott's conversations during meetings of the Boston Radical Club at the home of Cyrus Bartol on Chestnut Street, in which the transcendentalist pedagogist theorized a gender ambiguity like that of her hermaphrodite, arguing that "the coming man would be womanly, and he would predict, a Western woman." In his imaginative, philosophical mind, the man of the future would take the living features of brainy women like Margaret Fuller and his correspondent Mary Newbury Adams, who incarnated a "deified individual," or "harmonizing third" ("Mr. Alcott on Conversation," transcribed by Louise Chandler Moulton, New York Daily Tribune, October 20, 1870, qtd. in *Notes of Conversations* 49).

In the same Socratic, conversational form that characterized Alcott's style, Howe contributed to the establishment of a public tradition of "female seminars" which took place at the "Hedge Club" and at the bookshop of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, and consisted in a series of lectures or talks based on informal protocols of discussion which, by mixing male logic with women's instinct for conversation, effectively disseminated feminist issues. In one of these lectures dutifully transcribed by Mrs. Moulton, Bronson Alcott defined "hermaphroditic" the discursive practice of those idealists ready to assume the specific, "feminine element" which enabled them to converse (*Notes of Conversations* 208). The emasculated nature of Alcott's conversational style became exemplary for those transcendentalists who were willing to ignore the dominant sexual prejudices, in the pursuit of a unifying ideal of harmony Howe expressed through the peculiar, "rhapsodic manner" and stenographic style that Charles Sumner promptly noted, urging her to "strike that out immediately" (Ward Howe, *Reminiscences* 174).

The "monstruous" character conceived by Howe thus seemed to incarnate the woman of the future envisioned by Margaret Fuller, who extensively lectured on Greek mythology and other literary themes, nourishing women of mind no less than Berto does in the novel as he educates the young man of undecided sex with his broad, comprehensive erudition (93, 97). In *Woman of the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller argued that, were women "free, were they wise fully to develop the strength and beauty of women, they would never wish to be men." Instead, in a society which prevented them from being what they wanted, they embraced transvestism as Laurence does in the novel, reproducing, in the inverted terms of his uncanny female masquerade, the oddity of Sand's cross-dressing and of Théophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin's as Théodore.

As Williams points out, in Laurent's occasional transvestic incursions in the feminine world, Howe's sexually ambivalent hero was her American response to George Sand's *Gabriel*, a play which in 1839 opened a lively debate on the actresses' power to impersonate both male and female gender roles on stage (Mariani 73). As ethereal and aristocratic as Laurence, in Sand's play, Gabriel — emblematically named after a proverbially sexless angel — loses his male independence by changing sex and by enduring the humiliating aspects of a woman's married life. In Howe's version of the play, Laurence spares himself this fate and, though aware of inhabiting a male body he hardly identifies with, never gives up the more rewarding prerogatives of his male identity, deciding to cross-dress only twice in his story to explore the abyss of female altruism and subalternity. Although he temporarily mixes with Berto's sisters in Rome in a "suit of feminine habiliments" (139), in his cross-dressed individualism he eventually rejects women's deforming corsets and soon grows impatient with their emotional dependence. Safely "disvested of the moral corset de precaution in which they always shew themselves" (133), he stands out as a sexually neutral figure, exactly like the universal self which Margaret Fuller called true genius. Fuller, who was the American woman most respected by Sand.[1] and whom Howe celebrated in a documented intellectual biography, theorized the reversibility of sexual roles, representative of the "two-fold, masculine and feminine" human growth (*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*

2. In *The Hermaphrodite*, Briseida holds this Swedenborgian view when she evokes "one undivided, integral soul, needing not to seek on earth its other moiety, needing only to adore the God above it, and to labour for its breathen around it" (195).

3. Interestingly enough, Sand never considered herself a feminist, and before the socialists' defeat and her retreat to Nohant in 1848, she refused the *Voix des femmes*'s candidacy in support of a universal suffrage which excluded women.

4. When Longfellow asked Sam Ward to pave him the way for a meeting with George Sand, he furnished him with a "warm letter to Janin" which introduced him to the "moral hermaphrodite" whom he grammatically referred to in both male and female terms, the former being intended for the writing genius of the author and the latter to the seductive powers of the woman: "should your travels lead you her way, I will furnish you with a warm letter to Janin who will have great pleasure in making you known to him, And I candidly think her worth seeking. Beside her genius for writing [....] Should it be your fortune to fall in with him do not fall in love with her. He will enchant you more in an evening, if the fit of Psychic inspiration be upon her, than any being you ever knew, & is a kind of moral hermaphrodite" (Howe, *Uncle Sam Ward and His Circle* 342-43).

5. In a letter to Charles Sumner of March 29, 1843 (qtd. in Tharp, *Three Saints and A Sinner* 94), Sam Ward reports the Roman circumstances of Julia's and her sister Annie's lonely residence in Rome, confirmed in a letter written from Paris to Louisa Ward on September 19, 1843: "The good Chev (Dr. Howe) is so taken up with his own ideas and notions of education and reformation that he cares and thinks little about the objects which interest Julia and Annie" (Gale, *Thomas Crawford* 207n25).

6. In his dense introduction, Williams himself realizes that "Laurence may be Samuel Howe, yes, but 'he' is also Julia, a being fusing culturally ascribed impulses of both genders and thereby consigned, according to the logic of American domestic ideology, to a loveless and sexless existence" (XXXVII).

7. Although Williams sees in the dual body of Howe's hermaphrodite the symptoms of the conjugal troubles provoked by Sumner's

interest in her husband, there are reasons to believe that they also had a different origin (Ziegler 61). On this complicated and quite ineffable intimate matter, Robert Gale reports another letter of Louisa Ward to Thomas Crawford, referring, to a mysteriously abusive treatment of her sister by her husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, which apparently did not involve her alleged rival, Sumner, but the presence of an illegitimate child. Crawford replied to his wife on November 12, 1856: "I am really pained by what you tell me of poor Jule's treatment by Chev. The man must be mad, and Jule will be if she allows him to get possession of property. I do hope Uncle John will take the matter in hands and clean up the difficulty by actually separating them, allowing Chev a small portion of her income to bring up the child he is determined to keep. I think Jule is justified in leaving him whenever she pleases. Certainly such a dog's life is insupportable, as there can be no object in continuing it any longer" (Gale, *Thomas Crawford* 172-73) As for the subterranean war between Julia and Charles Sumner, the two of them apparently transcended their private controversies, which were due to Sumner's impulsive nature and were stigmatized by her by coining for him the nickname of "Don Carlos." In Julia's words, the belligerant Senator deserved to have applied to himself "a well-known line of Horace, descriptive of the character of Achilles:--'*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.* I confess that to me this direct attack appeared uncalled for, and I thought that the cause could have been well advocated without recourse to personalities'"(*Reminiscences 1819-1899* 174). Sumner notably stood on the opposite side from her on issues such as woman suffrage and the proposed annexation of Santo Domingo to the United States, which Julia and her husband supported, but was strongly opposed by Sumner in the Senate, on the grounds of his firm anticolonialist position (Maud Howe, "Julia Ward Howe" 355-57).

8. In Berto's recollection of that poignant pantomime: "the lyre of Orpheus to lull to sleep the dark powers that keep guard over the inmate of the enchanted hermitage [. ...] He bends over her, he raises her in his arms—but all aid is in vain, and Rösli must die as Sylphides die, and as angels lie down to sleep [....] subsided [....] to a cold and statue-like stillness. In her last agony, her arms flung over her head, her lips met those of her lover in one fervent kiss—the attitude was precisely that of Canova's exquisite Cupid & Psyche—another moment, and she lay in marble repose, the

112). In her transgender vision, "Men and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But in fact they are perpetually passing into one another" (116). Thus, the female genius that both Fuller and Alcott had in mind shared, in different proportions, the harmonized virtues of men and women as "priests of one worship" devoted to the "growth of man" (*Margaret Fuller* 153). Fuller portrayed this ideal woman through the allegories of Greek mythology and Goethe's notion of the "feminine principle," also aimed at the reconciliation of opposite sexual terms within an ideal Soul rising as "freely and unimpeded" as the Sandian subject (*Margaret Fuller* 154, 152). In this respect, she envisioned the rise of a new female with an "individual character" (138) as the empowering result of a gender interchangeability, rather than of gender difference, perfectly incarnated by Sand's male pseudonymous self and by the enigmatic nature of Ovid's hermaphrodite later revisited in Howe's fictional version.

Thus, it can be argued that, in pointing to the historical necessity of women to assume transvestic male roles in order to gain public recognition for their talents, Laurence's transgender masquerade is neither a protofeminist nor a queer celebration of sexual difference, since even Sand's motto, "Il n'y a pas qu'un sexe," points to the reversibility of gender roles in the universal self rather than to their intrinsic conflict or difference. Fuller herself theorized, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, an ideal Soul nurtured by the spiritual integration of both sexes, as "the two halves of one thought" speaking "in the name of a common humanity" (150). Her configuration of gender was based, like Sand's, on a Platonic vision reflecting Emanuel Swedenborg's convinction that love and wisdom were implanted in different measures in both men and women (*Margaret Fuller* 153-54).[2] Interestingly enough, the very term "feminism" was especially coined in 1830 to speak for those male "hermaphrodites" like Bronson Alcott, who were socially emasculated by the "unnatural" act of supporting American suffragism and female power (Klejman and Rochefort 22-23). Hence, Fuller's, Alcott's, and Howe's "gendered transcendentalism" (Rigsby 113) implies a redefinition of the masculine reformers (namely, Alcott and Thoreau) who were no less prone than Fuller, Howe and Elizabeth Peabody to embodying the alchemic balance between male and female principles, marble and fire, and poetry and reason.

Pronounced in his final illness by his physician both a man and a woman, Laurence, as the undivided incarnation of the hermaphroditic nature perpetually shifting from one gender to another, embodies this sexual paradox, being blessed, in the equivocal harmony of his perfect forms, with the privileges of an Apollonian intellect. Originating from the semi-divine, incongruous blending of godly Hermaphrodite and the nymph Salmacis, Ovid's mythological character relies on an oppositional logic which makes of him "a heavenly superhuman mystery" (195). Dwelling at the intersection of feminine sweetness and man's commanding powers, Laurence incarnates the transcendentalist aspiration to the perfect unity of male and female elements, which, according to Fuller, constituted a "spiritual and universal androgyny" (Martin 36-37). As she put it: "As fluid hardens to solid and solid rushes to fluid [....] There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman" (*Woman* 75). In his Romantic search for the "eternal and indivisible union of loving spirits" (164), Howe's hermaphrodite also appears as one of the most radical literary products of the cultural emergence of Sandism, which represents the highest synthesis of the transgender dialectics exhibited by bloomers transvestism, which can hardly be interpreted, in modern terms, as a clear-cut expression of queer or protofeminist identity.

Quite significantly, the transcendentalist reformers who were spitefully branded "Aunt Nancy men" and "hermaphrodites" were not the suffragists themselves, but the thirty-two male reformers who supported their demands at Seneca Falls, being firmly convinced, as Fredrick Douglass wrote in the first issue of *North Star*, in Dec. 1847, that "Right is of no sex" (Quarles 35). The very word "feminism" — first attributed to the French philosopher Saint-Simon (1760-1825) —historically originated from his utopian socialism and Christian humanitarianism, which advocated sexual equality as part of a broader utopian project, which became "an important factor of social debate in the 1840s, leading to the women's rights convention of 1848" (Schor, 193). Therefore, Sandism in America is not reducible to a mere instance of women's emancipation,[3] since, as Naomi Schor makes clear, the transvestic fashion that Sand initiated pointed in itself to an egualitarianism which postulated "the bold rejection of the anatomical ground of gender difference with the tame assertion of a single, undifferentiated sex," since "the single sex she has in mind is of the order of the androgyne" (96). The "masculine mania" (131) of Sand's male masquerades hence became nothing but the distinctive feature of a woman of genius never at peace with Victorian gender codes. In the satirical definition of the caricaturist Edouard Roger de Bouvoir, she became the

fairest of the Niobides" (111, 113).

9. Kari Weil aptly describes these hermaphroditic sculptural forms in terms of a sexual paradox fully at work in the dominant neoclassical style, as the reflection of a heterodox synthesis of classical forms and Romantic mysticism: "the term classical and romantic accrue masculine and feminine associations, such that their fusion is often figured as the union of male and female, or more specifically in an androgynous or hermaphroditic image [....] the choice of the hermaphrodite as a model of absolute perfection and sensuality that originated in classical Greece and was cast in marble as a contemplation of purposeless beauty and of an eroticism not subjected to utilitarian purposes that Winklemann theorized as art for the art's sake and American transcendentalists imitated, recalls the myth of Ovid's Metamorphoses, emphasizing the changing nature of beauty that Gautier identified with romanticism [....] these oppositions no longer exist, but they do exist in reconciliation" (Weil 113).

10. Moreover, questioning the genteel codes of Victorian womanhood, Cushman's unsurpassed impersonations of the most disturbing female roles never went unnoticed. From Lady Macbeth to *Oliver Twist* 's Nancy, *Guy Mannering*'s Meg Merrilies, she proved ready to unsex herself (Leach 241, 275) in repellent postures which often constituted a moral offense. Her "devilish magnetism" allowed her to transgress the genteel female code to impersonate destitute people that she grew personally acquainted with by entering – like Charles Dickens, but in male disguise – Five Points, the most crime-infested slum in London's underworld. Neither man nor woman, the "epicene" force of her "hybrid performance" (Leach 175, 182) was intensified by the disorientation produced by her male "vocal effects" (Mullin 142, 147). Her fame, which went far beyond Drury Lane, made Cushman the dedicated pen friend of Jane Carlyle, She might not have read Howe's manuscript, but her performances en travesti certainly inspired in her time the first British novel ever written by a woman about a hermaphroditic character: *Zoe. The History of Two Lives* (1845), by Geraldine Jewsbury (Leach 165-66). In her last tribute to Cushman, published in *The Woman's Journal*, Howe remembers her as the woman who "trod the boards in all the queerdom of the drama", as "Sorrow rises up between us and the vision of hours consumed with the high interest of classic

"charmant hermaphrodite" known for despicable male habits such as drinking, smoking, traveling and wearing boots, while in 1844 Elizabeth Barrett Browning called her a "large-brained woman and large-hearted man" ("To George Sand: A Desire," cit. in Fuller, *Woman* 47) and in 1876 Flaubert acclaimed her in a letter to Turgeniev as "this great man" who could write like Balzac and Hugo. In other words, Sand's Saint-Simonian androgyny spoke for the utopian possibility of women's equality but also for the dual nature of her manly power of intellect. In this respect, as a transcendentalist fictional embodiment of Sand's reconciliation of male individualism with female altruism, Howe's hermaphroditic character resists a univocal sexual definition, standing as he does for the "two-fold" model of the reformed relations between sexes advocated by Fuller and Alcott. In Howe's novel the gender paradox and utopianism underlying Sandism in America ultimately assumes a semi-autobiographical turn, making of it a *Bildungsroman* en travesti which also provides "the rationale of her strange and anomalous appearance" (135). In the sexual ambiguity of her male transvestism, Sand must have perceived herself no less divided than Howe's emasculated character dominated by a conflicting male rational instinct in control of womanly passions.[4] The oddity of the "beautiful monster" incarnated by Laurence (193) requires an assessment of the sexual complexity of the transgender phenomenon of Sandism which, strictly speaking, transcends both a protofeminist and a queer approach.

Perhaps a more convincing explanation can be found in the religious and aesthetic environments of Rome which generated this narrative. In this light, the "ambiguously gendered figure" created by Howe (Williams XVII) appears as an allegorical representation of the female intellectual adventure which her husband apparently did not encourage (Ziegler 101, 61) and which, in many ways, transcends the private circumstances of her marital crisis. Although Williams considers Howe's peculiar character "a projection of both her husband and herself, and thus hermaphroditic in yet another way" (XXVII), I would rather take advantage of his careful study of the cultural environments of Howe's Roman holidays to read Laurence's gender indecision as an instance of the sexual ambiguity that brainy woman Fuller claimed for herself when she wrote that "Man partakes of the feminine in the Apollo, woman of the masculine as Minerva" (*Woman* 75). It is a fact that, because of his philanthropic activities and his involvement with Charles Sumner, Samuel Gridley Howe often left his wife, Julia, in Rome in the care of her sister Louisa and her then suitor, the American "literary sculptor" Thomas Crawford.[5] Soon to become "the first American marriage in Rome" (George Washington Greene to Thomas Crawford, April 22, 1844, Sumner Papers, Houghton Library at Harvard), in the years 1850-51 the Crawfords shared their villa with Julia, and their conjugal correspondence helps illuminate the complexities of her private life and the environments of her residence in Rome. Williams's queer reading of the private frustrations which presumably urged Howe to write her novel might be profitably redirected to a more decided re-evaluation of the figure of Laurence as the author's male alter-ego.[6]

In other words, Howe's tale of gender transformations interpreted the libertarian yearnings of that long-neglected generation of women writers to rise to the male sphere of authorship, according to the same Sandist strategy of gender inversion which, in *The Hermaphrodite*, reflects the anxieties of an author suddenly confronted with a literary field conventionally considered an exclusively male sphere. In this light, the sexual struggle experienced by the hermaphrodite accounts for the complications encountered by her generation, which was culturally induced to ideally wed the opposite genders constituting obstacles to the free pursuit of their "manly," intellectual purposes. A further biographical inquiry into the circumstances related to the creation of Howe's manuscript[7] should not undermine the impact of the sculptural hermaphroditic forms on the author's imagination.

'Quasi-Hellenic Roman' Sculptures

Rome, the unsurpassed capital of neoclassical sculpture, greatly contributed to the making of an independent American literary tradition. In its constant reference to the formal perfection of neoclassical sculpture and its rejection of the artificial convolutions of the baroque style, *The Hermaphrodite* is firmly rooted in the visual imagination of the period, constituting a fictional representation of the sexually indeterminate Graeco-Roman sculptural figures created in "that quasi-Hellenic Roman" style that Howe encountered in the Eternal City (*Reminiscences* 209). The visual background of mid-nineteenth-century Rome nurtured Howe's hermaphroditic vision, firmly placing her novel at the intersection of the arts, as Howe herself realized in her travelogue *From the*

personations" (Stebbins 300).

11. Conceived in Rome and in many ways related to *The Hermaphrodite*, Howe's unpublished *Hippolytus* is a Greek play written in 1857 and originally scheduled for Cushman's second farewell tours of the United States in 1858, although it was performed only in 1910 and without Booth. In support of Williams's argument regarding the private war which opposed Howe and Charles Summer, it is worth noting that, like the male protagonist of the drama, her rival was also known for attempting to seduce his stepmother.

12. Crapanzano questions the euphoria which has recently characterized the reading of drag and cross-dressing as queer parodies of gender identity. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler insists on a playful self-representation of queer subjectivity (134 ff), which disregards the inner conflict at play in the different personalities implicated in transvestism (*Imaginative Horizons*, footnote 13, 227). Instead, these Sandist complications seem fully reflected in Howe's representation of the hermaphrodite.

13. Schor explains the critical neglect of Sand by the general devaluation of her idealism, which also contributed, as Jane P. Tompkins argues in *Sensational Designs*, to the neglect of mid-nineteenth century American women writers. The tendency of the literary canon to reduce Sand and Sandism within the frame of male fetishism is based on the mistaken perception of her as a "viriloid female dandy, a sort of phallic woman" (66) totally indifferent to her "female values." Instead, Schor acutely argues that the automatic identification of the androgynous model with the public categories of masculine individualism reflects the failure of modern feminism to resist the "demeaning association with the feminine, i.e., sentimentalism, sensationalism, and idealism" in relation to these "feminized" forms of writing (Schor 43) which, at times, Sand herself, in refusing the low status of the femme-auteur devoted to didactic purposes, did not hesitate to consider a mere "corollary of romance," (*Correspondance* 910, 33).

14. "On a remarqué que G. S. dans cette lettre use indifféremment du masculine et du feminine pour se qualifier elle-même. C'est à dessein que nous avons laissé ici cette anomalie, qu'en général nous corrigeons, pour donner un éloquent exemple de cet hermaphroditisme

Oak to the Olive: a Plain Record of a Pleasant Journey (73, 92). There she comments on the sculptural and pictorial forms also encountered in the Eternal City by Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper, and the young Henry James. More specifically, it was Thomas Crawford who first introduced Howe to the strange beauty of the Greek sculpture of the reclined hermaphrodite, during her honeymoon in the Eternal City in 1843-44. Her future brother-in-law first introduced her to the licentious beauty of the "Sala dell'Ermafrodito" and to "the lovely hermaphrodite in the villa Borghese" (16), in the leisure time in which he escorted the three Ward sisters "to the Vatican museums, the Roman Forum, the Borghese Gallery, and better the enchanting Borghese Gardens" (36).

The sleeping hermaphrodite in the Borghese Gallery, a Roman copy of a Greek statue attributed to Policlet restored by Bernini, provided a powerful allegory of the manifestation of the divine in a human body, nurturing Howe's transcendentalist vision. As she points out in her novel, the uncanny vision of a "young lad" with "the breast of a young maiden" was "one of the sweetest creations of Pagan genius," originating from the fusion of "two bodies, harmoniously blended together and both perfect, these two beauties so equal and so different" so that "in the whole habit of the body there is something cloudy and undecided which is impossibile to describe, and which possesses quite a peculiar attraction" (146-47). Like George Sand's model of gender confusion, the Greek statue of the reclined hermaphrodite in the Galleria Borghese provocatively changed the aesthetic perception of her sex, prompting Howe to conceive Laurence as a neoclassical figure "of vague and undecided character" (16). This sculptural source proved crucial in the making of the novel. It disclosed, in its sexual ambiguity, the inoffensive nudity typical of neoclassical marmorean creations (James, *Roderick Hudson* 246-47), providing a model of sensual beauty utterly devoid of erotic power and compatible with the cult of innocence incarnated by many a Greek allegory of celibacy much celebrated in Victorian times, including the sexually ambiguous allegories of female self-reliance of the virginal Diana and the brainy Minerva. Trained in one of Thorvaldsen's ateliers in Piazza Barberini, Crawford himself mastered a neoclassical style which stressed "the supremacy of the artistic" over the moral principle (Williams XXIX), becoming one of the main tourist attractions for the "descendants of grim Puritans" who arrived in Rome "with textile-mill money in their pockets" (Tharp 144), only to see their rigid religious persuasions seriously questioned by the sensuality of the hermaphroditic creations displayed in the Eternal City. The pubescent nudity of Crawford's "Orpheus," realistically described in Howe's novel as a "delightful, dangerous abyss of novelty" (131) as he makes his way through Hades, also stood as an image of the revealing gestures of the sculptor who lifts a lamplight in his dark studio to illuminate his marmorean creations. A sculpture widely praised in America, Crawford's "Orpheus" was celebrated by Fuller in a poem reproduced in her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and returns in Howe's novel as a symbol of sexual restraint in Berto's words when he compares it to Canova's representation of Psyche's furtive watch on her beloved's innocent slumber (101).[8] Crawford, who spent much of his time at the Vatican Museums in contemplation of the Apollo Belvedere, sculpted a number of juvenile mythological subjects such as Hebe (from the Greek word meaning "prime of life") and Ganymede in marble, according to a neo-Platonic cult of "the flower of youth" also worshipped by Canova, as emblems of a spirituality able to reconcile within itself human and divine elements. Being half human and half angel in their sexlessness, Canova's pubescent figures granted the viewer a world of harmony and the promise of eternal youth, whose innocence is fully represented in the perfect beauty of chaste Laurence.

Portrayed in the marmorean purity of his gender indecision, Howe's hermaphrodite might therefore be reframed within the visual field of neoclassical sculpture in Rome, which had previously generated Fuller's intuition of the dual harmony of the ideal Soul. Crawford's sculptural expression of the hermaphroditic youth was much acclaimed by transcendentalists in America as an instance of the classical serenity oddly fused with the Romantic spirit which spoke for their reforming spirit. The turbulence lurking in the constitutive sexual ambiguity embedded in the perfection of the neoclassical style was also a mark of the inner conflict of "true genius," whose classical serenity was constantly threatened by the streak of Romantic passion which provided transcendentalists with their reforming impulse toward the making of a more egalitarian and participatory society. In his gender complexity, Laurence is an instance of a utopian model of hermaphroditic beauty in which classical and Romantic impulses aspire to "one harmonious strain" (181). The opposite forces at work in this sexual oddity reflect the strange coexistence of the two divergent sensibilities embedded in the neoclassical style, whose blending of Romantic and

grammaticale très fréquent chez notre auteur [. ...] un signe de déviations sexuelles [. ...] La vérité nous parait simple: l'auteur George Sand est un homme, pour le public, et comme tel doit d'astreindre à employer le masculine dans ses livres et ses articles, pour respecter la fiction. Lorsque Mme Dudevant écrit, au gallop de la plume, des letters à ses amis, elle se surveille moins, et par moments l'habitude acquise par autosuggestion l'emporte sur la graphie instinctive" (George Sand, Letter to Franz Liszt, 18 October 1835, *Correspondance* vol. III, footnote 2, 66).

15. Sand thus comments on her transvestic rethorics: "Elle me parait trop risible pour être préférée de beaucoup à la servilité de la femme. Mais je prétends posséder aujourd'hui et à jamais la superbe et entière indépendance dont vous seuls croyez avoir le droit de jouir [. ...] Prenez-moi donc pour un homme ou pour une femme, comme vous voudrez. Duteil dit que je ne suis ni l'un ni l'autre, mais que (je) suis un être. Cela implique tout le bien et tout le mal, ad libitum. Quoi qu'il en soit, prenez-moi pour un amie, frère et soeur tout à fois. Frère pour vous rendre des services qu'un homme pourrait vous rendre, soeur pour écouter et comprendre les délicatesses de votre Coeur [....] Parlons de l'avenir du monde et des beautés du saint-simonisme tant que vous voudrez." Letter to Adolphe Guéroult on travestissement, 6 mai 1835, in *Ibid.*, II, 880-81.

16. Gustave Flaubert's letters, 2: 227, qtd. in Henry James, *French Poets and Novelists*, p. 225. In *Roderick Hudson*, the novel that James apparently modelled upon Thomas Crawford, Miss Blanchard is described as "a trifle prim, even when she was quoting Mrs. Browning and George Sand," and likely to "prefer a weak man because he gives them a comfortable sense of strength," judging independent women like her "only men in petticoats" (James, *Roderick Hudson* 410, 459). On this novel in relation to the sculptural experience of Thomas Crawford in Rome, see Robert Gale 1961.

17. As she "wanted to say a word about the trio. When two meet together they must try to find the third, which is their mutual understanding of each other [....] Might not woman bring in her hands the harmonizing third? A sort of peace commission is wanted. 'My peace I leave with you,' was the most blessed of legacies (John 14: 27)" (Alcott, *Notes of Conversations* 206).

classical features became an aesthetic model in the rising American Republic.[9] The unresolved mixture of pictorial Dionysian frenzy ad sculptural Apollonian restraint was notably fictionalized in terms of conflicting impulses in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* – a novel in which the "evil genius" of the painterly Miriam is opposed to the moral principles of the copyist Hilda– in a confrontation of opposites which confirms the unredeemed contrast implicit in the neoclassical style. Therefore, it can be argued that Sandism and the emasculated forms of Victorian masculinity were, in reversed but equal terms, social instances of the same transcendentalist cult of the neoclassical aesthetics which Fuller theorized in the gendered terms of the odd interaction of woman's sentiment and man's intellect in the genius. These sexually ambiguous features certainly belonged to the "coming ideal woman" envisioned by Bronson Alcott, who found a living projection of her in the "noted women of the day – Mrs Howe, Mrs Cheney, Lucretia Mott, Margaret Fuller" ("Mr. Alcott's Conversation with the Jacksonville Sororis," reported by Mrs Walcott, Jan. 23, 1871, in A. B. Alcott, *Notes of Conversations* 212). But their sexual paradox also spoke to Howe, who was a transcendentalist reformer herself, tutored in Rome by Crawford no less than Laurence by Berto in the appreciation of the oddities resulting from the convergence of pagan mythology and Christian culture that she witnessed in early American sculpture. The unorthodox training which characterized both Fuller's and Julia Ward's upbringing nurtured the conciliatory nature of their transcendentalist vision, contributing to make of Laurence himself an "integral man" (93). In the asexual splendor of his impassive self-reliance, Howe's hermaphroditic character incarnates in his odd serenity and ambiguity what Berto calls "the poetic dream of the ancient sculptor, more beautiful, though less human, than either man or woman" (194). Reflecting the sublime frigidity of Canova's creations, Laurence "is lost in the impersonality of art" (149), as distant in his abstract beauty as the pubescent figures that Gautier and Winckelmann noted in the sexually undecided time of growth they praised as the peak of absolute beauty. Their exquisite representations of adolescence carved into cold marble in the Hellenistic style of the first- and second-century Roman sculptors appealed greatly to the early American sculptors, who – with their "love of proportions" and their Phidean cult of "Greek moderation" (Ward Howe, *Margaret* 157) – saw in them the immutable models of unity and perfect harmony. In Howe's novel, even Laurence's "authorized semi-travestitism" (Mariani 52) expresses the odd, transcendentalist harmony which served to smooth the stark sexual divisions of Victorian America.

The 'Third Dimension' on Stage

However, unlike Canova's ideal hermaphrodites, the uncanny enigma of Laurence's female masquerade is never fully exempted from the horror of castration, which the novel conveys through an unsettling display of eunuchs, deep-voiced contraltos, and the other "fascinating monsters" of dubious nature represented in the novel. After all, in *The Hermaphrodite*, the "transvestite effect" produced by Laurence's cross-dressing is, like a sexually reversed form of Sandism, only a temporary mise-en-scène serving Laurence's desire to infiltrate a woman's world: one which, eventually, in a critical gesture against the limits of women's education, he does not hesitate to reject. No wonder that, like Sand's night walk in male attire, his female masquerade only lasts the short time necessary to stage the disturbing "asymmetry" of the "third sex." His masquerade is as theatrical as the female attire of Gautier's Madelaine d'Aubigny de Maupin, Balzac's Sarrasine, and, in reversed sexual terms, Rosalind's male masquerade in *As You Like It*. Strategically aimed to find out how it felt to be a man, Rosalind's gender crossover is paradigmatically enacted within the "privileged site of transgression" of a private theatrical, that is, in the Arden Forest as a place of revealing transformations which violated and ridiculed hierarchical social structures and established gender codes (Garber 35). The most frequently staged Shakespearean plays in Victorian America, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* staged sexual inversions comparable to those depicted by Howe during the Roman Carnival in via del Corso, also known as the public scene where people's real nature was unmasked in "the disguise of art" (120). In his introduction to *The Hermaphrodite*, Williams mentions, among Howe's other sources, her familiarity with the performances en travesti of the American actress Charlotte Cushman, whose gender crossover offered her guests many a memorable Roman soirée. Her breeches interpretation as Romeo was performed together with her sister Susan, and was inversely parodied in Julia's novel by Laurence's transvestic impersonation of Juliet (Note 24, XLI-II). She was only rivaled by Sarah Siddons and Sarah Bernhardt, whose "ephebic grace" – another instance of the "rare union of passion and intellect" (Mariani 84, 94) – was used to impersonate the uncanny spectable of a "female role with balls" (Garber 37, 134, 72). Cushman's "female virility," "redolent of same-sex eroticism," interpreted the fantasized male self

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never rid of sexual anxieties that Howe incarnated as a member of a rising "third sex," thinking and acting like a man while imprisoned in a woman's body.[10]

It might not be a coincidence that, like Rosa Bonheur in France, this talented American expatriate led a community of female sculptors in Rome, which included Emma Stebbins and the tomboyish Harriet Hosmer, notably pictured in breeches in front of her gigantic bronze statues. Happily inhabiting the no man's land of that female circle, Cushman met the red-haired Howe in 1849 or 1850 through her former companion, the actress Mathilda Heron. In her short but thorough profile of her mother, Maud Howe reports her presence in a late-1840s dinner at the Howes' home, where she appreciated the wit of her hostess. As for herself, Howe detected in the disquieting "mingled nature" of Cushman's "masculine body" (23-24) the "devilish" power she needed to capture the hermaphrodite's "imprisoned devil" (83) and his awkward ability to fall between sexes. On that occasion, she conceived for herself and actor Edwin Booth a "dark American play" in verse inspired by Euripides and Racine and dominated by the ephebic beauty of Hippolytus: his stepmother, Phèdre, is no less troubled than the widow Emma, whose female passion Laurence cannot possibly understand.[11] "Poor monster," the self-definition of cross-dressed Viola in *Twelfth Night* (2.2.34), is the expression adopted by Emma to stigmatize Laurence's hermaphroditic indifference, in contrast to her consuming desire for him. This expression was also the one derogatively applied by some critics to Cushman's disturbing third dimension, which interpreted the ambiguous nature of the brainy women who inhabited a female body they felt at odds with, and who, in some cases, ended up, like Cushman herself, privileging alternative forms of intimate companionships unconsumed by romance and utterly opposed to marriage. In *The Hermaphrodite*, Laurence's immunity to passion also speaks for such forms of self-reliant independence, which inspired the Saint-Simonian communities of women with an absorbing interest in the arts and the professions, being firmly persuaded, like Madame de Staël and Elizabeth Peabody, that their "tastes were intellectual," and that "there is no sex in intellect" (Tharp 172).

Passionless Seducers

Perhaps, like Psyche in her chaste, serene contemplation of her beloved lying asleep (75-76), Howe's hero ultimately represents the untroubled emblem of restrained desire, which was also one of Canova's favorite subjects from classical sculpture. It is no coincidence that the paradox of Laurence's hermaphroditic nature consists in his sexual irresolution, which ultimately makes of him an untroubled but powerful figure of reconciliation, standing alone as one of the most extraordinary incarnations of Victorian "passionlessness" (Cott 1978). Although, as in Ovid's model, he biologically incorporates the union of both sexes, he never longs for a missing part, proving utterly impermeable to the state of eternal yearning which affects all sexually determined people. The neoclassical perfection of the "pulseless marble" he is apparently made of (166) constitutes him as an imperturbable champion of moderation and self-reliance, reaching out, in the "absence of mind [....] grown so habitual to me" (36), for a level of abstraction which locates him in a serene, neoclassical space firmly situated beyond the emotional gynaeceum he infiltrates. In his brief exploration of a women's world, Laurence witnesses Nina's obstinate love for her lost Gaetano, which makes of her a "dream-rapt" creature (158) who sacrifices her talents to "the shade of one man" (164). In realizing the mysterious force of women's love power, which periodically intervenes to challenge his own sense of self-reliance and celibate self-control, Laurence becomes deeply fascinated with the self-consuming female craving for her missing half, which he cerebrally interprets as a devouring form of madness which typically afflicts women in their sentimental, "imaginary journey," ultimately leaving them with outstretched, empty arms (139). Therefore, in a gesture that many Victorian protofeminists like Howe would have shared, her fictional hermaphrodite ends his cross-dressed female adventure by consigning "to the flames the odious disguise" (183) and "the ignominious bondage of petticoat" (187).

At the same time, his neoclassical aloofness makes of him the quintessential object of forbidden desire, firmly indifferent to Nina's ecstatic vision of the communion of sympathetic lovers, which Howe dramatizes in Dyonisian terms at the end of her manuscript. Nina's exhortation in her delirious "swan-song" (183) – "Release thou, the prisoner of hope" (184) – reflects the drama of Eva's blindness until she finds her Rafael again, in a private theatrical which renews the longing lying at the core of any sexually defined life, "whose solitude," as Crapanzano puts it, "is only consoled by the bodily presence of a lover" (148). Nevertheless, this state of desire implies a dual configuration that the hermaphrodite incarnates but cannot individually fulfill. As in

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Ovid's myth, his body is the ideal site of the lovers' perfect union, hosting a fatal embrace which locks the two opposite sexual elements together, but never warms him. As a champion of transcendentalism and of Fuller's "two-fold" Soul, Laurence balances with his Apollonian "power of individual judgement" all Romantic excesses and desires (*Margaret Fuller* 157) by bodily expressing, without emotionally partaking of, the fulfillment derived from the perfect encounter of opposites. In other words, his dimorphism involves the same lack of contact which characterizes the protagonist of Balzac's *Séraphîta* (1834-35), another ambiguous character who appeals to both men and women though unable to give in to their advances. It is not by chance that Balzac's cross-dressed protagonist seduces both Minna and Wilfred, "to whom S/he appears as the opposite gender, either male or female" (Williams XV), but, exactly like Howe's hermaphrodite, remains frozen in the statuesque, "impartial frigidity" (James, *Roderick Hudson* 296) typical of the "unsexed souls" (15) who seek "sympathy from women, advice from men, but love from neither" (5). As Williams suggests, Laurence's constitutive ambiguity might well speak for the torments produced in Howe by the double erotic investment of her husband, but it also makes him hesitate painfully whenever he is confronted with any form of erotic request from any individual who gets magnetically attracted to him. According to the Ovidian myth, the androgynous embrace of Hermaphroditus with the nymph Salmacis is physically constitutive of his sexually dual character and makes of him the locus of love and seduction, while he remains, in his sexual irresolution, fatally impermeable to the longing for the lost half which characterizes any sexually determined mortal. Like Howe's "genius of intellect," who remains as cold as a marble artwork which "warms no living thing" (Maud Howe, "Julia Ward Howe" 357), Laurence is essentially impermeable, in his neoclassical serenity, to the advances of both his male and female suitors, becoming a deep source of anxiety to all of them. Therefore, he stands untroubled, like a Hellenistic sculpture by Canova, his "striking gender neutrality" (Boyd 48), making him a transcedentalist allegory meant to be publicly admired but never loved. Like a perfect sculpture of Apollyon portrayed in the baffling indifference of his "perfect model of classic grace" (4), as an ideal though intangible object of desire, Laurence's gender enigma – which is also typical of the perception transcendentalist women had of themselves – results from the endless conflict between the opposite forces that he inhabits, ultimately reflecting, according to Kari Weil, the contradictory impulses at play in the neoclassical style. As the embodiment of the complex dialectics between sexes, he never betrays erotic expectations, becoming a Victorian symbol of sexual restraint like the innumerable sculptural incarnations of Orpheus's failed love quest and Psyche's silent contemplation of Cupid's slumber, lest he disappears. In his essentially asexual nature, the hermaphrodite keeps a semi-godly distance from mortal love, aiming for the ideal bliss of perfect love that, as in Ovid's myth, he embodies, in the perfect encounter of "two forms locked in a fervent embrace" (181). Thus, despite its involuntary seductive powers, Laurence's neoclassical beauty is essentially narcissistic and chaste in nature, like Canova's marmorean representations of eternal youth. He incarnates the principle of self-reliance and the unearthly, transcendentalist condition of the Soul who resists mortal desire. Therefore, he lingers, unfulfilled, above the conflicts enacted within his dual body, caught in an inner struggle which leaves his heart pulseless and cold (12).

In an illuminating essay, Crapanzano convincingly traces the real "scandal" (145) of the hermaphroditic "undecided body" in its "asymmetrical" nature, which is representative of his utopian aspiration to a higher synthesis. This makes the hermaphrodite the quintessential Christian figure, aiming for a "further dimension." The paradox of his godly and carnal features lies, therefore, in the constitutive utopianism of his nature. Thus, Laurence's essential impotence originates from the mystery of his sexual hyperconnotation. Because it is awkwardly configured by the convergence of "multiple selves, male and female, in a single" body (126), it becomes the very source of his sexual indecision. The mystery of his self-divided body dwells in the contradictory "desires which cross each other or conflict" (197). In exhibiting her dandified style, George Sand also resisted contact, while remaining an unsurpassed object of seduction. Mistaken for a scandalous woman, as well as an icon of unconstrained passion and veiled homosexuality (Schor 120), in looking "like a man disguised as a woman," like Laurence, Sand was wrongly perceived as a highly eroticized body whose dream was to have each sex in turn. Instead, he symbolically remains, in spite of his natural sensuality, an essentially asexual figure, the resident of conflicting gender impulses which collide in his ideal aspiration to a harmony ultimately devoid of erotic intent. The puzzle of the dichotomic forces which, in Howe's novel, break Laurence's body in two leaves him more tormented than ever in his aspiration to reformed "relations independent of sex, relations of pure spirit, of heavenly sympathy, of immaterial and undying affinities" (17). Aware that he can "suffer [neither] the presence of a woman" (52) nor that of his male suitor Ronald, he recognizes that "when

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he would have kissed me, I shrank from him with a horror quite incomprehensible to myself and to him" (68). Laurence's deferral of desire seems to have little to do with homoeroticism, corresponding, instead, to the melancholic, "strange pain" detected by Fuller in the ephebic Endymion and Ganymede, despite the apparent, serene perfection of their youth ("Ganymede to His Eagle. Suggested by a work of Thorvaldsen" composed on the height called the Eagle's Nest, Orego, Rock River, July 4, 1843, rpt. in Arthur B. Fuller ed., *At Home and Abroad* 41, 40). In his declared homoerotic appreciation, Ronald is initially convinced that he has captured Laurence's real nature in his cross-dressed role as Juliet, but he is no less deluded than Emma by the unresponsiveness of his sublime, non-carnal body, whose "locus of desire" resides in his juvenile wish to be boy eternally. In other words, the hermaphrodite ultimately postulates the sexually neutral state of a "gender palimpsest" (37) suspended in the asymmetry of his constitutive duality. No wonder Ronald perceives Laurence as a child in an idyll (66), like a pubescent and virginal body, no less indifferent to love's joys than Gautier's mysterious Mademoiselle de Maupin. Maupin's transvestic identity as Théodore de Serannes is exemplary in this respect, since she also fatally seduces to no avail both D'Albert and his mistress, Rosette, as "a third, distinct sex, which as yet has no name," claiming for herself, like any woman of mind in Victorian times, "the body and soul of a woman, the mind and power of a man" (Gautier, *Mademoiselle* 282). Like Fuller's "two-fold" being, who claims equality and not love, Howe's hermaphrodite significantly differs from Gautier's transvestic heroine, since he is not the mere result of a fictitious masquerade, which invariably arouses all kinds of sexual desire in those who see in him the man or the woman they want him to be. At the same time, Laurence's cross-dressing, unlike Rosalind's male masquerade as Ganymede in *As You Like It*, is not even a symbol of the transient nature of love, to be dissolved as soon as the trasvestic effect of her masquerade vanishes. In Howe's novel, the ambiguous nature of the "third sex" with a "frozen heart" (16) is not a mere stage effect, but the complex embodiment of Sandean womanhood in America. In "The Transgressive and the Erotic," Crapanzano rightly warns against the playful assumption of the performative nature of transvestism because, in the hermaphroditic case he studies, the self-divided condition has nothing of the ostensive and grotesque aspects of a spectacular camouflage. It corresponds, instead, to the existential dimension that he (auto)erotically inhabited and cannot be reduced to the queer masquerade theorized by Judith Butler.[12] In *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, Viola's and Rosalind's male travesty assumes the temporary, educational function of teaching Orsino and Orlando to show their love, but Laurence's hermaphroditic condition does not reflect the intersexual formula that "Nobody gets 'Cesario' (or 'Ganymede') but he is necessary to falling in love" (Garber 36). His hermaphroditism is the very impersonation of the lovers' encounter. He is willing to embody their tortured embrace as a master of love who, unlike Rosalind and Viola, once divested of his fictitious travesty, is not meant to be loved in return. He remains, in Crapanzano's words, a controvertial, "discontinuous being," the very embodiment of desire, which cannot be named. Therefore, he inhabits it, but does not partake of it, given the "asymmetrical relations between men and women in love [....] and the illusory quality of possession itself, for you can never fully lose yourself in the other" (147, 143). Neither erotic nor parodic, in his sexually divided self, the hermaphrodite endlessly defies "our assumption of a single, cohesive gendered personality" (133). He is caught in the transgender struggle of opposite impulses which, despite his awareness of being the incarnation of love, does not make him crave it. Crapanzano argues that what ultimately results from the hermaphrodite's non-cohesive identity is his essentially "autoerotic" nature: a "lack of firm position and constant self," which makes him a "violent site for dramatizing the struggle" between the two sexual personae fighting inside him (131, 133). In Howe's fictional account of this hermaphroditic unrest, Laurence is painfully haunted by the delirious "vision that a woman and a man are fighting for the possession of his body" (Williams XXXV). This reflects the contradictions of George Sand as an inter-sexual creature self-divided between the expectations created by the proud individualism of her pseudonymous male self and her power of sympathy as Madame Aurore Dudevant, who was still able to reach peaks of female self-effacement in tune with the "German mysticism" of the most "disembodied spirits" (166, 159). As a result, the male habitus that she publically assumed as a professional writer and a public figure did not exhaust the influence of the woman she was, dutifully engaged in the "female" pursuit of the humanitarian causes that Victorian feminism advocated.[13] As Schor points out, the very expression "hermaphrodite," which publicly identified Sand through the fetishistic aspects of her dandy attire and pseudonymous male self, appeared as "a sign of sexual deviation." On the one hand, it granted her an authorial dignity, but on the other it was oblivious of her feminine features. However, the writer herself was careful to stress the dual complexity of her personality by adopting in her letters a "hermaphroditic grammar," which deliberately employed a male persona when she referred to her writing self and that of

1899.

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Mme Dudevant when referring to her life as a woman.[14] In reversing the sexual terms of the épeculiar middle ground established by Sand's "[m]élange de raison virile ed de sensibilité feminine," Howe's hermaphrodite spoke for the generation of transcendentalist women intellectuals who appropriated the sexually ambiguous figures of neoclassical sculpture to express their wish to be neither men nor women, but full human "beings" still capable of feeling women's compassion.[15] 15] The extraordinary case presented by Howe also requires, like Sand, a critical reconsideration of the intersexual nature of her "anamorphic art" (Garber 154) within the frame of the "(re)invented idealism" advocated by Schor as constitutive of this transvestic form of Victorian womanhood. Interestingly enough, Sand – who famously adopted her male masquerade as a symbolic reappropriation of the power of imagination, socially considered the highest male faculty – never shared Flaubert's and James's doctrine of impartiality, which assumed "that the Artist must appear in his work no more than God in nature."[16] With her parody of Carlyle's theory of clothes she counterbalanced this pre-modernist, impersonal vision of the writer with a strong awareness of her female redeeming power, because "the writer, far from being absent [....] must intervene, judge his characters, and above all provide his readers with a moral compass" (Schor 203). When Laurence inverts the scandalous terms of Sand's imposture to experiment with his hidden femininity in a little community of women, he is similarly torn between his masculine pride and the female principle struggling within him. He eventually rejects the latter, along with the love madness which condemns women – "born to feel, and not taught to think" – to be "slaves of their own impulses" (101).

A Triadic Theology

A doctrinally heretical overtone is added to the novel by the fact that Howe's hermaphroditic character, apparently so aloof and independent in observing the opposing forces struggling inside him, actually seems to demand a redemptive Christian death that peculiarly reflects the reformed Protestantism of the author. In a unpublished lecture given in 1862 on Chestnut Street and reported by her daughter Maud, Howe attributes to the figure of the hermaphrodite the flimsy, intermediate position of a Christian peace-maker, whose triadic features account for the disharmonius coexistence of the male and female elements constituting the transcendentalist Soul. During Bronson Alcott's lecture "On Conversation," reported in the New York Daily Tribune, October 20, 1870, Howe, also portrayed in the act of dispensing "nectar and ambrosia—or was it coffee and salad?— to a half-dozen guests," stressed the pacifist role of "the harmonizing third"[17] and the importance of avoiding any reference to "two-fold relations" between married people in times of Secession in order to reduce the gap between opposites that represented the focus of her own lectures. The latter significantly bore emblematically binary titles, such as "Doubt and Belief,'" "The Two Feet of the Mind," "Protean, or the Secret of Success," "Duality of Character," and "Polarity." (*Reminiscences* 111). In addition, it is worth poining out that, as time went by, long after the Roman holidays in which *The Hermaphrodite* presumably took shape, Howe developed a triadic vision of God as a man on earth serving as a third dimension mediating between the immanent and the transcendent. Such a religious view, which was more a transcendental vision than a religious doctrine in its own right, matched the one held by Bronson Alcott (*Notes of Conversations* 30), which had developed parallel to Howe's in his attempt to make the condition of Christ as being torn asunder representative of the transcendentalist effort to harmonize God and nature, the earthly and the divine, in a new theological synthesis aimed to resolving the old Calvinist dichotomies. This theological development, which demonstrates Howe's broad intellectual and theoretical horizons, led her to synchretically contemplate the triadic figure of "Christian harmony" as a spiritual elaboration of the Saint-Simonian principle of gender equality. This principle inspired her fervent Sandism, since "there is neither male nor female, but equal freedom for either sex to bear its burders and perform its duties according to its own best wisdom and highest resolve" (Julia Ward Howe, "The Other Side of the Woman Question," *The North American Review* 420).

In the transcendentalist context of her theological discussions, she did not fail to situate the recurrent figure of the hermaphrodite among the other allegories representative of the transition from the sternest aspects of Puritan intolerance to the immanent and earthly order her generation envisioned as Protestant reformers who – along with Elizabeth Peabody and James Freeman Clarke, who was Fuller's fellow-traveller on the journey recorded in her "Summer on the Lakes" – did not hesitate to appropriate the Roman Catholic symbols of reconciliation of the Madonna and the crucified Christ. The latter also became the embodiment of the Swedenborgian notion of

"Divine Humanity" theorized by Doctor Channing and Bronson Alcott (Peabody, *Reminiscences* 228) in terms of a semi-devine creature whose dual features seek completion in each other and spring, no less than Howe's enigmatic hermaphrodite, from the synchretic encounter of Evangelical Protestantism with classical mythography. Her novel itself quite heretically harmonizes, in the pursuit of a higher ecumenic unity, the liminal and discontinuous elements of her Sandist character with the mystery of Christ's martyrdom, finally evoking the pagan vision of an ever-burning Phoenix (132), which "demanded an expiatory sacrifice" (21). Berto – who, like a male alter-ego of Elizabeth Peabody, had many sisters and insisted on the importance of women's education – also reports the refreshing effects of an interfaith culture able to turn conscience anew through the interaction of Christianity with other religions against "onesidedness, fixed ideas" (95). Trained by Berto in the "advantages of scholarship and a liberal education" (101), Laurence acquires a universalistic mind, whose "Jesuit's countenance" (96-97) transcends intellectual and sexual barriers, and finally points to a body of knowledge which makes him the champion of a new Christian discourse based on the mystery of the unresolved dualism he incarnates. Laurence's Roman training, like Howe's, is aethestic, but also identifies "the point of Christian civilization" (98) in a full awareness of "the Christ of love and of life with us" (93). It is a cultural adventure which, throughout the text, parallels Peabody's wide theological horizons, ranging, as it does, from "Teutonic theologies" to Jacob Böhme's *Revelations*, Calvinism, and Swedenborg's religious syncretism. Therefore, in this rich texture of myth(e)ological awareness, Howe's intellectual journey to self-reliance directs, along with that of her male alter-ego, Laurence, her "attention to the mysteries of the unseen world, to the nature of God, the inner laws of being, the condition and relations of disembodied spirits, and other themes comprehended within the wide scope of the mystic-magnetic philosophy" (159). Trinitarianism, which in Ripley's pamphlet questioned the dominant Unionism of Concord's sages, expressed the same sublime aspiration to a chaste, youthful model of Christian Platonism which, in Bronson Alcott's words, made the synchretic "trio" of Socrates, Plato and Jesus "shake hands across centuries" (*How Like an Angel Came I Down* 54). In this ideal of Trinitarian synthesis, Howe's hermaphrodite finally takes the shape of a dove, as the symbol of peace (196) which, starting with her poem "Whit-Sunday in the Church" (*Passion Flowers* 68-80), exemplifies "the lesson of three-in-one of God, the soul, and the soul's" (Appendix One 200). In this way, the author confirms the theological stature of her character, also portrayed in Jacob's very human act of wrestling with the angel's divine powers (188). Laurence finds his final "redemption" from his restlessness, or "apotheosis," in his Christian ascent, as Williams puts it, "beyond materiality to a sexually undifferentiated plane of spiritual existence" (XV), since, according to Emerson, "in the spiritual world we change sexes every moment" (4).

If, in Crapanzano's words, the hermaphroditic body reflects a "transcending position, an ecstatic one in the etymological sense of ecstasy as displacement (from the Greek existanai, to displace, to drive out of one's senses)" (124), I might conclude, with Howe's hero in mind and the persistence in his divided figure of mythical Dyonisian elements later assumed by the crucified representation of Christ, that this allegory ultimately corresponds to the utopian nature of the transcendentalist project, suspended between earth and heaven, and firmly rooted in Sand's Saint-Simonian dream of (gender) equality. Temporarily "exiled from heaven" (14) and cast into a world of pain and passion to be shared "with his rude and sensual beings, but not of them" (79), Laurence stands as an unsurpassed figure of paradox, along with the Christian symbol of ideal Love: cold as pure marble and yet ignited, seductive and yet unwarmed, he represents, in his sexlessness and aloofness, the heretical features of Concord's transcendentalist women. In this ambiguous fashion, he inhabits the untenable union of male and female elements, embodying, in his gender anxiety, one of the most effective and mercurial literary representations of Sand's "third dimension." He is a disquieting symbol of the emergence of a breeches female genius, too human to survive her womanly condition, and yet already projected, in her subversive masquerade, far beyond her gender's limits.

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